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Archives du Maroc? The official and alternative national archives of Morocco

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ABSTRACT

The 2004 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that investigated human rights abuses in Morocco under King Hassan II cited the ‘deplorable state of national archives’ as a major obstacle to its work. In 2013, in accordance with the findings of the TRC, the National Archives of Morocco opened with a colonial *fonds*, primarily holding records from the period of French colonisation (1912–56). This article seeks to understand the late establishment of a national archives, positing that part of the delay was caused by the focus of Moroccan nationalists on the location of indigenous records and their rejection of colonial archives and historiography.

KEYWORDS

Morocco; national archives; colonialism; Hassan II Prize for Manuscripts and Archival Documents

In 2013, the colonial modern building built by the French in Rabat to house the General Library received new occupancy with the opening of the new Moroccan National Archives, the *Archives du Maroc*. At its inauguration two years earlier, the head of the Moroccan National Council for Human Rights celebrated the new archives as an important institution necessary for the development of a ‘rational and pluralistic history’.¹

Members of the National Council for Human Rights played an integral role in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of 2004–05 that investigated human rights abuses under the reign of King Hassan II. The National Archives of Morocco was mandated by law in accordance with the strong recommendation of the Commission based on its findings as it worked to ‘assess, research, investigate, arbitrate and make recommendations about the gross human rights violations that occurred between 1956 and the end of 1999’ under the rule of the late King Hassan II. The violations it investigated included ‘forced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, sexual abuse and deprivation ... as a result of unrestrained and inadequate use of state force and coerced exile’.²

The TRC cited the ‘deplorable state of national archives’ as a major obstacle to its work. The absence of formal, organised archives, and ‘the lack of reliable records and academic studies covering specific periods in the contemporary history of Morocco’,³ had serious consequences for its research as well as for its ability to collect adequate evidence against accused perpetrators of human rights violations. Such a precarious situation with regards

to documentation, including 'limited access to written records from state ministries and police files',⁴ was one of the main reasons the TRC decided not to press for criminal charges and opted for a reconciliation framework.⁵ Still, in having to piece together details about actual events under investigation, the Committee often had to rely upon alternative forms of documentation in order to reconstruct what happened during the period under review. Sources such as prison memoirs, autobiographies and even fictional texts concerning the period were all seen as containing informational value and were consulted.⁶ Amine discusses how even theatrical plays served a role in preserving memory, calling the 1980s play *No Man's Land* by Mohammed Kaouti 'one of the most significant Moroccan theatrical testimonies of the past', adding that it 'is considered to be a historical document' of the 'traumatic conditions of prisoners of conscience'.⁷

It is painfully ironic that many victims of the violence believe that a formal archives of the human rights abuses must exist somewhere in Morocco. They 'conjure up with certitude a vast secret police archive that collects their books, tracts, journals, photos, political posters, and more, materials confiscated once they were under investigation and in custody'. Human rights workers negate the possibility of such an archives based on what they know of the 'disorganized nature of paperwork in most Moroccan bureaucracies', or their reasoning being that 'oral [and] not written commands' would have been used in order to eliminate records of torture.⁸

Of course, members of the TRC would have loved to have had access to well-formed archives to support their investigation. In the absence of such archives, the frustration the Committee members faced in their research is palpable in their writings. They had to vie with archival silences, uncooperative officials and 'fragile' oral testimonies.⁹ They relate:

the Commission often had to grapple with the deplorable state of the archives and a non-regulated legal framework to control these sources and to impose sanctions in case of damage incurred or destruction. Furthermore, it was unable to access part of official records that supposedly exist, either because of the hesitations or slowness in delivering them, or because it was unable to make full use of the archives due to the limited period of its mandate (such as the military archives related to the history of the armed conflict in the Kingdom's Southern provinces).¹⁰

The lack of accessible and centralised state archives led the Commission to prescribe the creation of a national archives that could house its own records. The Commission saw its records as integral to understanding its processes, but also as resources 'likely to support historical research and enable, officially, citizens and various stakeholders in society to have access to a portion of the memory of the country hitherto hidden'. It was emphatic that the final repository for its records could 'only be the institution of national archives'. It viewed such an archives as 'the only institution that can ensure the protection and preservation of all national archival heritages'.¹¹

