

## **A MORBID AFFAIR: EPIDEMICS AND FAMINE IN MOROCCO, 1860–1888<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract. Drought and famine have been long been important events in Moroccan history and the second-half of the nineteenth century was no different. A series of such crises occurred from the 1860's to the 1880's, at a time when Morocco was already feeling the pressure of European expansion and the subsequent strain on its traditional trade networks. The disruption of trade networks as well as local food shortages resulting from these climatic disturbances often pushed people to migrate to major cities in search of relief. Often unable to migrate as families, individuals might leave their children in the care of others with the hope of collecting them after the crisis. An unfortunate choice but one that might just allow someone to survive. Environmental crises resulting in famine have long been a cause of global concern. In his seminal work *Poverty and Famines: an essay on entitlement*, Amartya Sen explains the critical role of entitlement in mitigating the effects of famine on a given population (1981). For the purposes of this article, we will focus primarily on his concept of 'own labour' and "production- based" entitlement. In its discussion of nineteenth-century Morocco, the article lends an historical perspective to the modern system of national and international cooperation during environmental crises. That one no longer hears of people dying from such crises in Morocco suggests that death and famine are not necessary consequences of environmental disaster but rather the result of a lack of ideas and infrastructure.*

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Pendant que les riches jouissaient de leurs biens à l'abri des aléas, les gueux se répandaient dans le pays, fuyant le terroir et abandonnant père, mère et enfants à leur propre sort ou, pour les plus endurcis, les cédant à d'autres en échange de maigres compensations. Les femmes surtout, et les enfants en bas âge faisaient les frais de ces transactions conclues à la hâte. Le petit être était parfois cédé pour un morceau du pain, ou confié aux soins d'un tiers en attendant des temps meilleurs. Mais quelle surprise quand, la tourmente passée, le père venait s'enquérir de sa progéniture et n'en trouvait nulle trace chez le bienfaiteur présumé. (Ennaji 1994: 129)

[. . .while the rich enjoyed their fortunes, sheltered from any harm, the very poor spread through the country, fleeing their land and abandoning mothers, fathers, and children to their fate. The most hardened among them bartered their family for meagre compensations. Women and children especially suffered the consequences of these hastily concluded transactions. The child could be given away for a bit of bread, or "confided to the care" of a third party, while waiting for better times to come. Once conditions improved, however, the father could be horribly surprised to find no trace of his child; the presumed benefactor had hurriedly profited from his windfall by selling the child in the market place.]<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a chapter from the manuscript of the author' "A Social History of Health and Migration in Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Morocco."

<sup>2</sup> This translation is taken from the English version of Ennaji's text (1999). As one sees in the version of the texts given here, the English version actually completes the ideas that are assumed to be common knowledge in the French version.

Drought and famine have been recurrent themes in Moroccan history, and the second-half of the nineteenth century was no different. A series of such crises hit the country in the late 1870s, at a time when Morocco was already feeling the pressure of French expansion and the consequent strain on the country's traditional trade networks. The above quote, taken from Mohammed Ennaji's *Soldats, Domestiques, Concubines* and its more recent translation, describes one of the ways in which the peasantry, by far the worst hit social group in such circumstances, coped with extreme conditions. Drought and the resultant food shortages often pushed those of the south to migrate farther north or to coastal cities. Many died along the way. Family members went their own ways or the most desperate might actually give their children to others, hoping vaguely to collect them after the disaster. As the quote suggests, however, some were disappointed when, at crisis end, their family member had disappeared from the would-be protector's home. People did what they could to survive and hoped to start again.

Reports of drought and devastation abound in European accounts of the time. In his four-volume work *Le Maroc et l'Europe* (1961), the historian J. L. Miège draws heavily on consular reports, foreign newspapers, and Moroccan historians in an effort to recreate the economic and social climate of Morocco as it was from 1830 to 1894. This was a period of active American and European involvement in the life of the kingdom. The Consul General of Great Britain to Morocco, Sir John Drummond-Hay, who acted as a key foreign advisor to Moroccan sultans, was an important member of this community. He, as well as the other foreign representatives encouraged the Moroccan sultan to open the kingdom to foreign trade, to drop the high tariffs on foreign goods, and to ease export taxes (policy suggestions similar to those made to developing countries today). Sultan Sidi Mohammed and his successor Moulay Hassan I listened to his advice but were slow to act. These suggestions for incorporation into the world market, however, did not ease the devastation and suffering faced by the peasantry during the environmental crises.

This article will examine the economic, political and social climate of Morocco between 1860 and 1888, dates that mark the consolidation of European involvement in Moroccan economic and political life. The economic and administrative reforms initiated by the Sultan Sidi Mohammed and later continued by his son and successor, Moulay Hassan during this period did not address the needs of most of his subjects. Moulay Hassan began his reign in 1873, three years after one of the more serious droughts of the century had had devastating effects on agriculture, a principle source of tax revenue; five years into his reign, however, drought and famine struck again further harming production. Changing economic conditions and unreformed administrative practices exacerbated the effects of the climatic disaster, and limited the people's ability to recover.

