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Adria Lawrence <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Political Science, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA

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# Rethinking Moroccan nationalism, 1930–44

Adria Lawrence\*

*Department of Political Science, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA*

Historians and social scientists studying the French protectorate era in Morocco have suggested that nationalist resistance began by the 1930s, if not earlier. Accordingly, the efforts to reform French rule in the 1930s have been called ‘proto-nationalism’ or ‘early nationalism’ in histories that portray nationalism as an evolutionary process, one that grows in a linear, unidirectional fashion. This article explores the tensions between nationalist and reformist demands, and stresses the distinctiveness of these mobilisation platforms. It argues against subsuming calls for reform into the nationalist narrative, proposing instead that calls for reform constituted an alternative to nationalist demands for independence. Proponents of reform emphasised equality and opposed the authoritarian nature of French rule. In contrast, the Independence Party, founded in 1944, challenged the foreign nature of imperial rule. Attention to these differences points to the diversity of responses to French rule. Moroccan anti-colonialism took multiple forms and did not always espouse nationalist goals. Labelling all opposition ‘nationalist’ inhibits our understanding of how actors come to seek national independence. Further, recognising that activists espoused different goals over time is important because it helps make sense of the different visions of the post-colonial order that elites espoused in the years after independence.

**Keywords:** Morocco; colonialism; French Empire; nationalism; protest

In the mid-1930s, Moroccan elites living under French protectorate rule organised to petition French officials for a number of liberties and reforms. A decade later, they were no longer advocating reform. The *Hizb al-Istiqlal* (Independence Party) was formed in 1944, and unlike earlier organisations, began demanding independent statehood. As in other parts of the French Empire, demands for independence began supplanting calls to reform the injustices of colonial rule.

The historical literature has largely treated both demands for reform and demands for independence as instances of nationalism. Historians have described the early demands for equitable treatment and better provision of services in Morocco as ‘proto-nationalist’ or ‘early nationalist’, suggesting that these kinds of demands represent an early stage in an evolutionary process towards nationalist resistance aimed at liberating Morocco from colonial rule. In their memoirs, nationalists also claimed that calls for reform were merely a first step in the nationalist

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\*Email: [adria.lawrence@yale.edu](mailto:adria.lawrence@yale.edu)

project of separation from empire and spoke of their intention to demand independence all along. Colonial administrators likewise called the reformists nationalists and accused them of harbouring separatist goals. Nationalism, in these accounts, is the foremost form of opposition.

This article argues against grouping demands to reform imperial rule and demands to end it under the same conceptual umbrella: nationalism. Instead, I offer an interpretation that sees these mobilisation platforms as distinct challenges to colonial rule. The quest to reform protectorate policy and make it more equitable largely opposed the authoritarian nature of French rule rather than its foreignness. Moroccan proponents of reform criticised the inequalities of a system that provided rights and privileges to French citizens, while denying them to colonial subjects. Demands for reform implied a desire for inclusion and access, not separation. Proponents sought to be treated like Frenchmen were treated; they asked to be regarded as political equals. While reformists sought accommodation with French rule, nationalists considered accommodation unthinkable. Nationalist discourses stress the right of nations to rule themselves.<sup>1</sup> Nationalist mobilisation in favour of independence thus focused on challenging the foreign nature of imperial rule, rather than specific injustices of colonial policy. Nationalists sought to capture the state, while reformists sought to democratise it.

In drawing a distinction between these two sets of demands, my intent is not to suggest that they had nothing in common. Both proponents of reform and nationalists seeking independence opposed the existing colonial system of governance and claimed to speak on behalf of an oppressed people. Indeed, the explicit references to the Moroccan nation during both periods contribute to the sense that these are both manifestations of nationalism. Yet, conceptualising these demands as components of one larger, nationalist agenda obscures important differences between them. Through rethinking the implications of each set of demands, I take seriously the proponents of reform who sought to alter and improve imperial governance. I argue against assuming a static preference for independent nation-states among Moroccan political organisers and suggest that their goals shifted over time. I propose a dynamic understanding of Moroccan anti-colonialism, one that recognises that goals are not given in advance, but are shaped by the political context.

The Moroccan reform movement is one example of anti-colonial opposition that has been subsumed into the larger nationalist narrative. In investigating it, I join a growing group of scholars who have suggested that nationalism is not the only organising idiom for populations living under foreign rule.<sup>2</sup> The attention to nationalism, and the relative neglect of other forms of anti-colonialism, stem from the tendency to 'do history backward', as Cooper (2005, p. 18) puts it. Yet privileging nationalism means failing to see the full range of options that colonial subjects considered when responding to imperial rule. Further, the reform efforts in the 1930s established a precedent for the kinds of demands that activists would espouse in the post-colonial era; they shaped the demands of socialist and left-leaning elites in the years after independence. Moreover, the calls for equality and good governance that began in the 1930s continue to be made by activists seeking change in Morocco today.

I begin by describing anti-colonial activities in French Morocco from 1930 until 1944, paying particular attention to the stated goals of Moroccan activists. Second, I discuss and criticise conventional understandings of the reform movement. The third section shows how the quest for reform differed from the independence movement. The fourth section considers what is at stake: what makes these distinctions useful and why is the existing periodisation problematic? I point to several consequences for scholarly understandings of how and why people begin articulating nationalist aspirations. I conclude by situating Moroccan politics during the protectorate period in the broader context of opposition across the French Empire.