Slyomovics says that the archives the Commission produced through its investigations is one of the most important and lasting aspects of its work because its archives are infusing 'raw material for writing the history of Morocco after decades of domination by the official memory'.¹² The documentation provided by the TRC on that brutal period provides narratives 'that [were] out of the reach of many or forbidden and taboo'.¹³ In the end, the Committee strongly recommended the opening of a formal National Archives in addition to other

‘institutional initiatives’ such as the creation of a new Master’s degree in contemporary [Moroccan] history at Mohammed V University in Rabat.¹⁴

Previous calls for a Moroccan national archives

The Archives of Morocco, as formally inaugurated in 2011, was not the first instance of an attempt to establish a national archives in the country. As Miller says, ‘[i]n Morocco, until very recently, both the creation of archives and the formation of historians to work in them have been flawed processes’.¹⁵ One of the first formal documented instances of such a project dates from the colonial era when French forces, after undertaking decades of ethnographic documentation of the country, sought a centralised location to house all of the records they had created.¹⁶ Burke explains that the Moroccan colonial archive, as he terms it, capitalised on the power of assertion that in ‘documenting’ Moroccan life, customs, laws, and religious practices, the French were creating an objective record.¹⁷

The modern Moroccan National Library, *La Bibliothèque Nationale du Royaume du Maroc* (BNRM), as it is now known, had several previous iterations. There was, originally, the General Library of the Protectorate, and then, the General Library of Rabat (*La Bibliothèque Générale de Rabat*). Later, it would be known simply as the General Library and Archives. It was the brainchild of the infamous French General Lyautey, who decided in 1919 to construct a ‘modern public library’ for the country perhaps influenced by the public library trends in his native France.¹⁸ Cohen points out that the French purposely avoided using the term ‘national’ in their naming of libraries and archives in Morocco, opting for the term ‘general’ to avoid the ‘political sensitivities’ around colonialism and anti-colonial sentiment.¹⁹

The general library erected by the French was built upon the *fonds* of publications and manuscripts of the Institute of Advanced Moroccan Studies (*L’Institut des Études Marocaines*, IHEM), a colonial research initiative begun in 1912 under the name School for the Study of Arabic Language and Berber Dialects. IHEM worked to encourage ‘research on Morocco and coordinating the centralization of the [research] results’. Most of the research it produced was subsequently published in the colonial journals *Archives Berbères* or *Hesperis*.²⁰ Other important collections that made their way into the General Library came from the Scientific Mission of Morocco, or were private collections bought or confiscated by the French.

As for state records retention, the French were also concerned with this aspect of Moroccan archives. In November 1926, legislation regarding state records management was included with the *dahir* (decree) which formally established the General Library of the Protectorate (*La Bibliothèque Générale du Protectorat*). This was followed years later by the *instruction résidentielle* 7204. This piece of legislation, issued during the waning years of French rule (4 December 1954), sought to encourage more observance of the articles of the previous 1926 decree, especially as related to the retention and accessioning of state records. Noncompliance with both of these laws seems to have been the norm.²¹

The post-colonial moment and national archives

The success of the anti-colonial movement brought about the end of French colonial rule in 1956. With it, a new political and cultural era began to be formed by Moroccans eager to redefine their identities and to shed the weight and burden of the colonial era. The Moroccan intellectuals who gained political power in the first post-colonial government sought to engage with the history of the country in a way that differed from that of colonial ethnographers and historians. The assemblage of colonial records, however vast and thorough, did not meet the needs of the stewards of the newly independent nation of Morocco. They seem to have been acutely aware of what Cook and Schwartz say regarding archives, specifically that 'in their creation and use by their makers' archives 'will always reflect power relationships'.²²

Given the vast amount of archival documents in Morocco, as well as the historical and cultural consciousness among the elite intellectual politicians who governed, the late development of the national archives in Morocco raises a lot of questions. Why did it take until 2013 for the first national post-colonial archives to open in the country? Specifically, why did the architects of Morocco's independence from colonialism, being themselves historians and intellectuals, not join the post-colonial moment to establish a national archives that reflected the master narrative of Arab-Islamic identity which they espoused? As Buckley explains, establishing a formal national archives, or at least the initiative to create one, signalled 'the transformation of the former colony into a modern nation and the national attainment of a specific sign of being modern'.²³ Furthermore, he explains that 'achieving recognized standards of archiving and records management' was considered to be 'a benchmark of the development of the postcolonial state out of its colonial history'.²⁴