The effects of environmental crises that result in famine have long been a cause of concern. In his seminal work *Poverty and Famines: an essay on entitlement*, Amartya Sen explains the critical role of entitlement in mitigating the effects of famine on a given population (1981). He lists four types of entitlement: production entitlement, gained from having produced something; 'own labour entitlement', which results from one's own labour; trade-based entitlement, acquired by trade in one's goods or property; and inheritance or transfer entitlement, which is obtained from the willing transfer of goods from one person to another (Sen 1981).

For the purposes of this article, we will focus primarily on the 'own labour' and production based entitlements. In its discussion of nineteenth-century Morocco, this article offers historical insight into the dynamics of famine and entitlement as described by Sen as well as brings new perspective to such phenomena as they occurred in a predominantly Muslim state. One sees in this a sort of history of the modern system of national and international coopera-

tion during environmental crises, a fact that shows how the system has evolved with time and how, possibly, it might improve in the future. We begin, however, with a bit of history.

### **Life at the Center: Reforms under Sultan Sidi Mohammed, 1860–1873**

Sultan Sidi Mohamed had been raised in the company of renegades, European converts to Islam in the service of the Sultan, and he welcomed the company of Europeans at a time when the traditional elite of the kingdom were growing uncertain of their influence on social life (Miège 1961: 199).<sup>3</sup> When he expressed his willingness to introduce reforms, many in Morocco's foreign community had praised him. With Egypt and Tunisia as examples, one of his first decisions was to create Moroccan state-owned companies. Port improvements in Mogador and Safi, which included the building of new docks and warehouses, were also part of his agenda.<sup>4</sup> The Sultan and his advisors also planned public works projects like railroad construction and roads between major commercial centres: however, unlike the port improvements in Mogador and Safi, these were not completed during his reign. These changes would have greatly improved the movement of Moroccan goods from Marrakesh northwards, and made it easier for foreign concessions to work at Moroccan ports. The decade of the 1860s was still too early for such major infrastructural and other long-awaited administrative and agricultural changes, which would not appear until the twentieth century. The central government, the Makhzen, did not sit idle, however.

In 1860, Sultan Sidi Mohammed introduced large plantations of cotton and sugar which he planned to use as cash crops in the Haouz. Both schemes succeeded. Having a certain preference for British skill in industry and engineering, he then bought machines from England and had an English engineer set up factories for both. In an effort to encourage their production, he imported and distributed seedlings to farmers, and also sent officials to England to study industrial management. At the same time, he attempted to modernize the army, sending other officials to Europe to buy new arms and munitions. As there were few trained Moroccan military personnel, Sidi Sultan Mohammed, like some of his predecessors, relied primarily on the aid of renegade Europeans who had joined his army. He preferred the English for industrial and engineering projects.

The first of these administrative reforms involved the port's personnel. Like other administrators, they received low salaries or none at all. Some, therefore, started businesses with merchants who needed their services as port personnel. In an effort to end this practice, central government officials issued a decree strictly forbidding commercial activity by port officials. By all accounts, these measures were a success, and curbed much shady activity.

In a long passage from his journal, Drummond-Hay gives an account of a meeting with Sultan Sidi Mohammed on administrative reform. Referring to the Makhzen practice of burning and destroying peasant crops as a way quelling revolt, he suggested a form of government based on that of Europe where "the just administration of the laws and security of life and property" had produced contented populations who did not rebel (Drummond-Hay 1896: 279). According to Drummond-Hay, the Sultan responded by saying that "a lenient administration was not suited to the wild races of Morocco (Drummond-Hay 1896: 281). After further discussion, however, the sultan changed his mind. The English had trained a group of two hundred Moroccans who had been chosen at random rather than by pedigree, and whose abil-

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<sup>3</sup> Miège's monumental work, which relies heavily on European consular records, first appeared as a *doctorat d'état*, and has since become a reference for the economic, political and social history of Morocco in the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Mogador is the former name of the city of Essaouira, southwest Morocco.

ity to maintain orderliness appeared as a pleasant surprise to the Sultan. Drummond-Hay advanced Mohamed Ali of Egypt and Sultan Mahmoud of the Ottoman Empire as examples of Muslim reformers. He also recommended that the Sultan make an example of those administrators who failed to go along with the reforms: "I should probably cause more heads to fall in a month than have been cut off during the whole of Your Majesty's reign" (Drummond-Hay 1896: 281). Sultan Sidi Mohamed, he claimed, asked him to prepare a secret memorandum of the type of government he thought should be instituted. How much of this story was written to Honor the wisdom of a friend and how much actually occurred we may never know. We do know, however, that Sultan Sidi Mohamed died before any decisive changes were made to the administrative structure, and that well before his death in 1873 doubts about these "liberal" measures had arisen amongst the his ministers and governors.