## 1. From reform to rejection: Moroccan anti-colonialism (1930–44)

In 1930, protests over the Berber *Dahir* led elites to begin organising to demand reform.<sup>3</sup> The Berber *Dahir* (decree) was an attempt by the French to codify the administration of Berber customary law in tribal areas. It officially enshrined customary law, rather than *shari'a*, in the Berber tribal areas. The promulgation of the law was seen as an attempt to divide Berbers and Arabs and limit the sovereignty of the sultan over the Berber population. Rumours circulated that the intention was to convert Berbers to Catholicism. Protests were organised against the statute in multiple towns, and the prayer of *latif* (said in times of great calamity) was recited in mosques throughout the country.<sup>4</sup> The French authorities shut down the protests, but the events prompted a small group of young men to organise. These men set up an underground society and founded *L'Action du Peuple* in 1932, a newspaper that drew on French leftist ideals (Pennell 2000, p. 152).

The reformist platform was first articulated in 1934, after the formation of the *Kutlah al-Amal al-Watani*, or the *Comité d'Action Marocaine* (CAM).<sup>5</sup> The CAM unified smaller religious groups and literary clubs under one umbrella. CAM initially consisted of approximately 10 elites, primarily from Rabat and Fes. They presented a lengthy plan of reforms to the French government in 1934. The Plan of Reforms did not discuss independence; in fact it asked for a stricter application of the Protectorate Treaty. The principle of the protectorate itself was not called into question. The plan asked for separation of powers vested in pashas and *caids*, the unification of administrative and judicial systems, the appointment and promotion of Moroccans in all branches of the administration, freedom of the press, freedom to assemble, improvements to the educational system, and the establishment of municipal councils and a national council elected by the population. The plan thereby asked for the same kinds of democratic rights that French citizens enjoyed.<sup>6</sup>

Contact with the French left and with French political institutions influenced the drafters of the Plan of Reforms.<sup>7</sup> By 1932, Ahmed Belafrej and Mohamed Hassan Ouazzani had founded the journal *Maghreb* in Paris, with the help of an editorial board composed of French and Spanish liberals; the journal criticised protectorate policy (Lugan 2000). A group of French supporters founded the *Comité du Patronage* and submitted the 1934 Plan of Reforms along with members of the CAM (Rézette 1955, p. 95). Moroccan reformers made appeals to the democratic nature of the French state and argued that republican institutions were likewise suitable for Moroccans.

The protectorate administration did not respond positively to the 1934 Plan of Reforms. Instead, administrators thought that the CAM and its supporters should recognise the existing efforts and achievements of the administration. In response to the CAM's request that more Moroccans be given responsible positions in the administration, French officials complained that they needed more time.<sup>8</sup>

With the 1936 parliamentary triumph in Paris of the *Front Populaire*, a coalition of socialists and communists, reformists in Morocco and across North Africa hoped that France would finally implement meaningful reforms. Moroccan nationalist al-Fasi (1970, pp. 25–26) wrote,

The formation of the Popular Front in France, and its victory in the elections, was widely acclaimed by the people of North Africa, particularly in Algeria. Our countrymen believed that these leftist parties, which had unreservedly disassociated themselves from all the oppressive acts of the reactionary imperialists, would not hesitate to meet the wishes of the people, at least within the scope of their self-proclaimed principles which had installed them in power.

Others described the hopes prompted by the victory of the Popular Front, which was ‘for us the equivalent of the Great French Revolution in which we all believe and of which we all hope to be the beneficiaries’.<sup>9</sup>

The number of meetings to discuss reforms increased. Meeting in Fes in May 1936, Moroccan reformists decided to re-submit the plan of reforms, this time scaled down to ‘urgent’ reforms. In October, the CAM presented a list of reforms to Resident General Noguès, asking for, among other items: democratic freedoms, more primary schools, a unified code of justice, separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers, distribution of communal land tracts, more generous credit facilities for farmers, equality between Moroccan farmers and settler landowners, the abolition of some taxes and the equalisation (between settlers and Moroccans) of others, the application of French social laws for workers to Moroccan workers, and improved public health facilities (al-Fasi 1970, pp. 156–157, Cherif 1971, p. 241; MAE DI343).

Despite the promises of the *Front Populaire*, substantial reforms never materialised.<sup>10</sup> Although the French Communist Party had passed a resolution to support revolutionary movements directed against French imperialism at its annual party congress in 1926, when it actually had parliamentary power, it asked only that French colonial policy be investigated.<sup>11</sup> The government also denied the legitimacy of the CAM platform. Foreign minister Vienot called the CAM unrepresentative, writing: ‘No political group, whether in Morocco or France, can pretend to act for the Nation as a whole’.<sup>12</sup> Resident General Noguès referred to the reformists as ‘youngsters’ and ‘rowdy children’ (Hoisington 1984, p. 43).

Instead of implementing reforms to redress the political inequality of Moroccans, the *Front Populaire* vacillated between policies of minor reform and repression.<sup>13</sup> A meeting organised by the CAM in November 1936 turned into a demonstration when it was learned that the sultan had forbidden the meeting. Several leaders were arrested. But in early 1937, Vienot told Noguès that ‘Morocco must be governed for the Moroccans . . . Native policy presently is more important – much more – than all the rest’ (quoted in Hoisington 1984, p. 56). Noguès thus decided to release some of the leaders who had been jailed and to allow freedom of the press. But when the leaders decided to transform the CAM into a political party, the National Action Party, they met with repression and the party was outlawed in March 1937.

