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**Master's degree in human Rights and Multi-level Governance**



“Parrhesia: the power of discourse as a tool for civil movements”.

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## **Abstract**

The thesis addresses the philosophical and political notion of parrhesia taken up by Michel Foucault. The thesis research will focus on the application of this notion to civil movements, particularly under democratic but also under authoritarian regimes. The thesis will focus on the concept of parrhesia, the ability to say anything and tell the truth, in the context of social movements, and will address its conception in the digital age.

*Keywords: democracy, parrhesia, civil movements, freedom of speech, discourse, politics.*

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## **GLOSSAIRE**

*Cynism*: A cynical attitude toward propriety and opinion that leads to the blunt expression of principles contrary to morality and social norms.

*Democracy*: A form of government in which sovereignty belongs to the people.

*Democratization*: The action of leading to democracy and making democratic values accessible to all social classes.

*Demokratia*: Political system, form of government in which sovereignty emanates from the people.

*Internet (Web 2.0)*: A set of interconnected global networks that enables computers and servers to communicate effectively using a common communications protocol.

*Isegoria*: Principle of equality of speech in Greek antiquity.

*Isocracy*: A form of government where all citizens have an equal political power.

*Kunism*: The way of acting publicly against conventions.

*Parrhesia*: From the ancient Greek for 'to speak of all', composed of pan ('all') and rêsis ('speech'). Parrhesia also means to speak the truth.

*Parrhesiate*: A person who practices free speech.

*Polis*: In antiquity, polis were city-states. They had their own rights, their own constitution, their own religion, their own dialect, and were autonomous from neighboring cities.

*Public sphere*: The public sphere is conceived as the social space in which different opinions are expressed, problems of general concern are discussed, and collective solutions are developed communicatively.

*Social networks*: A social network consists of a service that enables.

## INTRODUCTION

From 1982 onwards, Michel Foucault assigned a central place to two notions: the transformation of evening and access to truth. Foucault first uttered the word parrhesia in a lecture on February 10, 1982, at the University of Grenoble. Michel Foucault has devoted much of his most recent work to the notion of parrhesia, which can be translated as "outspokenness". It appears notably in *L'herméneutique du sujet* (1982), *Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres* (1984), and *Le Courage de la Vérité* (1984). He devoted a series of six lectures to this subject at the University of Berkeley in October and November 1983.

He begins his reflections on this notion, particularly in the context of the relationship between truth and the subject. Foucault then compares the notion of parrhesia with that of political parrhesia, based on Greek democracy, particularly Athenian democracy, and the court of the prince. In the democratic context, parrhesia is a political right that enables influential politicians to play an active part in the government of the city, and to win the support of their fellow citizens through the frankness of their discourse. To this end, Foucault will analyse the mythical history of this democratic parrhesia, based on an analysis of several tragedies such as those of Euripides, in particular *Ion*. This 'good' parrhesia is also opposed by a 'bad' parrhesia. Translated from the Greek by Plato, this is the kind of city where everyone says and does what they feel like saying and doing, or where only the orators who flatter the people and tell them only what they want to hear are listened to.

Parrhesia is the ability to speak the truth, without precautions, and independently of power relationships. Parrhesia can also be defined as the fact of saying everything, which means saying what you think in complete freedom. Parrhesia is not simply the right and power to speak the truth, it's the right and power to speak and express a truth that often disturbs, it's the right and power to shock, but also to surprise with one's speech and to step out of one's role and function. It often happens that everyone perceives a problem, yet no one dares to denounce it. This is often to avoid conflict, preserve ties, ensure one's reputation, or maintain the existing order.

Yet parrhesia could be a notion to 'save' politics. In a context where political discourse is often far removed from the raw truth, the notion of parrhesia is not often in their favor. Indeed, as Raphael Glucksmann points out in his book *Une Lettre à la Génération qui va tout Changer*, parrhesia is attenuated to the person who is going to possess more and more power within society, as he is going to encounter more and more constraining effects forcing him to bend to rules, he cannot circumvent in order to maintain the established order. A politician, for example, knows

the ideology he is supposed to apply in order to fit in with the image expected of him and flatter his electors.