One reason for their discomfort may very well have been the blame that Hay and other European representatives placed on the Sultan's entourage for his limited action. The traditionalists amongst his ministers had not liked the idea of consulting Europeans on the questions of how to run their country. Wary of both their growing influence and that of European-protected businessmen in the kingdom, provincial governors were equally resistant to reform. Non-salaried governors would have found little appeal in reforms that affected their ability to tax or obtain some kind of remuneration on agricultural speculations (Miège 1961: 127). Some even thought that the climatic and economic crises of his reign were a sign that Mohammed IV had lost the *baraka*, or blessing, needed to govern. An important Moroccan historian, En-Naciri, interprets the reaction of the traditionalists as fundamentally religious, saying,

Cette liberté qu'ont établie les Européens dans ces dernières années est l'œuvre absolue de l'irreligion car elle comporte la destruction complète des droits de Dieu, des droits des parents et des droits de l'humanité. (cited in Miège 1961)

(This liberty established by the Europeans in recent years is the work of irreligion because it brings with it the complete destruction of the rights of God, parents and humanity – author's translation)

This attitude from his countrymen and the increasing rivalry among the foreign representatives for the ears of the Sultan blocked any possible changes to the status quo. Had there been more support on the part of the Europeans who had, after all, encouraged him to change government practice, these reforms may have happened sooner; this was what the traditionalists of the Makhzen feared the most however. Instead they chose to fight amongst themselves and in trying to gain their personal advantage, lost the chance at improvement for all. Financial problems resulting from the diverse currencies in use and the growing problem of taxation would further aggravate an already unstable situation.

Taxation had become a serious concern for both the foreign and Moroccan business communities. As distributed, tax levies were hardest on those least able to pay. Often the worst affected during environmental crisis, small farmers paid the most to the government. A tenth of their produce was given to the caid and another percentage given to the sultan and religious authorities in the form of zakat; they were also expected to provide corvée labor for the sultan. The amounts of these taxes varied according to the exigencies of the local governor. It was not uncommon to have a caid demand an amount beyond that requested by the Sultan; with no salary, he needed to supplement whatever income he already had. Certain tribes received tax exemptions. Those like the Cherarda or the Oudayas who supplied the government with troops were exempt from tax payments. The mercantile elite of the major cities could only be expected to pay a minimal amount, given their importance to the economy. Many of the larger enterprises and land owners gained the "protection" of foreign concessions; such status meant that they, like the foreign representatives themselves, were tax-

exempt. In its early years, the institution of foreign protection existed as a privilege for Moroccan employees working in the direct service of foreign ambassadors however, over time, a number of those ambassadors or General Consuls extended the privilege to Moroccan business partners. This meant that some of those most able to pay Moroccan taxes were not doing so. A coordinated program of administrative reform on the part of the government, and the limiting or abolition of protective status might have eased some of the Sultan's financial strains.

For these reasons, Moulay Hassan inherited a very difficult situation from his father. The series of economic, financial, and food crises experienced during Mohamed IV's reign had led his subjects to question his *baraka*, still an important means of legitimacy for the sultan. Some of his ministers believed that his liberal policies and openness toward Europeans threatened traditional hierarchies and norms. His attempt to balance the interests of his immediate entourage, the provincial elite and the foreign business community left little time to consider the situation of the southern poor. His son and successor Hassan I would assume that responsibility.

### **Life at the Center: Reform under Hassan I**

In the fall of 1873 the chiefs of the south, the Haha and the Chtouka on the Atlantic coast and those in the area of Marrakesh, pledged their allegiance to Moulay Hassan whom his father's had chosen as successor while still a teenager. His youthful piety, earnestness and serious nature had encouraged his father's choice (Miège 1961: 198). People of Fez and Mèknes however had hoped for the selection of Moulay Ismail, a younger son or Moulay Abbas his uncle and did not pledge their allegiance immediately. The succession, some thought, would be contested. Some of the Berber groups<sup>5</sup> rebelled, but only briefly: Moulay Hassan put down their revolts with the use of his military, and was recognized in Meknes (Miège 1961: 198). He then moved to Fez where, following negotiations with tanners and merchants over the export tax, they too acknowledged him as sultan. Despite periodic discontent among individual tribes, his authority was accepted throughout the bled el-Makhzen, the territory of Morocco controlled by the central government by the fall of 1874.

The troubles surrounding Moulay Hassan's accession to the throne highlight one of the principle difficulties of his reign; the interests of the Sultan and those of elites were necessarily linked. It was (and still is) commonly held that to declare oneself king of Morocco, one had to have the support of Fez and Marrakesh. Had he not addressed their concerns, he risked his position and that of the Makhzen as a whole. He and his ministers could easily move between Fez and Marrakesh to quell revolt and oversee the government of both places. The control of areas farther away was delegated to another tier of authorities: the *pasha*-s, and, sometimes, the *caids*. At the beginning of Hassan I's reign, there were only six pashas in the kingdom: one at Marrakesh, one at Fez Jdid, Larache, Meknès, Rabat, and Tangier. These men owed their positions to the sultan's favour, and could be removed when that favour waned. They controlled a limited military force to help them govern. Candidates for pasha usually came from elites of the *jaysh*, The Bukhari, and the scholarly and mercantile bourgeoisie of the cities.<sup>6</sup> Rather than receiving salaries, the pashas were expected to make their positions

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<sup>5</sup> The Azzemmour and the Beni Ahssen were two of these groups.