The outlawed party re-established itself secretly as the as the National Party for the Realization of the Plan of Reforms (*al-Hizb al-Watani li Tahqiq al-Matalib*) under Allal al-Fasi.<sup>14</sup> This party began holding meetings in major cities and sending representatives to rural areas to recruit and gather information on grievances.<sup>15</sup> French reports suggest the party was gaining influence in a number of tribal regions. After riots in Meknes over water rights in September 1937, organised with help from CAM representatives, and demonstrations in Marrakech and Khemisset in September and October, Noguès arrested Allal al-Fasi, Ahmed Mekouar, Omar Abdeljalil and Mohamed Lyazidi. Protests broke out in Fes, Sale, Casablanca, Oujda and Taza, witness to the growth of the organisation.<sup>16</sup> The French moved to occupy the Fes medina militarily. The French ultimately silenced the opposition with repression, not reform. Leaders of the CAM went into exile and the quest for reforms came to an end.

After the demise of the reformist movement, there was almost no internal contestation in French Morocco. Indeed, at the beginning of World War II, the French received numerous vows of loyalty and support for the war effort.<sup>17</sup> Even when France fell in 1940, Moroccan leaders continued to pledge support for France and city streets were calm.<sup>18</sup> Writing just after the fall of France, protectorate officials noted that continuation of normal regime administration through the protectorate’s intermediaries was interpreted as ‘the irrefutable sign of the durability

of our protectorate'.<sup>19</sup> Right up to the allied invasion, French administrators maintained that 'the attachment Moroccans have to France is deeper and more sincere than ever'.<sup>20</sup>

Yet within a year of the allied invasion, the former reformists had founded the *Hizb al-Istiqlal* (Independence Party) and the population had begun to engage in public demonstrations for national independence. Writing in February 1944, protectorate officials admitted that 'the ideas of nation and independence are henceforth commonly acknowledged'.<sup>21</sup> Though calls for reform occurred alongside calls for independence in the post-war period, nationalist demands for independence dominated political discourse in Morocco until independence was attained in 1956.

## 2. Conventional understandings of the Moroccan reform movement

Historians of this period agree that Moroccan organisations sought reform within the protectorate framework during the 1930s and shifted to demanding independence in 1944, and often organise their chapters around this periodisation. They distinguish the reform period from the quest for independence, but describe the reform period as 'proto-nationalism', 'early nationalism', or 'incipient nationalism'.<sup>22</sup> Although mobilisation during the late 1930s involved a small elite who made no claims about Moroccan independence, scholars see their calls for reform as a step on the path towards separatism; before elites try to overthrow colonial rule, they first ask for minor changes.<sup>23</sup> Moore (1970, p. 36) describes three modes: activists seek equality, activists engage in traditional anti-colonialism, and finally modern nationalism, when they 'achieve full consciousness of their mission'.<sup>24</sup> For some, seeking reform counts as nationalism because nationalism is the obvious or inevitable response to colonialism. Waterbury (1970, p. 35) states that pacification and the establishment of colonial rule 'elicited their "dialectical opposite", the nationalist movement'.<sup>25</sup> Moroccan scholars working on the period also stress the inevitability of the nationalist movement, and describe the movement to make colonial rule more equitable as part of the larger struggle for independence.<sup>26</sup>

One reason for the dominance of this understanding stems from a tendency to want to fix the origins of the nationalist movement at a particular point in time. Historians of the era describe nationalism almost as something organic, which has 'roots' or an 'embryonic stage' and a 'birth', and then 'grows' and reaches 'maturity' or 'ripeness'.<sup>27</sup> Many studies were written prior to historical work on the constructedness of nations and nationalism, and fail to consider the ways in which the development of national consciousness takes continual work and may not grow in a natural and obvious way.<sup>28</sup> The desire to pin down the origins of nationalism in Morocco has led to arguments over the date that nationalism can be said to exist and over who can be accurately called a nationalist. For historians seeking to look back in time and date the beginnings of the nationalist movement, it makes considerable sense to consider the reform movement part of the nationalist movement. Some of these same leaders later articulated demands for a separate state on behalf of the Moroccan nation and founded the *Istiqlal* party. But the very task of seeking the origins of nationalism in the early activities of political leaders tends to homogenise political mobilisation and obscure differences in the movement's goals and activities over time.

Moreover, historians seeking to identify the origins of nationalism in Morocco may be biased by their knowledge of the outcome. Historians know that nationalist movements eventually became dominant, not only in Morocco, but elsewhere in the colonised world, and that is why they are particularly interested in identifying the beginning of the nationalist movement. But by reading back into history with this nationalist 'lens', they may fail to take seriously

other political currents because they know already that other mobilising strategies were ultimately unsuccessful. In the search to locate nationalism's origins, it is tempting to depict the reform movement as simply a period of apprenticeship.<sup>29</sup>

Yet one reason for labelling the reform movement 'nationalist' or 'proto-nationalist' is that many believe that the quest for equitable reforms was simply masking a more genuine desire for independence. There are a number of pieces of evidence that support the view that Moroccan leaders hid their true preferences when seeking reforms. This argument is a serious alternative to the interpretation I propose here; if independence were the goal in both periods, and the demands for reform purely rhetorical, there is little need to sharply distinguish the two periods. I therefore evaluate each piece of evidence, and explain why I remain unconvinced that leaders were dissimulating.