But parrhesia demands something quite different, and that is to say exactly what we believe to be true. When we express parrhesia, we need to distance ourselves from the fallout that occurs. He who expresses parrhesia expects no other return from others than that of expressing what seems right to him at the moment he says it. It goes without saying that parrhesia is opposed to lies, but even more so to bad faith. Parrhesia is the risk of speaking the truth, a discourse that often jeopardizes the speaker, the listener and the bond that unites them. But politics dies, especially when discourse becomes emancipated.

In *The Prince* (1532), Machiavelli divulges truths that were not expressed at the time, but rather kept secret. The secrets of the empire, political truths that were extremely dangerous to publish, and in particular the need for the prince to practice lying in politics in order to maintain or increase his power over the people. This point of view is broadly in line with the vision represented by today's social movements. Citizens in our societies often witness a lack of democratic values and representation for all. They grow weary of politics, and votes drop, leading to greater abstention from election to election. Amidst all the civil disobedience uprisings and the emergence of social movements around the world, people are demanding sincerity in politics, and they find themselves sharing the same anger and desire for political change.

In the age of social movements, parrhesia rediscovers its Greek origins. In this sense, parrhesia can be interpreted as a search for fair representation and truth on the part of political authorities. In fact, social movements are born in a context of seeking to act together and develop within a logic of defending the common interests of the same group with regard to a material good or a cause. Parrhesia grasps certain dimensions that are vital to political life: how to exercise the political power of authority in a way that is both truthful and trustworthy. Foucault's discussions highlight the democratic challenges and possibilities related to political power that parrhesia as governmentality can engender. They also examine the political place of citizens in this register.

In today's context, parrhesia can be linked to the emergence of social networks, which have expanded the public sphere of free speech to denounce injustice to a wider audience, to bring together like-minded people, and also to be more influential in political participation. In the Internet age, the emergence of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram have enabled the emergence of numerous social movements to defend democratic claims and bring about change within their political society. We can cite as an example all the popular protests of the



Arab Springs from 2010 onwards, or even more recently, the Yellow Vests movement, and the Me Too hashtag. These digital protests have only one initiative: to express their demands and make themselves heard by the political figures who govern them. These social networks have facilitated and amplified collective action.

The aim of this research is to study the notion of parrhesia in the present day. Today, speech has been democratized through various social movements. This research will focus on analysing the different currents and concepts of parrhesia over time, in order to apply them to today's political context, through both democratic and authoritarian regimes. The aim is to define whether parrhesia, i.e. free speech, is a notion that can be transformed into a tool of democratization in the struggle of citizens, but also to find out whether parrhesia can be a possible tool for citizens to participate within their government in order to change or bring about changes within their politics. Social networks are proving to be a promising tool for sharing parrhesia. Indeed, thanks to new technological tools and the Internet, a civilian need only pull out his or her phone to post the "truth" and then share it on the networks. Parrhesia can be defined as a means of representative democratization for the people. From this notion, citizens can make themselves heard in order to obtain a better representation of their government, but also to have the power of speech in order to denounce a lie or an injustice pronounced by a governor.

Our problem will be to show how Foucault's concept of parrhesia proposes a new way of engaging the demands of today's social movements, and to analyse the influence it can have for citizens within the international politics and government of their country.

We will begin by examining parrhesia in ancient history, its democratic origins in Athenian times and its various mentions in Greek literature. Next, we'll analyse the various theories and notions of parrhesia through the work of Michel Foucault, who reused this notion to apply it to today's political context. These theories will then be applied to the various definitions of existing social movements. Lastly, the present research will focus on and analyse various cases where parrhesia was present through different social movements such as the Arab Spring, but also the Me Too and yellow vest movements. The aim will be to analyse whether the various social protest movements produced on social network platforms to an influential effect for a quest for truth with the aim of creating a better democracy.

## **Chapter 1 –**

### **Concept of Parrhesia - Research Problem and Conceptual Framework**

This chapter aims to provide the conceptual framework for reading the concept of parrhesia in research and to lay the groundwork for the development of the following chapters. It is fundamental to first understand what this concept is in order to proceed with the analytical part of the work. To achieve this objective, the chapter will be divided into two parts. The first paragraph will be devoted to the concept of parrhesia which will focus on its definition and its evolution through the years. Indeed, to understand why it is pertinent and applicable in this research on civil movement, we need first to understand why this concept is approachable in a political way. In the second part of this chapter, we will study its possible projection in civil movements and the different approaches and theories on the concept of discourse and freedom of speech inside this kind of movement.