<sup>6</sup> The Jaysh refers to those tribes who traditionally supplied men for the Sultan's army. The Oudayas and the Cherarda both southern tribes, were just two of these groups. The Bukhari also known as the Black Guard refer to the sultan's personal guard established under Moulay Ismail in the eighteenth century.

pay their upkeep. In provincial areas like the Sous, caids were appointed either by the sultan himself or by local groups.

The components of the social hierarchy in the Souss varied according to locale, but there was, however, a general set of social categories:

<i>Shorfa</i>	Those who claimed descent from the Prophet Mohammed, and were therefore considered 'cousins' of the king.
<i>Morabitin</i>	Claimants of descent from a locally-recognized saint: they controlled the <i>zawiyas</i> and were religious authorities.
<i>Free peasants</i>	Berber or Arab cultivators without claims to sherifian or saintly descent.
<i>Slaves</i>	Self-explanatory.
<i>Harratines</i>	Cultivators: depending on the area, they worked as sharecroppers to the <i>shorfa</i> and <i>morabitin</i> .
<i>Jews</i>	Metal workers, jewellery makers, and businessmen.

This hierarchy varied because not all of these groups were to be found in the same place. Some oases were exclusively Harratine, like Tissint where most of the population consisted of Harratine and other Berber groups. Other villages did not have Jews or *shorfa*. Personal protection came from living closely with one's neighbours, and through forming alliances with others. In this period, the Sultan actually assured this social hierarchy by selecting its representatives from amongst the *morabitin* and *shorfa*. It was often those interested in maintaining the social order who were the most vocal in their opposition to administrative reform.

Although he was far from optimistic after nearly thirty years of working in Morocco, Sir John Drummond Hay was at least pleased with Hassan I's choice of Moulay Hassan as his successor (his rival European representatives had supported other candidates). Hay had seen in him the necessary willingness and seriousness to address the problems of the Moroccan government; of all possible successors, he considered him the most likely to continue the reforms his father had initiated (Miège 1961: 199). With both the French and Spanish representatives having been recalled at the time of Hassan I's enthronement, Hay could secure his footing with the new sultan. As he had with his father Sultan Sidi Mohammed, Hay explained to Hassan I that economic reform had to be accompanied by administrative change.

Despite the slowness of the Makhzen, peasant production was increasingly linked to the markets of Europe and to an extent not fully understood by Moroccan officials. Large farm owners and peasants understood the importance of cash and commodity exchange. That there were some elites who thought they would close the country to foreign interests indicates that the internationalization of the Moroccan economy was not fully understood by them or if it were, was not wanted as it threatened tradition. The persistence of social hierarchies and the need for the right social connections in order to improve one's economic condition, proved important factors to those who felt the greatest weight of the tax burden who were generally those at the lower ends of the production chain like agricultural workers and small producers. Government organizations reinforced these social structures. Time and reform would be needed in order to change the situation as the Makhzen itself risked ruin by not observing established hierarchies. During his time in Morocco, Drummond-Hay would provide the constant reminder of the need for change.

Generally bad economic and environmental conditions during the 1860s and 1870s meant that paid employment was not always available to those who needed it. As part of an expanding cash economy, wage labour served as an important means of avoiding famine as it could be used to supplement income earned as a peasant or labourer. Especially for those in the inte-

rior, weak inland markets meant that small traders had to take their wares to larger venues, like that of the port city of Mogador where one of the more important trans-Saharan trade routes ended. There, and in similar places, they could deal directly with foreign merchants. By this time, the European and particularly the French presence in West Africa had greatly disrupted what had been an important southern Moroccan trade with Timbuktu. This change in the destination and buyers directly affected the goods sent along trans-Saharan routes. While slaves remained an important commodity to the local trade of southern Morocco, their numbers were greatly reduced in part by European expansion in Sahelian Africa. Europeans at Mogador were more interested in other goods, like ivory and ostrich feathers. Consequent declines in exchange affected the income of merchants and others who might have paid the wages of agricultural workers. In addition to these difficulties of particular merchants, news of famine and epidemics in Morocco led many countries to close their markets to goods from the kingdom, thereby exacerbating the problem of government revenue. The Makhzen had little room for manoeuvre.

### Famine and Its Management

The years 1867 to 1869 had been difficult for the peasantry. The early 1870s brought some respite from the drought and famine cycle that weakened the economy, and by 1874 both trade and climate seemed to have stabilized. Good rains and substantial harvests had improved state coffers. Another drop in rainfall three years later, however, led to more crop failure and an eventual decline in export income. Whereas the usual rainfall was thirty to forty inches a year, by winter of September 1877, only three and a half inches of rain had fallen. The land in the South was parched and livestock, cattle and sheep in particular, were dying (Drummond-Hay 1896: 324).