First, many of the leaders of the nationalist movement in favour of independence were the same leaders who initially sought reform. Since these leaders eventually expressed a desire for separation, it is plausible that they would never really have been satisfied with reform, and always intended to ask for independence. In their memoirs, nationalist leaders typically articulate this view. They explain the reform movement by saying that independence was not feasible at the time, so they asked only for change within the system. In his memoir, al-Fasi (1970, p. 169) called the proposed reforms 'minimal' and said that asking for reforms was part of a policy of gradualism, implying that reforms were intended to be only a first step. Yet one problem with this claim concerns the reliability of the sources. Relying on nationalist memoirs is problematic because they were written after the movement for independence had begun, when elites were engaged in the project of constructing nationalist history. al-Fasi's introduction exemplifies this project; he begins by asserting that '[n]ationalist consciousness existed in al-Maghrib before and after the advent of Islam'. His memoirs seek to depict nationalist mobilisation as an obvious and inevitable stage for Morocco. His description of his preferences at the time of the reform movement cannot be separated from the political project of nation-building that he is engaged in at the time he describes those preferences.<sup>30</sup> Since he did not publicly state a desire for independence during the reform movement, there is no way to reliably know whether he believed in reforms for their own sake, or whether he already wanted independence at that time. Nationalist writings typically say that separatism was always the main goal, but these are *post-hoc* writings that seek to invoke a deeply rooted sense of nation and national belonging. At the time of the reform movement, leaders insisted that they did not seek separation, but desired meaningful change within the structure of French rule.

Another reason to doubt the nationalists' account is their explanation for why they did not speak of independence during the reform movement. They claim that independence was not feasible at the time, but they do not explain why this is the case, or why independence became feasible later. In fact, most nationalist histories suggest that when the independence movement began, France had no intention of departing, independence was not particularly feasible but required a struggle, and thus the nation had to rise up against an imperial power reluctant to leave.

Furthermore, this argument implies that reforms were more realistic than independence, but in fact, the requested reforms were far-reaching. The movement essentially asked the *Front Populaire* to alter the form of government from an authoritarian one to one in which there would be lower inequality, representation of Moroccans in democratic institutions, universal education and public health, and land redistribution. They challenged the French to follow through on their civilising mission and pointed to the failures of the French to live up to their promises.



Their demands were not insignificant, nor were they particularly feasible. If they were a first step, they were an audacious one, since they would have involved entirely changing the character of French government in Morocco.

The second piece of evidence that the leaders advocating reform truly wanted independence comes from colonial sources. The French themselves, writing at the time, called members of the CAM 'nationalists' and speculated that activists were not really seeking reform, but were 'radicals' who wanted to oust the French. In 1936, socialists charged that Moroccan activism was really a power struggle among the Moroccan bourgeoisie who wanted to replace the French, and who were using the quest for reforms as a device to gain support (Halstead 1969, p. 264). At the time, Moroccan activists denied the charges; the party asserted its reformist nature and its recognition of the authority of the protectorate in a March 1937 issue of *L'Action Populaire* (Rézette 1955, p. 105). But after the fall 1937 unrest, Noguès wrote that he suspected the nationalists of the CAM of harbouring desires for separation, and said, 'If the real intentions of the leaders of the Moroccan national movement have escaped us for the past several years and prompted us to follow a liberal policy, these last events should leave no doubt as to their bad faith and the anti-French nature of their activity' (quoted in Hoisington 1984, p. 66). It should be noted, however, that Noguès's evidence that members of the CAM could not be satisfied with mere reforms comes from his belief that France had indeed followed a 'liberal' policy and yet the CAM continued to mobilise. Yet the idea that French policy in 1930s Morocco was 'liberal' is demonstrably inaccurate. While Noguès made some reforms during his tenure as resident general, he also used repression, and he never implemented the kinds of reforms that advocates had sought. His conclusion that the CAM would not have been satisfied had reforms been implemented is unknowable, since the French never implemented serious political reforms.

Again, the problem with using evidence from French reports is the reliability of the sources. The French use the term nationalist in their reports to describe any kind of opposition to French policy, without reflecting on the meaning or implications of the term.<sup>31</sup> It is worth considering why French administrators might have preferred to call any and all opposition 'nationalist' and what use the term might be serving. Like the nationalists, the French were motivated by their own political goals, which compromises their usefulness as sources for the preferences of the reformers of the 1930s. French administrators wanted to portray opposition as more extreme than it really was; they sought to imply to the government in Paris that all was well with colonial policy and the only opposition was from a noisy, extremist minority who rejected French rule, no matter how equitable that rule might be. By calling the reformists 'nationalists' with separatist aspirations, the French avoided taking demands for reform seriously.

Moreover, French administrative reports are not good sources of evidence because they had no reliable way of knowing the hidden motivations of leaders. There is little reason to believe they had privileged insights into Moroccan leaders' private desires. Indeed, French reporting on the motivations of the native population contains obvious contradictions. Although they wanted to understand the preferences of the population and devoted numerous special reports, as well as sections of their monthly reports, to indigenous public opinion, their analysis generally wavered between two stark poles. They tended to describe the population either as completely loyal, or as anti-French. Mobilisation for change was often interpreted by those working in the protectorate as anti-French, even when it resembled the kind of political mobilisation commonly organised by French students, workers, or other social groups.

Both the French administration and Moroccan leaders described the activities of the reform movement as nationalist in nature. I have suggested above that there are problems with the

reliability of both French and Moroccan sources.<sup>32</sup> But another reason why both invoked the term nationalist to describe the reform movement may stem from the modular nature of the ideology of nationalism by the time the reform movement began.<sup>33</sup> Both the reformists and the French knew of nationalist movements elsewhere, and they linked the Moroccan demands to this international ideology, even though the reform demands differed from the demands for autonomy and independence made by nationalist groups elsewhere. Similarities between nationalist groups elsewhere and the Moroccan reformists did exist; the CAM sought reform on behalf of the Moroccan nation, even though they did not seek separation. It was already not uncommon to characterise all opposition to colonial rule as nationalist, regardless of the actual goals of activists. Thus both Moroccans and the French may have used the term nationalist to describe both the quest for reform and the demand for national independence even though they understood the distinctions between the two mobilisation platforms.