Considering that 'the link between nationalism and the archive has been a powerful one ever since the nineteenth century',²⁵ and that archives were seen to be 'important for the legitimization of nation-states',²⁶ it could appear as if Moroccans missed an opportunity that other former colonies rushed towards in the development of a national archives. However, in the dawn of the post-colonial era Moroccan nationalists rejected the narratives of the colonial archive and instead busied themselves with locating and collecting indigenous records in order to produce new post-colonial narratives. Considering that the French had already established a (Moroccan) national library and archives in the early 1920s as a centralised place to store French documentation of the country, it does not seem that the erection of another formal institution was pressing. An archival project that did interest Moroccan nationalists was the location and collection of indigenous records through various means, but primarily through the vehicle of the Hassan II Prize for Manuscripts and Archival Documents, which began in 1969.

Redefining identity and decolonising history in post-colonial North Africa

It could be argued that the Hassan II Prize served as an alternative post-colonial national archives that Moroccan nationalists used to support their master narrative of an Arab-Islamic identity for the country. With the goal of locating and preserving records in private hands, the Prize was established in 1969 by the first post-colonial

Ministry of Culture. It incentivises disclosure of records in private collections through public extolling and cash incentives valorising them as the documentary heritage collection of the nation. The Hassan II Prize was begun within the first independent Moroccan Ministry of Culture 'during a particular historical moment when Morocco as a young independent nation was working to redefine what it meant to be Moroccan.'²⁷

In the decades following independence, Moroccans from all walks of life were reassessing and contemplating what it meant to be Moroccan. Abdellarif Laabi, a leftist political progressive who, along with a group of Moroccan artists and writers, established the arts, culture and politics journal *Souffles-Anfas*, wrote in 1967 that the 'anxieties engendered by the colonial phenomenon [were] widely shared' and cited the need for an 'autopsy of colonization' based on the worldviews of the formerly colonised.²⁸

The need for a new look at the past, to 'decolonize history', was a preoccupation of many North Africans at this time owing to the perception that the writing of 'North African history [had] largely been a monopoly of French scholarship since 1830'.²⁹ In Algeria, Morocco's closest neighbour that was colonised by France for 130 years, Algerian revolutionaries began to collect historical documents that asserted 'the existence of a sovereign Algerian state that preceded the French conquest' years before they gained independence.³⁰ Likewise, Algerian historians were, even during colonialism, doing 'battle ... with the historiography of the oppressors', to which one such historian attributed dogmatism, a 'superiority complex' and a 'disregard for authentic sources'. Touati says that '[t]he fact of the matter is that Algerian historiography has always operated as the *inverse* of colonial historiography'.³¹

In independent Algeria, where a national archives has been in existence since the 1970s, there continues to be an impasse between the Algerian government and that of France over the custody of 'vast collections of documents'³² created in Algeria but 'repatriated' to France after the loss of its colony. The dispute over these records remains an unresolved political issue in both countries and is seen by some Algerians as an impediment to the writing of a 'truer' history of the country.³³

In Tunisia, another North African country colonised by the French, the approach to post-colonial historiography seems to have been different. Prior to French domination, a system for managing state and public records had been put in place in 1874. French authorities kept the system in place, but only with regards to local and regional records directly related to the native population. Following independence, state archives were restructured with the intention of 'centralization and preservation', however 'records transfer came to a halt' and the French repatriated those records generated from the work of the French resident general, with Tunisia later having access to microfilm of those records. What is now the National Archives of Tunisia inherited many of the records from these previous state archives iterations, but was not formally established until 1988, more than 30 years after the end of colonialism.³⁴ Love notes a different approach to archives and history in Tunisia because the French colonial historiography project there did not attempt to 'erase or conquer the production of knowledge on premodern history'.³⁵ Instead, it allowed Tunisian historians to participate in the telling of their nation's history pre-independence.³⁶