Peasants were the first to suffer the consequences. While sheep were raised for consumption (meat and milk), cattle were used primarily to till the soil and were only eaten rarely; mutton was the preferred meat. For the farmer and landless peasant, surviving the famine meant gaining access to new animals. To afford the investment, one might have to hire oneself out or hope for a loan from a moneylender or local notable.

The British consul at Mogador, Robert Hay, son of Sir John, wrote to his father about the state of affairs. He reported that “the Sultan is said to be distributing grain” and that “wheat and other provisions are imported from England and other foreign countries.” The consul himself had written an article to the London *Times* requesting assistance from the English public. Meanwhile, the elderly Hay organized subscriptions in the foreign community to help the poor as they came to the city. In a way similar to modern food aid, the local and foreign communities worked to feed the victims.

By the autumn of 1878, a cholera-like epidemic had broken out in Casablanca and parts of the south. Rumours of cannibalism in the interior, and in the South, spread to the cities. Hay writes that,

There are reports that the starving people eat their dead. This is an exaggeration, but they are eating arum root, which when not properly prepared, provides symptoms like cholera. (Drummond-Hay 1896: 325)

Ennaji also tells the story of people eating the dead in his description of the poor during periods of famine. He tells the story of a young woman whose sister had died and whom fellow sufferers had proceeded to eat leaving her with only the head. More than likely, this is an apocryphal tale, intended to show the extreme suffering of the famine victims.

The plant to which Hay refers is *arum arisarum*, a tuber which was eaten during extreme food shortage. It was cut into small pieces and washed several times before being steamed.

Following steaming, it was then pounded, mixed with millet if possible, and made into either porridge or shaped into cakes. One had to be very careful about its cooking, as it was potentially poisonous, producing cholera-like symptoms.<sup>7</sup> Death from these symptoms was not a foregone conclusion, however.

In November 1879, doctors in Mazagan and Mogador confirmed that the disease was not cholera and that among the wealthy, it was not deadly.

the prevalent disease is not *cholera asiatica*, but it has a choleric character. The famished, weak, and poor invalids are carried off, but if a person in comfortable circumstances is attacked, a dose of castor oil or even oil cures them. (Drummond-Hay 1896: 326)

His statement fits with the generally held notion that it is the poor who are most affected by scarcity. An undernourished and overworked body enjoys little protection against disease. Many of the peasantry lived in such conditions; that they should succumb to famine first comes as no surprise. That they should fall victim to an otherwise innocuous disease or poison because of their weakened states before the crisis is equally unsurprising.

It is also in keeping with Amartya Sen's idea of landlords and powerful peasants often faring better than landless peasants and labourers during famines. The doctors to whom Drummond-Hay referred were located in the city, where international trade on behalf of the king and others, in addition to agricultural speculation, contributed to the income and general well-being of the important families. Their economic position allowed them access to a varied diet and income that could mitigate the effects of temporary scarcity caused by changes in climate that might otherwise kill those lower in the social hierarchy.

One should note that no distinction is made between the very poor and the peasantry. The southern peasantry by which is meant 'free people', without claims to shریفian or saintly descent, are synonymous with the poor. None of these sources talk about the handicapped or the old people those naturally dependent on others. It is with discussion that we depart from Sen's theory and return to the Moroccan economist Mohamed Ennaji, who comments that the worst affected by crises were those with no important social connections. As slave or an elderly woman connected to the right person might be more likely to survive than a young man with no social clout. Even with land, such people could do little to protect themselves from the effects of an extended environmental crisis. This would explain why the powerful were immediately sought during a crisis.

For those without such opportunities, the best options seemed to be migration, or the simple removal of oneself from the bad situation. When famine hit the Souss, people made their way north to the nearest cities, ports in particular, or into the mountains where they could usually find water. Women bartered their jewellery, which often served as the family savings, for food. Many died of hunger or disease as they left and some exchanged themselves or their family members for sustenance. Imprisoned men feared that their tribes might sell their children in their absence (Ennaji 1994: 133).<sup>8</sup> Generated in part by a fall in trans-Saharan trade slave trade, the labor shortage in the south made this exchange of humans advantageous for powerful land owners. They could have the extra hands they needed for very little. Those peasants (including harratines) connected to a powerful benefactor did not fare as badly. The distinctions between the poor and the very poor, or between slave and free, were blurred during famine. They were blurred by the very conditions themselves which varied depending on one's relationship to the powerful.

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<sup>7</sup> This arum was probably the same plant used to make pure arrowroot, or prepared as a starch for consumption, or, as in the Caribbean and other places, used on wounds.

<sup>8</sup> Ennaji (1994: 133) cites a document that describes a prisoner's plea to the king.