The third potential piece of evidence suggesting that independence was always the true goal comes from descriptions of political protest in the 1930s. During mass protests in Moroccan cities, anti-French slogans were common. During the water riots in Meknes in September 1937, crowds expressed their hostility towards the French, shouting 'Water or death' and 'Not a drop of water for the French' (Landau 1956, p. 140). These statements document anti-French sentiment, but they do not reflect a pro-independence stance. This kind of rhetoric is compatible both with demands for decolonisation and with demands for better government.

A final piece of evidence that leaders may have had nationalist aims in mind is that they interacted with other known nationalists. In France, student groups and workers had already spoken of independence for North Africa, and Moroccan leaders had contact with these groups during trips to France. Moroccan leaders also met with Arab nationalist Chakib Arslan, who travelled to Tetouan in 1936 to discuss nationalism.<sup>34</sup> Chakib Arslan influenced many of those who would eventually lead the nationalist movement to independence; Mohamed Mekki Naciri and el-Ouazzani studied with him in Geneva.<sup>35</sup> Arslan was less interested, however, in encouraging local nationalisms than in promoting the unity of Arab countries. He supported pan-Maghrebism, or the unification of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco (Julien 1972, p. 34). Contacts with Arab nationalists like Arslan were undoubtedly important for the thinking of Moroccan leaders. But this contact, far from meaning that leaders were already seeking Moroccan independence in the early 1930s, might have dissuaded them from developing the particularistic Moroccan nationalism that came to dominate the post-war era in favour of focusing on regional Arab and Muslim ties. Further, the ideas of Arab nationalism and Moroccan independence may also have come to matter to these leaders only once they realised that reforms would not be granted. The adoption of nationalist objectives does not occur automatically upon exposure to nationalist ideas. Moroccan leaders interacted with leftists, nationalists, and other politicians in Morocco and abroad. The clearest way to evaluate how they thought about ideology is to observe their actions.

### 3. Seeking equitable reform: a distinctive agenda

The previous section laid out criticisms of the conventional approach to understanding the quest for equitable reforms in Morocco. I argued against the view that leaders in the 1930s already had the same goals they would espouse in the post-war era. There are three further reasons to believe that the reform movement did constitute an alternative to separation, not a stage of nationalism.

The first piece of evidence in favour of the distinctiveness of the reform movement is that the sultan's attitude towards the reformers was sharply different from his attitude towards

nationalists seeking independence. During the unrest in 1936 and 1937, the sultan opposed the Moroccan leaders who advocated the plan of reforms. The sultan expressed his anger that French administrators had allowed the activities of the CAM to expand. He was outraged to learn that organisers had claimed to have his approval for a meeting in Casablanca on 14 November 1936. Speaking to French administrator Thierry, he said, 'I could not tolerate it. I let my subjects know that they have been misled and I forbade any demonstration. What is more, I ordered the arrest of the principal organizers'. The sultan described CAM leaders: 'They are usurpers. Have they received their authority from the sultan, from the protector state? Or even from a fraction of the Moroccan people? Are they *ulema*'? For my part, I think it is necessary to deal severely'. He asked the delegate, who reproduced the sultan's phrases for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 'Now I want to know what you plan to do. I am ready to punish those who not only are agitators but have outraged their sovereign. The evil must be destroyed while there is time' (quoted in Hoisington 1984, p. 45). In his communication to Paris, Thierry stressed the importance of maintaining good relations with the sultan. He wrote 'For the moment [the sultan] depends on us, but if he perceives some hesitation on our part, he will quickly lose confidence [in us] and completely change his position' (Hoisington 1984, p. 47). Vienot answered that while he was glad to see the sultan take a stand against the 'separatist nationalists', he thought punitive measures should be avoided, saying that it was important to remember many of the nationalists' demands, 'inspired moreover by [the Popular Front's] own program', were 'justified'. He decided to reassure the sultan of France's support, but to ask him to avoid making martyrs of the CAM leaders.

The sultan's hostility to the CAM is noteworthy, given that he later worked with nationalist leaders and became the undisputed leader of the movement for independence. However, the goals of the Plan of Reforms were quite different from the goals of the independence movement. The sultan's political authority was guaranteed by the protectorate, and he worried that challenges to that system, even if they were accompanied by professions of loyalty to him, threatened his authority. The Plan of Reforms did not directly call for a constitutional system of government, and al-Fasi later explained that the reformers wanted to gradually prepare the people for democratic life and to maintain a relationship of trust with the sultan (Zade 2001, p. 27). But the democratic government envisioned in the Plan of Reforms left no clear role for a sultan. 'He realized that a Morocco molded in the image of the Plan of Reforms would be a state wherein his power would be severely curtailed' (Hoisington 1984, p. 47). Members of the CAM tried to woo the sultan and reassure him that the plan would not threaten his position. They ran a series of articles to this effect in *La Voix du Peuple* and also organised an annual *Fête du Trône* starting in 1933 (Waterbury 1970, p. 48). But an alliance with the sultan was not achieved until World War II, when the platform had changed.<sup>36</sup> The independence movement was consistent with a ruling monarch or a constitutional monarchy.<sup>37</sup> The sultan himself thus saw a big difference between mobilisation in the 1930s and the nationalist movement of the post-war era.