#### *1.1. Definition and History of Parrhesia:*

##### *1.1.1. First apparition of the word parrhesia in ancient Greece literature:*

The definition and etymology of the word parrhesia is very old. The word parrhesia first appeared in the literature of ancient Greece. The concept has been appropriated by several writers and philosophers in a political context where democracy takes its first roots around the city of Athens in ancient Greece around the 5th century B.C.E.

In its etymology, parrhesia means ‘to say everything’ from ‘pan’ (i.e. everything) and ‘rhema’ (i.e. that which is said). The one who is using parrhesia is called the ‘parrhesiaste’ and it is someone who says everything he has in mind. He doesn’t hide anything from other people through his discourse. The parrhesiaste has to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind, to say his own opinion. It is someone who takes a risk and who has the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. It is because of this reason that ‘kings’ or ‘tyrants’ generally can’t use parrhesia because of the risk of nothing.

Parrhesia remains a difficult concept to translate. It denotes the possibility of saying anything, sometimes translated as free speech, frankness, or frankness. This unlimited freedom is neither a ‘right to speak’ (i.e. isegoria) nor a ‘true speech’ (i.e. aletheia), of which it is only a modality, it is legitimized by a moral and physical asceticism and is potentially ethically condemnable. It is

thus problematic because if it opens on a perfect and demanding adequacy of living and saying, it exposes one to the risk of exposing oneself to power.

The first apparition of the word parrhesia was first used during ancient Greece. Subsequently, in the Greco-Roman philosophy of the imperial period, parrhesia does not refer to an obligation imposed on the disciple but rather to an obligation imposed on the master to 'tell the truth'. However, it failed in ancient history. It shows that it referred rather to the imposition of silence on the disciple which can obviously be linked to the responsibility of the master.

As far as the appearance of the word parrhesia is concerned, it all started with a famous text by Polybius (200 B.C.E. – 118 B.C.E.) in which he speaks of the Achaeans<sup>1</sup>. For him, the perfect politic regime in a city is composed of three characteristics: demokratia, isegoria, and parrhesia. Demokratia is the participation of all, in any case, in the exercise of power. Isegoria is a principle of equality of speech in Greek antiquity. And among these characteristics, it states and defines that parrhesia is '*the possibility for all to have access to speech, the right of everyone to speech, speech being understood as the speech that decides the political field, speech as an act of affirmation of oneself and one's opinion in the political field*'<sup>2</sup>. Polybius identified these three points as an ideal form of a 'real democracy'.

However, the power of speech in public still needs a formal claim to equal access, to free speech, and to power, but also to be in connection with isokratia<sup>3</sup> and with an emphasis on isegoria. In this sense, it is important to point out that the term parrhesia, in the beginning, seems more as one of the essential attributes of a 'free democratic citizenship' than as the sense of speaking the truth<sup>4</sup>

The primacy of the term and its earliest recorded usage was in Euripides. Written in 418 B. C., the parrhesiatic play *Ion* had a political meaning. Euripides (480 B.C.E. - 406 B.C.E.), uses the word parrhesia in the first passage in *Ion*<sup>5</sup>, it is primarily a story of the movement of truth-telling. We see that it is in any case birth, it is membership of the citizenry, which alone in a properly organized city can allow one to speak. For example, if a foreigner enters a city, even if the law

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<sup>1</sup> The Achaeans is the name of the people inhabiting in the area of Achaea in Greece.

<sup>2</sup> Faitini. T. and Ghia. F. (2015). *A Historico-Conceptual Outline of Political Parrhesia*. Theopopedia, Archiving the history of theologico-political concepts. University of Trento.

<sup>3</sup> Isocracy is a form of government where all citizens have equal political power.

<sup>4</sup> Ndlr. Michel Foucault.