The medical crisis of 1878 became worse before it became better. Very soon after the cholera-like epidemic abated, a typhus epidemic began. Bodies were buried close to the surface or simply left exposed in the open: this assured the spread of the disease. On hearing about the epidemic, authorities in Gibraltar and other ports began to quarantine Moroccan goods. As Drummond-Hay explained “these quarantines increase the misery, for they check trade, and the poor engaged in labour connected to commerce are in a starving state” (Drummond-Hay 1896: 326). His comment was much in keeping with the general ideas of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh which, until 1886, had followed Gavin Milroy’s suggestions on matters of contagion (Edmond 2006: 52).<sup>9</sup> Regardless of Drummond-Hay’s own concerns, the quarantine persisted until the end of the typhus epidemic.

Current famine analysts see the availability of wage income for workers as an essential part of famine prevention (Drèze et al: 1995).<sup>10</sup> Again, we refer to Sen’s idea of entitlements, this time to labour-based entitlements and the actual ability to exchange labour for food. In this nineteenth-century case, people were concerned not only by the drought, but also by the price rise in staples. A Moroccan clerk in the vicinity of Mogador wrote that

Le moudd d’orge atteignit vingt-cinq onces au comptant et cinq riyals ou plus pour la vente à terme. Le blé était encore plus cher ainsi que les fèves et le maïs. (Ennaji 1994 : 128)

[A moudd of barley reached 25 ounces, 5 riyals or more that on consignment. Wheat was even more expensive than fava beans or maize.]

A moudd was equal to three-fourths of a litre, the capacity of a modern wine bottle. The clerk referred not to barley flour, but to unground grain which would need to be ground into flour, and then made into bread. More flour could be put in a wine bottle than grain. As we know from the famine of 1882, the Spanish consul Rotondo wrote that “workers from the countryside were extremely cheap; a man earned between 5 or 10 ounces a day and woman worked for half as much.” (cited in Miège 1961: 442, author’s translation). In the absence of wage data during the famine four years before, these figures serve as an index for the unfavourable nature of the labor market for workers during the earlier famine. Taking the higher end of these figures, a family with both husband and wife working would need to work two days in order to earn the price of one *moudd* of barley. If one considers that the peasant family had eight members, and knowing that barley bread was a peasant staple needed in large quantities, this income is obviously insufficient to support a family. Using Sen’s schema, the possibility of starvation would be highest at this point. Something would need to be done to prevent everyone from dying. It is no surprise that poor southerners who could do so exchanged family members for food.<sup>11</sup> Humans, in the absence of money, were a valuable commodity.

Further complicating matters was a steady depreciation of Moroccan currency which helped drive prices higher. French, Spanish and Moroccan currency circulated together in the kingdom. While Moroccans exported good currency, with a fair value of metal and the right weight to pay foreign debts, other countries sent outdated currency to pay for Moroccan goods. The Spanish isabelline and philippine coins, not legal tender since 1868, made their way to Morocco. Property owners in Oran used them to pay Moroccan workers from the Rif,

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<sup>9</sup> Gavin Milroy was a nineteenth-century physician and epidemiologist born in Edinburgh who was an expert on leprosy and who made a name for himself as an opponent of the quarantine system. According to Milroy, quarantine was bad for trade as it removed people from the labor force.

<sup>10</sup> The collection of essays cited here addresses the politics of hunger at both the macro- and micro-levels. The third and eleventh chapters, in particular, provide specific data on the condition of landless labourers and small farmers.

<sup>11</sup> See the epigraph on page 128 above.

thereby ensuring a cheaper workforce. Forgers in Larache and Tangier produced fake Moroccan silver coins and fake copper coins circulated in the Souss. For those who could find a job, the value of one's actual remuneration was not at all certain. Because of the uncertainty of the currency, merchants adjusted their prices to compensate for possible depreciation.

Reacting to the monetary crisis of the 1870s, Moulay Hassan commissioned the company Seillère to mint new Moroccan currency, the *hassani*. Though this currency was set to the Spanish *douro*, its actual value was greater. While the Moroccan coin contained 29.216 grams of pure silver, its Spanish counterpart contained only 22.5 grams (Miège 1961: 114). Despite this disparity, the Moroccan coin was set at a nominally equivalent value to European currency. Because of its greater real value, large quantities were exported illegally and forgers set to work once again. Fake and foreign currencies continued to circulate, preventing any efforts at improvement.

As mentioned earlier, migration was often a chosen means of avoiding environmental crises like famine. Evidence of such population shift can be seen in population statistics for the major ports.