The second reason to see these movements as distinctive concerns the actors involved in each. The sultan was not the only actor to participate in just one of the two mobilisation efforts. During the reform movement, the Moroccan reformists allied with French leftists, who assisted in pushing for reforms. Other segments of the French population were also implicated. The proposed reforms were intended to reduce the social and political distance between colonial subjects and French settlers in Morocco, and they opened up the possibility of alliances across national boundaries. By 1937, there were 68,000 Moroccan workers employed in the principal industries of the French zone. Moroccans were forbidden from joining French unions, but despite the ban

some joined anyway, encouraged by French workers. In June 1936, a strike in Casablanca included both Moroccan and French workers; about 1400 of the 2000 strikers were Moroccan (Hoisington 1984, p. 99). These kinds of joint Moroccan–French efforts took place only during the quest for reforms. If reforms had been granted, there could have been further collaboration between Moroccan and French workers. But after 1944, the boundary between the Moroccans and the French was sharper and joint protests less feasible. The nationalist agenda delineated two sides, while during the reform period, nationality did not determine attitudes towards reform.

A third reason to differentiate these movements is the sharp time distinction between the two. Moroccan reformers avoided speaking of independence until the invasion of the allied forces during World War II. French reporting suggests a marked shift during World War II from complaints about particular protectorate policies to mobilisation for independence, even among some traditional elites who ruled rural areas on behalf of the protectorate.<sup>38</sup> A French report in early 1944 stated that the now ubiquitous nationalist activity had little in common with mobilisation during the mid-1930s, since the latter did not call the principle of the protectorate into question.<sup>39</sup> The absence of claims about independence in the inter-war years supports the view that these were distinctive mobilisation platforms.

#### 4. Why rethink Moroccan nationalism?

This article has sought to unravel the assumption that these requests for equitable reform constituted a stage of the nationalist movement for independence. Rather than subsuming all political opposition into the nationalist narrative, I have stressed the distinctiveness of these mobilisation platforms. By doing so, I aimed to point to the diversity of responses to imperial rule: Moroccan anti-colonialism had multiple forms. But what exactly is gained by conceptualising these demands as separate movement platforms? Although many scholars and participants called the reform movements nationalist, they typically did not fail to recognise that the demands for independence were different from demands for reform and they discuss the shift from one platform to another. So what is the harm in categorising both demands for political equality and demands for independence as instances of nationalism? I maintain that inattention to distinctions between the two has produced three related consequences for the study of nationalism.

First, broadly categorising both sets of demands as nationalist obscures the tensions between them. The goals of the reform movement were distinct from, and in many ways opposed to, the goals of the nationalist movement seeking separation. Proponents of reform argued that democratic republican principles were universal and ought to be extended to French colonies, regardless of race, language, or religion. They invoked the French Revolution and claimed that its principles applied not only within the boundaries of the hexagon; *égalité, fraternité*, and *liberté* ought to prevail outside France.<sup>40</sup> They sought the kinds of political institutions available to French citizens in France and Morocco, while, ironically, the French defended the traditional rule of the sultan and rural elites.

The shift from the reform movement to the national independence movement entailed a move away from universal principles to particularistic identities. As Duara (2004, p. 12) writes, ‘The ideals of egalitarianism, humanitarianism (or universalism) and the moral and spiritual values represented by the twin pillars of socialism and civilisation discourse were frequently in tension with the program of nation making’. Instead of emphasising equality and rights, the *Istiqlal* leaders emphasised the incompatibility of Moroccan and French culture to support the

claim that Morocco was a nation in need of its own state. Both movements wanted to end the inequality and injustices of imperialism, but in different ways. The reformers wanted to alter the nature of imperial rule, while the nationalists wanted to eject imperial rulers. The reformists sought democracy, while the nationalists articulated a platform that was compatible with authoritarian rule.

A second consequence of taking the reform movement to be the start of the nationalist movement is that it produces an elite-focused history. The Moroccan reform movement was primarily an elite affair; though popular protest occurred, it was not until after World War II that mass mobilisation began. If the elite's reform-oriented activities count as the beginning of nationalism, there is no need to look beyond the elite to analyse the onset of nationalist mobilisation. The literature has often focused on the nationalist leadership; less attention has been paid to how and why other segments of the population became involved. Instead, nationalism is presumed to expand among the population through underspecified mechanisms. Distinguishing between the elite movement for reform and the nationalist movement generates new areas of inquiry by suggesting a focus on how participation in the nationalist movement transpired.

Third, when no distinctions are made between different kinds of political opposition, the question of why nationalist movements in particular arise is either not posed or there is a presumed teleology in which nationalist movements seeking independence naturally follow demands for reform. Gelvin (1998, p. 12) states that, 'it is necessary to step outside the nationalist narrative and to focus on those factors that prompted the transition from a social system that was not conducive to nationalism to one that was apposite to the ideology'. The conditions that promote nationalist mobilisation for independence may be quite different from those that facilitate reform movements. Moreover, the relationship between reform movements and nationalist movements may be causal, not constitutive. The fate of the reform movement may prompt nationalist mobilisation, as reformists facing failure come to see independence as the only way left to redress the inequalities of colonialism. The reasons for the shift from advocating reform to demanding independence are obscured in a literature that sees both sets of demands as aspects of one phenomenon.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has analysed the movement for equitable reforms in the Moroccan protectorate and argued that it ought to be conceptualised as distinct from the movement for independence. The claim that the reform movement constitutes a real alternative to nationalist mobilisation in favour of independence is not obvious for Morocco. Scholars have had good reasons to contextualise the attempts at reform in the 1930s within a broader nationalist framework: the leadership was similar, the claims were made on behalf of a specific people, and the opponents were the same. I have suggested that there has been too much focus on continuity, on seeing Moroccan anti-colonialism proceeding down a single path towards independent statehood, and not enough on moments of rupture. Moroccan reformers called attention to the abusive aspects of French rule and protested its authoritarian nature, but did not question the French presence in Morocco. The move to demand independence in 1944 marked a shift in Moroccan anti-colonialism. Labelling both movements nationalist obscures more than it reveals because it serves to gloss over differences in the content of demands for reform and independence. These differences have implications for our understanding of how nationalist movements begin and spread.