This did not happen in Morocco; however, historians were motivated to open ‘a new nationalist historiographical school’, one that eschewed colonial European histories of Morocco. They ‘sought to decolonise history “at the level of the source”³⁷ with indigenous documents being the fodder for new re-readings of Moroccan history.’³⁸ That being the case, major efforts in the field of documentary heritage were put towards further developing a national collection of indigenous archival materials. At that moment, Moroccan intellectual elites took the opportunity to access the archival landscape in their country and to work towards the identification and preservation of local primary sources. Two decades after independence, the difference in their approach from that of French researchers was already apparent. An academic researcher visiting the General Library in the early 1970s noted that ‘the once complete collection of Moroccan in European languages ... scrupulously maintained under the French’ was by then ‘hopelessly out of date’ with only the materials for Arabic language materials having been kept up to date.³⁹

UNESCO surveys of Moroccan archives

At the inaugural 1966 colloquium of the Moroccan Historical Society, the state of Moroccan documentary heritage dominated the agenda. In the colloquium proceedings, Cagne wrote of the problems facing those conducting historical research in Morocco and stressed the need for a ‘national archives service’. He imagined that a national archives would allow for the centralisation of the country’s historical archival documents while also facilitating ‘the training of archivists and document conservation technicians’, both of which he said were ‘specialties that [were] sorely lacking in Morocco’ at that time.⁴⁰ That same year, the Moroccan government extended an invitation to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to visit Morocco in order to carry out an appraisal of its archives and to provide trainings and recommendations for the future. UNESCO was already heavily involved in helping post-colonial nations develop archives, libraries and the requisite educational institutions to support archival administration. In Morocco, the organisation had begun in the 1950s working on a project, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and the Arab League, to microfilm some historical manuscripts.⁴¹

In response to the official request that came from the Moroccan government two years earlier for ‘an expert who could provide useful advice about procedures and practical methods to inventory and preserve documents and archives’,⁴² Mr Yves Pérotin of UNESCO arrived in Morocco in November 1968. Six years earlier Pérotin had carried out a similar archives evaluation in Algeria at the request of the new post-colonial government there.⁴³

For his Morocco visit, Pérotin toured the country in 82 days with the task of surveying the archival situation and then proposing solutions at a national scale. He was based at the Ministry of Culture and not at the General Library and Archives as it was still called at that time. This is a distinction he himself mentions in his final report and which I think is significant because it was the Minister of Culture and his entourage who were concerned with local documentary heritage. In his final report, Pérotin provides the caveat that his observations deal primarily with public archives in Morocco, adding ‘it must be noted that in Morocco there exist private archival

collections that are of considerable importance'.⁴⁴ When he writes that 'amicable steps with a deliberate incentive were thankfully being put in place to use funds to put the value of private archival collections on par with public archives',⁴⁵ one cannot believe that he is speaking about anything other than the nascent Hassan II Prize, which must have been one of the topics of discussion in the Ministry of Culture during his visit.

Pérotin's report provides a valuable snapshot of the immediate post-colonial state of Moroccan archival collections. Dividing the *fonds* he surveyed by era: pre-colonial (before 1912), colonial (1912–56) and post-colonial (1956 onwards), he noted for example how restructuring during the final years of colonisation as well as during independence put some important local and regional records collections in peril because they had not been 'inherited' by any particular office or authority.⁴⁶

In the end, Pérotin proposed modern systematic reforms for Moroccan archival problems. In the short term, a focus on preservation and safeguarding materials, and archival instruction abroad for those Moroccans working in archives and libraries. In the long term, he hoped to see a complete restructuring and harmonisation of the myriad archival holdings in the country. He added that 'the first condition for success of the policies' he put forth would be the development of a national team of specialists who, in light of the traditions of Morocco and international archival standards, 'forged their own doctrine and developed their own methods'.⁴⁷

The Hassan II Prize for Manuscripts and Archival Documents

The first press conference to announce the Hassan II Prize occurred just as Pérotin was wrapping up his visit to Morocco in February 1969. On 18 February 1969 Mohammed al-Fāssi, the Minister of Culture, introduced the Moroccan public to the 'Hassan II Prize for Manuscripts'.⁴⁸ He explained that the Prize was intended to 'expose the archival documents and manuscripts that live ostensibly "underground" in private libraries, wooden chests, and the homes of people who consider them valuable in their own right and not because of their contents...'.⁴⁹ After giving examples of the valuable submissions that the Prize had already received, he called on Moroccan citizens 'to become aware of the value of what [was] in their homes'.⁵⁰