<sup>5</sup> Euripide (2002). *Ion*. Les Belles Lettres, p. 211.

makes him a citizen, his language will remain servile. He does not have the right to say everything because he does not possess parrhesia. So, we see that parrhesia is a right, and in particular, a right linked to citizenship. In a city, the non-citizen cannot speak, only the citizen is allowed to do so and has the right to speak by virtue of his birth. This tragedian makes it clear that the privilege of parrhesia derives from the status of the citizenship of Athens and belongs to citizens only. It cannot be extended to foreigners and slaves. The only way to obtain it is to be born from an Athenian mother. In the texts, *Ion* prays to be born Athenian in order to have the freedom to speak since he is a foreigner.

Parrhesia is not only an attribute of citizenship. It can also be used to influence others to ensure the well-being or the salvation of the 'poleis' thanks to equal free speech to the citizens. But it is all above a democracy that free speech can really have space because even in possession of this right, the citizen may be afraid to use it at the risk of being punished because they are not the master or for fear of the master.

In *The Phoenicians*<sup>6</sup> (408 B.C.E.), it is a dialogue between Jocasta and Polynices. In this dialogue, exile is discussed, and Jocasta asks Polynices about the pains and misfortunes of exile. Polynices answers that the worst disadvantage in being exiled is that he cannot enjoy parrhesia. And Jocasta answers: "*That is a slave's life, be forbidden to speak one's mind*". In this text, we can see that the right to speak is also linked to the fact that one is a citizen living in a city. When one lives in one's own city, one can speak, and when one is not in one's own city, he does not have parrhesia. You need to be a regular citizen in the city, if you are exiled, then you cannot use parrhesia. It is also implied that if you don't have the right to speech, you are unable to exercise any kind of power, and are in the same situation as a slave. Indeed, the slave does not have parrhesia, because he does not have citizenship. He is not fit status, to tell the truth. Further, if citizens cannot use parrhesia, they cannot oppose a ruler's power and without this right of criticism, the power exercised by a sovereign is without limitation.

In *The Bacchae*<sup>7</sup> (405 B.C.E.), this text deals with another view of parrhesia, the fear of telling the truth and the fear of the other's reaction. This text approaches the story of a servant, more specifically a messenger, who must announce bad news. He wonders whether he can benefit from parrhesia, to speak freely. In this situation, we see a servant who has something to say, does he

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<sup>6</sup> Euripide. (1961). *Les Phéniciennes*. Les Belles Lettres. p. 170.

<sup>7</sup> Euripide. (2002). *Les Bacchantes*. Les Belles Lettres. p. 77.

have the right to speak? To which his master Pentheus replies that it is his duty to speak. However, only because he promises not to punish him and opens a space of freedom, a space of right to speak to the one who is not the master, and also because he asks him to speak, that is to say, to tell the truth. One of the problems of the parrhesiastic character must resolve and confront is how to distinguish that which must be said from that which should be kept silent.

A final occurrence of the word parrhesia in Euripides' can be found in the play *Orestes*. The play was written in 408 B. C.E., a few years before Euripides' death and during a moment of political crisis in Athens when there were numerous debates on the democratic regime. This text is interesting because it is the only passage where the word parrhesia is used in a pejorative sense. Indeed, the narrative starts with an Athenian procedure for criminal trials. When all the citizens are present, they are asked if they want to speak, so to use the Athenian right of equal speech, *isegoria*. The first speaker called Talthybius, is described as someone who is not completely free because he is dependent upon those more powerful than him. The text states that he is 'under the power of the powerful'. Consequently, he speaks not frankly and ambiguously. Although the speaker is a citizen, he nonetheless possesses parrhesia supposed to be his formal civil right guaranteed by the Athenian constitution. This aspect designates his parrhesia as pejorative or in a negative sense. In order for parrhesia to have positive political effects, it must also be linked to a good education namely an intellectual and moral formation.

The word 'parrhesia' first appears in Greek literature in Euripides and problematize its concepts. The problematization of parrhesia in Euripides was presented majority in a positive sense or value. As we saw, it was about the freedom to speak and also, the privilege conferred with the citizenship of Athens. Parrhesia represents at this time the 'good citizen' who has a respectful relation to the city, to the law, and to the truth. For example, Ion was in research to assume the parrhesiastic role, which seem a natural act to him. We saw that to entitle the use of parrhesia, there was a need for citizenship and that parrhesia was considered as a civil right. However, it mounts disparities with an egalitarian system where not everyone can use parrhesia. Still, parrhesia was not clearly defined in institutional terms, and there was no law from potential retaliation or punishment for what he or she said. There were no social, political, or institutional laws that were determining who is able to speak the 'truth'. The second aspect we can also approach is concerning the function of parrhesia. It is not only the disclosure of the truth but there is also a need of recognizing who is able to speak the truth within the limits of an institutional system and where everyone can speak his or her opinion equally.