### Population of Moroccan Port Cities

	1874–1875	1884–1885
Tetouan	22,000	22,000
Tanger	15,000	21,000
Larache	6,500	8,000
Rabat	27,000	27,000
Casablanca	7,000	9,000
Mazagan	5,500	7,000
Safi	11,000	11,000
Mogador	17,500	20,000

Source: Miège 1961: 461

Unfortunately, the table gives no population numbers for inland cities like Fes or Marrakesh. One could reasonably assume, however, that they too saw slight increase in their population either in the centre or the periphery. It does give a sense of population shift in the port cities after two major drought and famine cycles, however. In the cases of Rabat, Safi, and Tetouan, one sees no change in population. Population figures remain the same for both periods. In both Larache and Mazagan, one sees an increase of one thousand fifteen hundred people by 1885 or a twenty-three to twenty-seven percent increase in figures from 1874 to 1885. The next largest real increase appears in Casablanca where two thousand or twenty-eight percent more people appear in the 1885 record. One also sees an increase of two thousand five hundred in Mogador, an already fairly large trading city with a mobile population. The greatest shift in both absolute numbers and percentages occurs in Tangier to which six thousand or forty percent more people appear on the list of inhabitants.

Miège takes the whole period from 1877 to 1884 as an extended crisis which, given the course of events, seems a reasonable characterization. Though rains returned in 1880, so many cattle had died, that the land could not be worked. People themselves needed to recover; and before they had, another drought struck in 1882. The principle population shift occurred in Tangier. Tangier offered many opportunities to poor refugees of the interior. It had a major

port for European goods and people could find wage employment. A Muslim peasant from the Souss could get a job without being a member of a guild. As we know, however, jobs were not abundant. While employers benefited under the circumstances, the destitute rural dweller could not. These migrations often included the movement of Jews from the interior to the port cities like Essaouira, with some going as far north as Tangier. Many of them sought protected status with foreign embassies which, if granted, made them exempt from Moroccan taxes which could be exorbitant.

Information from the Royal Archives and other secondary sources gives a sense of what the Sultan and his central government did during famine periods. As was the tradition, Moulay Hassan attempted to alleviate the hunger of those near him and in November 1878, was said to be feeding some three thousand people in Marrakesh, the first year of the first major famine of his reign. Mohammed Ennaji writes that it was common practice for the Sultan to open his reserves, request foreign aid, and feed the victims of famine, but he could only do so for those close to him (Ennaji 1994: 131). The countryside often saw little or none of this bounty, and the provinces depended on the honesty of their governors. Nominally better off themselves, provincial governors or heads of religious centres, *zawiyas*, depended on the crops grown on their land and gifts from neighbouring families. During climatic disorder, they relied on whatever reserves remained in their *agadirs*, or granaries. For an extended crisis however, they might suffer with everyone else or individual family members might migrate themselves. Central government's ability to conduct famine relief in the countryside was greatly limited by its organizational structure which relied on taxes in kind (usually grain), from the countryside in order to provision itself and the cities (Kaplan 1984, Holden 2009).<sup>12</sup> The people who themselves might have needed to migrate because of hardship might very well have been expected to conduct famine relief. As part of a closed system of rural-urban dependency in which the agents of government themselves occasionally stole to survive, government relief measures were necessarily more effective the closer to the centre they were undertaken, the closer, that is, to the Sultan himself. He simply could not know whether supplies got to the countryside or not.

The crisis which began in 1878 was both long and difficult. Humans and animals alike died by the thousands. The people of the Souss were hit especially hard. Unlike their urban counterparts in Marrakesh or Fas, they did not have access to the Sultan's relief measures. They walked to ports in search of work and, as the ports were also important cities where foreign communities distributed aid, could find some relief. Many did not survive the move, however.

In the power relations of the poor, women and children became articles of trade. In the South, where the supply for labor had been high, these circumstances were a boon to any well-off person needing workers. Rather than going to a slave market, he could get a house servant for a piece of bread, a significant saving. For the individual exchanging family members for food, nothing was certain. He might not survive the famine, in which case his family would at least be in the care of someone else. Often enough however, following the worst ravages of the famine, he would find that the family member placed in the care of a powerful neighbour would be gone, sold to the highest bidder. One should note that this dilemma was not particular to Harratine or recently freed slaves, but to the community as a whole. The social structure so vigorously maintained by the provincial authorities and their allies at court did little to help those of its lower orders, and restricted the Sultan's room for manoeuvre.

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<sup>12</sup> Kaplan's *Provisioning Paris* (1984), a seminal work in the history of food, details the symbiotic relationship between city management and rural life and the place of food, in this case grain, in assuring it. These themes are readily applicable to life in Morocco. One recent work in English that attempts as much is Stacy E. Holden's *The Politics of Food in Modern Morocco* (2009). Begun as a doctoral thesis, Holden's work examines the role of food in assuring political stability.

## Conclusion

The period from 1860 to 1888 was a time of great change for Morocco. At the beginning of the period, Sidi Mohammed began the slow process of modernizing the kingdom. Starting with administrative improvements at the ports, modernization would facilitate trade with the outside world and attract foreign interest in Morocco. The creation of a cotton and sugar industry figured high on his list of modernizing priorities. Sir John Drummond-Hay, a key member of the foreign community and confidant to the sultan, had encouraged more than one sultan to open his economy. Free trade, he believed, would lead to better financial circumstances for the Makhzen; in Hay's logic, a better treasury required better management. Economic reform required administrative reform.