The Hassan II Prize was an initiative of the Istiqlāl Party, the political party headed primarily by urban bourgeoisie Arab nationalists who had led the fight against French colonialism with strong political and cultural agendas. Their Hassan II Prize initiative offers a fascinating case study on an actual program to decolonise archives 'at the level of the source'.⁵¹ In its early years, the award-winning records submitted to the Prize were put on display for the public in exhibitions. A researcher who toured the 1973 exhibit said that it 'gave an inkling of the rich trove of historical material still in private hands'.⁵²

'As a government-sponsored initiative, the H-II prize is a "top-down custodial" attempt to respond to the guardedness of custodians of private manuscript collections in Morocco',⁵³ many of whom do not feel comfortable disclosing the existence of their collections owing to a myriad of concerns including privacy, sentimentality, and fears of theft or confiscation. In the nearly 50 years since its inception, the Prize has received more than 35,000 submissions from all over the country.⁵⁴ A significant portion of these submissions have been microfilmed or digitised and stored at the National Library of

Morocco (BNRM). In 2015, the Ministry of Culture decided that a copy of the digitised records of the Prize would also be kept at the new national archives, the *Archives du Maroc*.

Hassan II Prize as alternative national archives

If we rehearse the key characteristics of national archives, the argument that the Hassan II Prize represents an alternative national archives for Morocco gains strength. A national archives is the literal repository of documentary records that support the nation's narrative of itself. It 'serves multiple macro-social functions', namely to 'preserve a collective national memory' that then supports national identity as it is iterated by the dominant political group(s)⁵⁵ (we will sideline Berger's questioning of the extent to which national master narratives are actually based on archival records).⁵⁶

As I have written at length elsewhere, the Hassan II Prize was conceived during a particular post-colonial moment when a deeply felt need to reassess and define Moroccanness motivated cultural and political sectors of society at various socio-economic levels. A review of the 'pages of the *al-'Alam* newspaper, which served as the mouthpiece of the Istiqlāl political party, show[s] that multi-faceted efforts' including letters to the editor, interviews and feature articles were used by 'the intellectual politicians of the party to awaken an interest in and reverence for historical documents, their contents and care'.⁵⁷ The close association between the anti-colonial political party and the search for local documentary heritage heightened the nationalist potency of the Hassan II Prize and most likely played a significant role in encouraging those who participated during its early years to come forward with their materials.

Being that archives are also 'manufacturers of memory, and not merely guardians of it',⁵⁸ one can see the allure of a 'new' post-colonial archives of historic indigenous records. This is precisely the archives collected by the Hassan II Prize, one that fits well within the political, historical, archival and psychological needs of a nation coming out from under the trauma and injustices of foreign domination. The finds of the Hassan II Prize, which include 'notarial records, judicial advice documents, documents concerning social, economic and legal life in Moroccan rural areas; as well as *kunnāshāt*, the notebooks of learned people',⁵⁹ all support the narrative of an erudite nation connected to the glories of Andalusia (Muslim-ruled Spain) and the Arab East.

A colonial *fonds* for the national archives

The motives behind the Hassan II Prize explain, to some extent, the 'late start' for the Moroccan national archives, which opened in 2013. It cannot explain however, why the national archives opened with a colonial *fonds*, primarily holding records from the period of French colonisation of the country (1912–56).

The *Fonds Protectorat* contains a portion of what have been termed management documents on 'colonial economy, public works, and administrative or legislative matters'⁶⁰ that were not repatriated to France after Moroccan independence. Shepherd has shown that the designation of records as management as opposed to those of sovereignty, that is, more politically sensitive, was conceived by French archivists in a rather impromptu way in response to unfolding events during the waning days of colonisation and is arbitrary. Such designations do not accurately

describe the records or the information that they contain.⁶¹ As one researcher has pointed out, a portion of the Protectorate *fonds* at the *Archives du Maroc* contains files from the *Direction des Affaires Indigènes*, the Directorate of Indigenous Affairs,⁶² that technically should have been repatriated to France under the logic of the above-mentioned designation.