This raises the question of whether a democracy fully allows this. Parrhesia is a verbal activity, as pure frankness in speaking, but it can also result in ignorant outspokenness.

### 1.1.2. *Parrhesia and its connection with democracy in Ancient Greece:*

The development of Parrhesia endorses the interrogation of democracy and also its relationship with freedom and power. At the time of Ancient Greece, it emerges the interrogation on the problematization of the value of freedom of speech, the value of free speech, and the way how freedom of speech must be understood in Athens.

After seeing the different definitions of Euripides' works, we will move on to the vision of the ancient philosopher Plato (428 B.C.E. – 348 B.C.E.). Plato's argument in *The Laws*<sup>8</sup> (356 B.C.) is the possibility of the necessity of someone who would be like a kind of moral master. This would be someone who would prevail over everyone by parrhesia, who would prescribe to everyone what is in accordance with the politeia, the constitution of the city. The Republic describes the democratic city where everyone can choose the form of life they want, which is what freedom consists of, with the possibility of doing what they want but also the possibility of saying what they want. The parrhesia thus appears as one of the features of this democratic city. He speaks of the need for a moral master, someone who through parrhesia would prevail over all and express what is in accordance with the constitution of the city.

In *A Nicoclès*<sup>9</sup> (374 B.C.E.) discourse, Isocrates says: "*Hold as faithful, not those friends who praise whatever you may say or do, but those who condemn your faults. Give parrhesia to the wise, so that you may have advisers for embarrassing matters. Distinguish between skilled flatterers and devoted servants, so that dishonest people do not prevail over honest people. Listen to what people say about each other; try to discern both the character of those who speak and the matters they speak about*".

It can be understood here that the quality of a good monarchical government is to leave a space of freedom around the monarch where others can speak and give him sound advice. We could see that the parrhesia had a meaning of the one where it works when it was a right of the citizens.

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<sup>8</sup> Platon. (1975). *Les Lois*, III, Les Belles Lettres.

<sup>9</sup> Isocrate. (1956). *À Nicoclès*, in *Discours*. Les Belles Lettres. p. 105.

Then, it was also the necessity or the criterion of a reasonable monarchic government that let itself be told the truth. In Plato's *Gorgias* (380 B.C.E.), it takes on another meaning: the one who wants to know and to tell the other when an act is unjust<sup>10</sup>.

We can see in these texts that the use of the word parrhesia is in political thought. Parrhesia in these texts is linked to equality of speech (isegoria) or to democracy (democratia) but it is also linked to the exercise of personal power and to the representation of an unequal structure. Indeed, it is freedom more often granted and conceded by the 'powerful' or by the 'rich'. However, parrhesia is also the criterion of good sovereignty. Parrhesia is a freedom that the sovereign must give to the citizens. It should not be considered as a kind of delegation of power or participation in power. But what can it be the extend of its field of application? Before the problem of freedom of speech for everyone arose, the problem of the right to free speech within the court space was a major political problem. In the text of *Gigante*, published in the acts of the congress of Guillaume Budé in 1968, there is presented the text 'Peri parrhesia of Philodemus' who undermines the question was whether parrhesia should be considered a virtue, a technique, or a way of life.

In the *Interview*, by Epictetus (55–135 C.E.), another point is raised, it is the skill of listening, that is to say, a technique of listening properly to the other, of knowing why listening to him and doing it to know a certain number of things to understand it. Seneque (8 B.C.E – 65 C.E.) argued about parrhesia beginning to tip over and becoming a form of dual obligation where two people trade for the truth. And, for Philodemus, he was talking about parrhesia as a means for the disciples to save one another. It responds to the exercise of 'self-care'. If concern for the self needs the other, and the discourse of the other, then the discourse of the other must be considered as an act, an action in the nature of parrhesia. Parrhesia should be considered as a set of characters that are based on law and that ensure the effectiveness of the discourses of the other in practice in relation to his concern for the self. Parrhesia characterizes the discourse of the other in concern for the self. Parrhesia is an action, is it that it acts, it allows discourse to act directly on the transparency between discourse and the movement of thought<sup>11</sup>.