In the Moroccan central government, however, many were unwilling to reform. Provincial governors, some of the king's ministers and the lettered elite were among those who saw the new knowledge and learning as a threat to tradition. That tradition accompanied a very distinct social hierarchy in which those on the bottom reaped little benefit if not an ally of those at the top. This was of particular concern in the south where little such investment took place; all of Sultan Sidi Mohammed and Sultan Hassan I reforms focused on the urban areas from Marrakesh north. The government recruited the army and put new factories in the cities. Only when Hassan I planned to assert his claims to the southern provinces did his reforms have a southern vision. When he did go to the Souss, he took an army which devastated the crops and farms of rebels, as system which generated more animosity than support. His real reform efforts were directed towards the governors.

The problems of the peasantry, however, continued well into the twentieth century. Drought and famine made their already difficult lives even more difficult. Many died or were separated from their families. In a society where family and social relations were essential to social identity, this was true impoverishment. The people of the south risked this kind of impoverishment with every drought. Parents exchanging their children, and husbands exchanging their wives, for something to eat were long-established practices in Morocco. Once a family's jewellery was gone and they had nothing else to sell, their labour was all that was left. However, the free selling of that labour remained difficult, particularly in southern regions of the country where modernization was and continued to be a slower process than in the rest of the country. Human beings, indentured or enslaved, remained a valuable commodity for a long time; social hierarchy kept them in their place. The administrative system of the central government that worked within that social hierarchy limited an individual's ability to escape it. It would not be until much later in the twentieth century, the establishment of the Protectorate serving as a catalyst, that such economic and social possibilities could become a reality (see Thomson 2011, where I discuss changes in Moroccan economic and social life from the nineteenth to the twentieth century).

These cases from 19<sup>th</sup> century Morocco share many of the features describe by Sen's theory of famine and deprivation. In both, there is an environmental crisis, drought, which leads to crop failure, the death of animals and, eventually, to famine and starvation. Unable to exchange either the goods they produce or their labour freely meant that those lower in the social order landless agricultural workers and labourers were the first to suffer during a crisis. Viewed from the perspective of the twenty-first century, one see striking similarities between these cases and more recent cases of natural disaster and famine in (for example) the Horn of Africa. Like the 19<sup>th</sup> century case from Morocco, current difficulties in Ethiopia and Somalia show the problems of managing environmental crises when working with unstable or uncertain governments. When they do provide help to their populations, such governments can only do so on a very limited scale. Like nineteenth-century Morocco, insufficient revenue and lack of good infrastructure merely add to the logistical complexity of aiding those in need. Also

like nineteenth-century Morocco, they too require the help of the international community which unlike in the nineteenth century now knows such countries a lot better and may be able to help more efficiently in the interior, far away from the large cities.

The hope of these Moroccan cases lies in what happened in Morocco in the twentieth century. Improved transport networks and stronger central government are just two factors that have greatly contributed to the disappearance of famine and starvation as major development concerns for the kingdom. While drought and other environmental changes remain a problem, the accompanying famine and death by starvation have not. The government has not needed to rely on the help of the foreign governments to feed a population at risk.<sup>13</sup> One can only hope for the same elsewhere.

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<sup>13</sup> While Morocco does, today, satisfy some of its food needs through imports, it no longer needs to do so in order to fend off the effects of major food crises.

## УЖАСНЫЕ СОБЫТИЯ: ЭПИДЕМИИ И ГОЛОД В МАРОККО, 1860–1888 ГОДЫ

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*Аннотация. Засуха и голод оставались серьезными явлениями на протяжении всей марокканской истории, и вторая половина девятнадцатого века не была исключением. Ряд подобных кризисов произошел в 1860–1880-е годы, когда Марокко уже ощущало на себе давление европейской экспансии, повлекшее ослабление традиционных торговых связей. Разрушение торговых отношений при нехватке продовольствия в результате климатических нарушений зачастую подталкивало людей к миграции в крупные города в поисках помощи. Часто люди, не обладающие возможностью эмигрировать с семьей, были вынуждены оставлять своих детей на попечение соплеменников, надеясь забрать их по окончании кризиса. Это был сложный выбор, но единственный, который мог позволить хотя бы кому-то выжить. Экологические кризисы, приводящие к голоду, давно вызывали мировую обеспокоенность. В своей основополагающей работе «Бедность и голод: очерк о правах и лишениях» Амартия Сен поясняет ключевую роль пособия в смягчении воздействия голода на население. В данной статье автор сосредотачивается в первую очередь на концепции «собственного труда» и «прав на производство». Описывая Марокко XIX века, статья дает исторический обзор современной системы национального и международного сотрудничества во время экологических кризисов. То, что больше не слышно о людях, умирающих от таких кризисов в Марокко, свидетельствует о том, что смерть и голод – не неизбежные последствия экологической катастрофы, а скорее результат отсутствия идей и инфраструктуры.*

*Ключевые слова: засуха, окружающая среда, управление, Марокко, Африка*

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