The archives also holds reports from the *Centre des Hautes Études Administratives sur l'Afrique et l'Asie Modernes* and publications from the *Section Historique du Maroc*, both colonial projects. In essence, the new national archives have become a storehouse of the Moroccan colonial archive, a term coined by Burke to describe the official and unofficial writings on Moroccan society produced by French ethnographers during the period ranging from 1880–1930. He called the formation of the colonial archive a 'formidable intellectual achievement', but one that was 'marked by the deforming lens of Orientalism' and was utilised to provide 'justification for the French protectorate as well as the template for the colonial state'.⁶³

Burke makes a worthy point that, in forgetting the colonial past, societies become 'ill-placed to understand the institutions of modern states ... or the complex political compromises and bargains with which modernity has been organized'.⁶⁴ The *Archives du Maroc* project, housed in the former building of the French-built general library, cannot be accused of forgetting the colonial past, but can be faulted for seemingly accepting the colonial archive, its documentation methods and the records it produced unquestionably. As Cooper states:

The past of the new African nation is recorded in the old colonial archive. The difficulty this poses is not so much that these archives reflect a 'colonial point of view' – that is obvious – but that the categories and units of analysis that shape the colonial archive also shape other forms of historical preservation and memory.⁶⁵

The influence of colonial forms on the new National Archives of Morocco is strikingly apparent. In October 2017, I entered the lobby of the archives building to view the exhibit on display on Henri de Castries (d.1927), a French military officer turned historian/archivist. De Castries is most known for his work on the publication of the eight-volume series *The Unedited Sources on the History of Morocco* (*Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc*), which aggregated documents related to Morocco found in libraries throughout Europe. According to Benjelloun-Laroui, this publication was not de Castries' first attempt at gathering Moroccan archival documents. The commander of the French colonial forces, General Lyautey, chose him to head a project entitled the Archives of the Protectorate, the goal of which had been to collect the papers of the French colonial government as well as documents held by Moroccans that pre-dated French rule. That project proved unsuccessful because those de Castries approached, members of the ruling family and elite Moroccans, were unwilling to share the documents he sought with colonising forces.⁶⁶

The exhibit at the national archives building was accompanied by a colloquium held to commemorate 90 years since de Castries' death. At a public event, speakers from the national archives and the royal library extolled the virtues of his work, which was described as being driven by his 'love of Morocco'.⁶⁷ The colloquium and subsequent exhibit offered what Cooper calls a 'soft version of memories of colonialism'.⁶⁸ Brown and Brown also point out that access in national archives extends past who is allowed to

enter towards who is allowed to 'be memorialized there'. They say that 'the inclusion ... of exhibits or displays in libraries and archives can seem to signal official approval to the public'. Highlighting already well-known historical figures (in this case de Castries and his multiple works on Moroccan history) whose related documentation has already been 'thoroughly acquired, catalogued, and presented publicly' is also, according to Brown and Brown, a choice against making new information available to the public.⁶⁹

El Mansour considers de Castries to be amongst a group of French colonial intellectuals whose work 'was able to rise above the official political climate of their time and make valuable contributions to the knowledge of the Moroccan past'. He even goes so far as to write that '[t]here is no way ... to overestimate the value of de Castries' *The Unedited Sources on the History of Morocco*.⁷⁰ On the other side of the spectrum, the celebrated Moroccan historian Germain Ayache⁷¹ wrote in 1961 that while de Castries' *The Unedited Sources on the History of Morocco* contains essential archival documents, they were not Moroccan documents as they came from European archives. Instead, he said, there existed richer sources which researchers had turned their backs on – the contents of actual Moroccan state, local and regional archives found in the country.⁷²

Considering the conditions researchers of Moroccan history faced in the recent past, the opening of the Archives of Morocco, even with its colonial *fonds*, could be seen as a breakthrough towards greater transparency. An American scholar of Moroccan history has written about the censoring of historical writing that limited scholarship on Morocco's contemporary history including the colonial period. She writes, 'it was clear to those of us working in the Moroccan archives in the 1970s and 80s that contemporary history including the period of the Protectorate after 1912, was simply off limits for research'.⁷³ The Protectorate *fonds* that now forms the majority of the National Archives collection itself was considered off limits at that time. It was not until the late 1990s (that is, towards the end of Hassan II's reign) that they underwent some basic processing and were made available for research.