Returning to its connection with democracy, it shows that it is in many ways ambiguous and problematic. Plato indeed presents the unflattering and disinterested speech of the parrhesia which confronts a whole assembly with an uncomfortable and unpleasant, yet useful truth. The emphasis here is on parrhesia as an act that confronts the assembly with truth in the trial of Socrates, which

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<sup>10</sup> Platon. (1972). *Gorgias*. Les Belles Lettres. p. 166-167.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault. M. (2012). *Parrhesia*. Critical Inquiry, Vol. 41, No. 2, p.170. [La Parrêsia \(openedition.org\)](http://www.openedition.org)

is an example of the risks that arise even under a democratic government<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, parrhesia seems to be on the borderline of political indifference, even under a democratic government, and this indifference is well before the valorisation of freedom of expression. Plato reminds that conceding the right to parrhesia to all the inhabitants of the polis, could distort the concept and cause decadence. In this sense, the right to parrhesia is a right to the freedom of expression but can become in a sense an uncontrolled speech where the polis becomes then 'chaotic'. One finds here another image of the parrhesia compared to what was seen before, a rather idealized image that Euripides gave.

We can therefore affirm in a sense of the political awareness that has existed since the beginning. With the decline of democratic institutions, the semantic field of the concept of parrhesia takes place in the political sphere.

### *1.1.3. The problematizations of the parrhesia:*

Parrhesia is a Greek notion that has had meaning in the Greek universe since classical Greece, then in the Latin universe, and in that of Christianity. After the first centuries of the Christian era, it is a matter of freedom to say everything to the extent of the courage to say it.

Starting from the Greek tradition of parrhesia, according to the theologian Heinrich Schlier (1900-1978), it is possible to identify three different meanings of the term in the Bible. First of all, parrhesia is the right to say anything. This right confers on the one who enjoys its authority and distinguishes the free man from the slave. Then, parrhesia as a right of expression, that is to say, the right to speak the truth without any reserve. However, it also shows the human tendency to conceal things for fear of facing the risks that may follow. And, thirdly, parrhesia is the ability to challenge those who hinder the spread of truth, as a virtue of resistance to tyranny. The parrhesia then reappears later in the Christian era in the martyrological literature<sup>13</sup>.

Parrhesia is also symbolized and defined in the Bible. Here the authority is conferred directly by God, who distinguishes the free man from the slave. In *Syriac*, parrhesia is understood as the 'boldness of speech'. Parrhesia can be seen as the pronouncement of truth as the courage and

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<sup>12</sup> Rohrmoser. G. (1969). *Platons politics*. Philosophie Studium Generale. p. 1090-1134.

<sup>13</sup> The martyrology of literature is the set of literary works written in honour of the Christian martyrs.



honesty before man but also before God. Another meaning of parrhesia appears in the *Psalms* and refers to the inner freedom with which the faithful surrender to God is the cornucopia of parrhesia.

The philosophy of the Hellenistic period and especially of the Roman period of the first two centuries of the empire allows us to encounter a notion, which is the notion of parrhesia: the notion of parrhesia which, etymologically, means the obligation to say all things. This function of the parrhesia under the Hellenistic monarchies is characterized by the role of the good adviser for the king to warn him against the dangers of the abuse of the power but in a certain sense also for the whole people who are not present at the discussions between the king and his advisers. However, parrhesia is strictly forbidden outside the palace, outside the power.

In Christian spirituality, the word parrhesia seems to signify the sense of the need for the disciple to show the movements of his thought. This notion is also found in the Greco-Roman philosophy of the imperial period, with the crucial difference that parrhesia is not an obligation imposed on the disciple, but rather an obligation imposed on the master, in particular, to impose silence on the disciple.