Morocco is not the only place in the French Empire where reform movements preceded calls for independence. In other parts of the empire, activists sought inclusion as French citizens; they

asked the French to implement the policy of assimilation. For these cases, it is easier to make the claim that these movements were distinctive; calls for assimilation appear easily distinguishable from calls for independence, and some scholars have emphasised alternatives to nationalism in these places.<sup>41</sup> For Morocco, where French citizenship was not on the agenda, it has been easier to see all anti-colonial activity as nationalist in nature. Yet the Moroccan reform movement resembles movements for political equality elsewhere. Morocco, like other parts of the empire, did not experience only one kind of anti-colonialism. Ideologies of opposition were more diverse than the existing literature acknowledges.

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## Notes

1. Self-rule is central to nationalist ideology. As Gellner (1983, p. 1) put it, nationalism is the principle that the political and national unit should be congruent. Nationalists in the colonial world thus asserted the right of the nation to autonomy or full independence.
2. See, among others: Cooper (2005). He states 'we do not need to romanticize anticolonial movements in their moment of triumph or treat colonial history as if the actions of the colonized never changed its course up to the final crisis' (p. 32). See also Cooper (2002). In his study of the *Salafiyya* movement in Algeria, McDougall calls into question the determinism of histories that focus solely on nationalism, and contributes to 'the task of dismantling the linear certainties of foundational master-narratives' (McDougall 2006, p. 5). See also Clancy-Smith (1994), Gelvin (1998) and Thompson (2000). This article contributes to this trend of emphasising the diversity of responses to colonial rule.
3. In choosing to begin in 1930, the intention is not to imply that this is the start of Moroccan anti-colonial politics. The reform movement did not start from a blank slate. In 1930, resistance to the French was ongoing in rural areas; 'pacification' would not be accomplished until 1934. Moreover, many reformists were initially part of the *Salafiyya* religious movement that constituted another response to foreign incursion. Both Arab nationalism and the *Salafiyya* movement helped shape the specifically Moroccan brand of nationalism that became dominant in the post-World War II era. By focusing on the reform era, I do not wish to imply that reform was the sole ideology; the purpose here is not to fully describe all existing political currents but to demonstrate that the quest for reform was distinctive and important in its own right. For more on the religious reform movement, see Eickelman (1985) and Munson (1993).
4. Hoisington (1984), LaFuente (1999), Pennell (2000) and Zade (2001). The protests did not extend to Berber tribal areas.
5. Demands for reform were heard first in the Spanish zone of Morocco, where elites presented a petition for democratic reform to President Necito Alcalá Zamora in 1931, after the republicans took power in Spain (Zade 2001, p. 25). They asked for reforms similar to those that the Moroccans in the French zone would advocate.
6. Sources on the Plan of Reforms include: Abun-Nasr (1975), al-Fasi (1970), Halstead (1969), Rézette (1955), Waterbury (1970) and Zade (2001, p. 26).
7. Rézette (1955, p. 28); SHAT 3H1413.
8. *Direction des Affaires Indigènes, Situation Politique et Economique, 1935*. SHAT 3H1413.
9. Abdeljalil and el-Ouazzani to Vienot, 26 October 1936, cited in Hoisington (1984, p. 42).
10. See Thomas (2005) for a discussion of reform movements in French overseas territories from the perspective of the French government. See also Cohen (1972).
11. Betts (1991, p. 27). The *Front Populaire* had other pressing concerns besides colonialism: the civil war in Spain, the growth of fascism, and the ambitions of Hitler and Mussolini. Imperialism was low on the priority list. Colonel Olié, 'Les mouvements nationalistes en Algérie'. Report of the General Residence of France in Morocco, July 1949. SHAT 3H1417.
12. [*Sic*], quoted in Hoisington (1984, p. 43).