The colonial *fonds* offers much in the way of primary and secondary resources for insightful inquiry, but only if the inclination to ingest it whole, without thought or contemplation, is resisted. As Cooper elucidates:

The language of colonial documents was never transparent but was always revealing. Archives help us see not only a singular past corresponding to a French or British view of the proper colony or a single past corresponding to a budding 'nation.' They are unwieldy institutions whose contents provide more clues about the past than their architects intended to give.⁷⁴

The tension brought on by the colonial *fonds* and the history of colonial documentation at the new national archives of Morocco is due to the 'persistent significance of colonial-era representations' in the modern day. Such representations, especially when they take the form of assumedly objective archival documentation of culture and traditions, complicate the 'ongoing post-colonial struggle to define collective identities and their associated "traditions" in Morocco'.⁷⁵ It was precisely this struggle for an identity, free of 'colonial stereotypes and interpretations',⁷⁶ that prompted the creation of the Hassan II Prize for Manuscripts and Archival Documents.

Post-colonial state records

There remain questions about the state of and possibilities for access to the records of the post-colonial government in Morocco. Members of the TRC found through their investigations of human rights violations that ‘a part of the public and private archives was degraded’ and that there was an ‘absence of a national modern institutional framework responsible for the collection, sorting and preservation of archives’.⁷⁷ In turn, they have invested a great amount of effort and hope in the establishment of the new national archives that is meant to serve as a historical and societal corrective. The national archives has the ‘eventual goal’ of becoming ‘a true national archive that possesses historical records from all state agencies and ministries’.⁷⁸ This is easier said than done owing to a culture that, for various reasons, has not encouraged the development of ‘a sense of archival responsibility’ in many sectors of the country. As one scholar has pointed out, ‘in Morocco deliberate destruction of archives is less the culprit than a long history of neglect’.⁷⁹ This, combined with a ‘disdain for the “paper trail”’, has led to the preference of word-of-mouth transactions (which limits lasting accountability) over written documentation.⁸⁰

Morocco, like other places in the world, is still in a stage of archival and historical memory recovery. This is a later stage of the decolonisation process that was seriously and violently complicated by the oppressive measures carried out under the rule of Hassan II. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s mandate for a national archives has helped to further advance the country in the process of memory recovery. However, the work of the new national archives seems unduly and perhaps intentionally handicapped not only with the unbalanced weight of colonial-era records, but also with a mandate not supported with a comparably adequate monetary budget, staff capacity or physical space.

Surely, some of the decades of delay in opening the formal national archives can be attributed to the lack of political will from the most powerful actors in the society. In spite of this, it seems possible that, slowly but surely, post-colonial and pre-colonial collections may move out from under the shadow of the colonial *fonds* in order that the *Archives du Maroc* could more accurately come to represent the nation as it sees itself.

In Europe, appeals to the nation’s archives ‘were more of a strategy for gaining cultural capital than a practical programme of the writing of national histories’.⁸¹ However, Jamaâ Baida, the current head of the *Archives du Maroc*, referred to the new institution in its small colonial furnishings as something akin to a proof of concept (‘un simple appartement-témoin’) to raise public awareness about the importance of archives to healthy societies.⁸² In Morocco, the long road towards a national archives can also be attributed to an important interruption by nationalist and post-colonial historians of a narrative they sought to radically reshape. In prioritising indigenous documents and actively seeking records not available in the public domain, the establishment of the Hassan II Prize for Manuscripts and Archival Documents by Moroccan elites sought to create alternative national archives that valued local knowledge and facilitated new post-colonial understandings of and writings of the country’s past.

Notes

1. Kingdom of Morocco National Human Rights Council, 'Inauguration of "Archives of Morocco": To Write Rational and Pluralistic History', May/June 2011, available at <<https://www.cndh.org.ma/an/bulletin-d-information/inauguration-archives-morocco-write-rational-and-pluralistic-histor>>, accessed 20 July 2018.
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