The regulation of attitudes toward silence is ancient. It can be found in Pythagoreanism (Pythagoreanism is, in fact, a wisdom that is deployed in all fields, whether in knowledge, religion, aesthetics, or politics. The recruitment of followers was carefully done according to the face, the walk, the habits, and the inclinations of the candidates). We find it in the ancient Greek texts of philosophers such as Plutarch *De Audiendo* (46-125 C.E) or Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.E. – 45 C.E.) in *The Contemplative Life*, all the gestures of silence that were imposed on the disciples. The disciple is then at that time the one who keeps silent, whereas in Christianity, in spirituality, the disciple will be the one who has to speak.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it was referred to as a ‘confession’ over a period when the penitential sacrament form was constituted by early Christianity under the sacrament of penance or rather the form of confession. During this period, the sacrament of penance did not yet exist. However, we will find distinct forms of obligation to manifest the truth about oneself. One is the obligation to manifest the truth about oneself and the other is the obligation to tell the truth about oneself. The obligation to manifest the truth about oneself is part of the penitential ritual. The confession of sins, that is, the obligation to tell the faults one has committed, is not the obligation to reveal one's thoughts to someone else. The confession of sins is not the obligation to say everything. The confession of sins is the obligation to tell the faults one has done. The obligation to say everything is quite singular in the Christian spirituality of the fourth and fifth centuries. This is found in the direction of conscience that develops and flourishes in the 16th and

17th centuries. However, parrhesia is never really expressed in the form of a 'confession' since it is a speech that arises freely. One finds nevertheless during this time, that the parrhesia is hindered by the 'power'.

On the other hand, parrhesia, the obligation to say everything, appears to be a precept that applies to the master who is necessary for self-care. Indeed, one can only care about oneself, one can only care about oneself on the condition that one is helped by someone, and it is this someone, this other in the care of oneself, on whom the obligation of parrhesia weighs.

The master's parrhesia is both a technique and a way of being. As a technique, it enables him to help the disciple to know himself and to equip himself with the truths he needs to face the events of life and to live a truly philosophical life. But it cannot succeed as a technique if it is not also a way of being by which the master manifests that he is himself as what he says, making sure that what he says is immediately received as true by the disciple.

The parrhesia is then the freedom to say everything to the one who has the courage to say it. This notion, which has passed into the Greek universe but also into that of Christianity, reveals a history of a desire to speak the truth, necessary for a democracy. It denotes the possibility of "saying everything" and can be translated by freedom of speech. This freedom, without limits, is legitimized by a moral asceticism that is nevertheless potentially condemnable in certain regimes. It exposes one to the risk of exposing oneself to the brutality of the "stronger" (of the power) towards which it is often an abuse of power.

After having characterized the ancient philosophy by the concern of oneself, parrhesia in this period recalls that it is in the concern of oneself through the acquisition of true knowledge that the subject of Antiquity constitutes himself as an ethical subject, capable of governing himself and the others. But in order to practice this self-care, the subject needs another: a master, a director. We question any form of political parrhesia, from its origin. The notion of free and sincere speech. The notion of a free and sincere discourse implanted and created in a democracy, and of a need for this discourse to remain democratic. This notion also reveals an egalitarian structure that threatens its democratic foundations. If absolutely everyone is allowed to say what they want, democracy has no reason to exist. But if only the 'strongest' are allowed to speak, those who are able to say what they think are not able to do so. They are the ones who are able to speak coherent and well-founded truths because they have been elected by the government. But always in the idea of telling or 'hiding the truth' then in this case the democracy is in danger perhaps irremediably in danger.

## 1.2. A concept studied by Michel Foucault:

### 1.2.1. A notion reappropriated by Michel Foucault:

For Michel Foucault, parrhesia is the 'obligation to say the truth'. Foucault reconstructs the movement of the parrhesia in correspondence with the political movement of democratic Greece. In order to play this role, the other always needs to be endowed with parrhesia, a notion of which Foucault, before refining its meaning through the analysis of texts, gives a first definition: "*Parrhesia, etymologically, is the fact of saying everything (frankness, openness of speech, openness of spirit, openness of language, freedom of speech). It will later qualify the fact of saying everything or obligation to say*". In Latin, parrhesia is generally translated by *libertas*. It is the openness that makes one say that one says what one has to say, that one says what one wants to say, that one says what one thinks one can say. For him, parrhesia is necessary and useful because it is true. But what is the ethical structure internal to truth-telling? What mean that at a given moment someone is obliged to tell the truth?