13. A progressive minority in France critiqued the 'state of gangrene' at the *Quai d'Orsay*, and the heavy-handed actions of protectorate administrators, demanding immediate reforms, including the right to unionise, reorganisation of the justice system, and improved public health facilities. Paul Chaignaud, 'La Question Marocaine'. Rapport présenté au Congrès de Marseille, 1937, CAOM.
14. At this time, there was a split within the leadership of the CAM between Allal al-Fasi and Mohammed Hassan al Ouazzani. This split has often been characterised as one between 'traditionalists' and 'Westernists', however Zade (2001) questions this characterisation and demonstrates that both groups contained traditional and western elements. The most persuasive arguments suggest that the split had more to do with personality differences and disagreement over the structure of leadership (Rézette 1955, Rivet 1999, p. 363).
15. Tracts by the CAM and the new party were distributed to air grievances about issues such as the collection of taxes during times of economic depression (MAE DI343). Efforts to recruit began, and new recruits swore an oath of allegiance to God, the nation, and the party (Rivet 1999, p. 369). By the time it was banned, the party was reported to have a membership of 6500 (Abun-Nasr 1975, p. 371) Others say it was more popular earlier on (Ghallaab 2000).
16. Rézette (1955, p. 99); SHAT 3H1412; MAE CDRG212.
17. See the sultan's appeal to support the French in wartime (Levisse-Touze 1994, p. 211).
18. The French worried about the loss of prestige following the armistice; yet in their reports, they note that even their adversaries were cooperating fully. Some scholars have suggested that the loss in prestige in 1940 helped produce nationalist mobilisation, but mobilisation did not begin until after the allied invasion. See Bernard (1968, p. 16) and Knapp (1977, p. 277).
19. *Bulletin de Renseignements Politiques et Economiques du 7 au 13 Juillet 1940*, SHAT 1414.
20. *Bulletin de Renseignements Politiques*, Novembre 1942, SHAT 1414.
21. *Rapport Mensuel sur la Situation Politique en Milieux Indigènes*, February 1944. *Commandement Supérieur des Troupes du Maroc*, SHAT 3H249.
22. Abun-Nasr (1975), Bernard (1968, p. 12), Clayton (1994, p. 24), Entelis (1980, pp. 33–34), Halstead (1969, p. 265), Landau (1956, p. 149), Pennell (2000), White *et al.* (1995), Waterbury (1970, p. 35), Zade (2001, p. 12), Zniber (1984) and Zisenwine (2010). For some, nationalist activity began even earlier, in the pre-protectorate era or the first years of the conquest (see especially Burke 1976, Laroui 1977). Burke (2000) later acknowledged that labelling pre-protectorate activity 'nationalism' was mistaken.
23. An exception is Rézette (1955) who puzzled over the shift from reform-oriented demands to demands for independence. He concluded that ideology was simply not very important to elites, a somewhat unsatisfying conclusion. In response to Rézette, Halstead (1969, pp. 264–265) argued that elites were serious about reform, and not yet concerned with taking power.
24. He calls seeking equality 'liberal assimilation', or the adoption of the values of the ruler. This corresponds to the period of reform in Morocco, but using the term assimilation may be confusing in this context as assimilation was not a policy the French explicitly applied to Morocco.
25. The idea that colonialism confronts its 'dialectical opposite' implies that there is only one response to colonialism. He borrows the term from Moore (1960, p. 265).
26. See Essakali (1983). For a critique of the tendency for Moroccan scholarship to portray Moroccan history as a series of successive victories, see Zade (2001, p. 10) who documents the failures of the nationalist movement as well as its successes, though like European scholars he considers the reform movement to be a stage in the process of nationalist mobilisation.
27. For examples of these terms, see Halstead (1969), Ageron (1991a), Landau (1956, p. 149), Laroui (1977), Deschamps (1954) and Zisenwine (2010, p. 9).
28. See Comaroff (1995), Brubaker (1996) and Suny (2001), among others. See Burke (2000, p. 29) for a critique of 'progress-oriented narratives' in nationalist and colonial historiography of North Africa.
29. See Gelvin (1998, p. 5), who suggests that historians are affected by nationalist history, but suggests that scholars of nationalism in the past 20 years have sought to 'deflate the teleological pretensions of state-supported nationalisms that represent themselves as the inevitable and singular historically inscribed expressions of national destiny' (pp. 10–11).
30. His book was initially published in Arabic in 1948, during the process of mobilising the population in favour of independence.
31. In the Spanish zone of Morocco, the Spanish High Commissioner maintained in a 1934 article in *El Sol* that it was possible for Moroccans to be both nationalist and pro-Spanish, saying, 'I believe that Moroccan nationalism has at its base a sincere love for Spain'. His view that nationalism can entail love for another nation (and a conquering one) is a curious one, but may reflect the fact that the group of Moroccan reformists in the

- Spanish zone were not actually claiming that Morocco should govern itself and separate from Spain. *Direction des Affaires Indigènes, Situation Politique et Economique, Période du 1 au 15 Septembre 1934*. SHAT 3H1413.
32. If the reformists were dissimulating, we might expect to find some records of private conversations or correspondence that would support this view, but evidence is thin.
  33. See Anderson (1983).
  34. Chakib Arslan promoted the Berber *Dahir* protests of 1930.
  35. Jamai (quoted in Essakali 1983); Rézette (1955, pp. 62, 94).
  36. Rivet (1999, p. 369) suggests that not only did the CAM come into existence without the sultan, it was also initially opposed to the sultan. The oath that new pledges to the CAM took contained no mention of the sultan; but after its formation, the *Istiqlal* party added a vow of loyalty to the sultan to the existing oath. Some saw the *Istiqlal's* relationship with the sultan as evidence that the party had developed an autocratic bent (p. 381).
  37. Hoisington relied on French sources, particularly the report of Thierry to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 16 November 1936, in Noguès's papers. An opposing account in official Moroccan histories holds that the sultan never opposed the CAM, but was unable to openly support it because of the limits placed upon him by the French (see Essakali 1984). This account points to acts of loyalty by members of the CAM, such as their establishment of the annual *Fête du Trône*. In weighing the validity of these contradictory accounts, Hoisington's appears much more likely to be accurate. It comes from documentation written at the time, and moreover, the reports reflect French concern that the sultan would be excessively punitive in dealing with the CAM leaders. The Moroccan interpretation comes long after these events, after the sultan had become the head of the independence movement, when there were reasons for the sultan to claim that he had always supported the nationalists. As Hoisington (1984, p. 55) notes, 'it was good politics for the nationalists to portray the sultan as the unwilling instrument of the French – the *machine à dahir* – and much later for the partisans of the monarchy to accept that version of history'.
  38. *Rapport de la Direction des Affaires Politiques, janvier-fevrier 1944*. SHAT 3H1417.
  39. *Rapport de la Direction des Affaires Politiques, janvier-fevrier 1944*. SHAT 3H1417.
  40. The gaps between French republican principles and actual colonial practice have been widely discussed, particularly outside Morocco. See Thompson (2000) on the ideological commitments of colonial administrators.
  41. On French West Africa, see Cooper (2002, 2009). On Algeria, see Ageron (1991b), McDougall (2006) and Stora (2001).

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