The notion of Parrhesia reappeared in Michel Foucault's teaching between 1981 and 1984. He gave a first lecture at the Collège de France (1981-1982) and then, was published twenty years later in 2001 as *L'Héméneutique du sujet*, a second lecture (1982-1983) was published in 2008 as *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, and in the fall of 1983, he gave six readings at Berkeley entitled as *Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia*. In 2009, shortly before his death, *Le Courage de la vérité: le gouvernement de soi et des autres II*, was published, which includes these six lectures.

It was at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century that works on the notion of parrhesia multiplied. In the collective volume *Foucault dans tous ses éclats* (L'Harmattan, 2005), we find there the article by Fulvia Carnevale, *La parrhèsia : le courage de la révolte et de la vérité*<sup>14</sup>. In this article, she analyses Foucault's study from a philosophical point of view. She realizes that Foucault particularly uses the word 'truth' in the plural. Indeed, he saw this in a framework of different 'regimes of truth' that coexist in society, and which occurs in a certain distribution of knowledge and power. Fulvia Carneval focuses more particularly on the silences of speech, often the result of oppression or trampling on the truth. But once again, there is a scarcity of statements on the subject. "Yes – said Foucault – I would like to write the history of the vanquished (...) finally give voice to those who have not been able to take it up to now, to

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<sup>14</sup> Carnevale. F. (2005). *La parrhèsia : le courage de la révolte et de la vérité*, in *Foucault dans tous ses éclats*. L'Harmattan.

*those who are forced into silence by history, by the violence of history, by all the systems of violence and exploitation. (...) those who have been defeated (...) are those from whom, by definition, speech has been taken away! A foreign language was imposed on them. They are not mute.*". She interprets here, by a foreign language, "*the language of power, the language of legal 'testimony', of confession*". We often find there this difficulty and inability to listen and make heard the language that comes from elsewhere or 'from below' which is more often in favor of power, of what it says or makes say. This repressive hypothesis is based on the idea that any exercise of power produces a form of resistance and that it acts within a margin of force where the reversal of the balance of power is always possible.

Parrhesia is a technique that constitutes "*a kind of verbal activity in which the speaker maintains a specific relationship to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relationship to himself and to others through (...) the moral law (...). In parrhesia, the speaker makes use of his freedom and chooses frankness instead of (...) falsity or silence, the risk of death instead of life and safety, (...) moral duty instead of his own profit (...).*"<sup>15</sup>. What is meant here is that this technique is a use of discourse that has political consequences. It is then situated in the heart of social modifications, as seen before, but also of political modifications. Alexander Kiossev specified this subject in *Paranoïa de la Parrhesia*<sup>16</sup>, writing that "*the parrhesia is a transcendent act that problematizes the political (...)*". Indeed, the practice of parrhesia awakens new reactions, raises discussions and debates, and puts in crisis the habits, practices, and institutions that had been until a point 'accepted' by society.

If the method in itself does not aim at obtaining the persuasion of the interlocutor, the parrhesia is only a manifestation of the thought and a speech that arises freely from the thought. Its goal is to make known and to express its opinion to the other, often against its interest because the speaker can find himself in danger for that. We also find in this notion, that the status has great importance since it is a social status that allows him to reach this role of 'all-saying'. Indeed, since the appearance of this notion, we can see that the preliminary conditions to this exercise of the parrhesia are not satisfactory, and that often this freedom of expression is even degraded. In certain contexts, parrhesia is confronted with the opposition of silence as for example to the disciple in the Christian literature.

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault. M. (1997). *Discourse and Truth and Parrhesia*. The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>16</sup> Kiossev. A. (1994). *Paranoïa de la Parrhesia*. SUNY Press. p. 172.

For Foucault, no power can be exercised without a manifestation of truth, and it always exists within the framework of the exercise of power. He uses as a diagram, that of the principle of Saint Simon ( i.e. economic and social doctrine elaborated by the count of Saint Simon, 1760-1825) or of the "*reversal of the particular competence in universal awakening*" which means that if everyone knew all the truth about the society in which he lives, then the government could simply no longer govern and then there would be a revolution. The parrhesiate does not say what seems to him to be the truth but what he knows to be the truth. Indeed, knowing and communicating the truth is, according to Foucault, the two components of the game of parrhesia.

Foucault argues several answers on the subject. First of all, the first is that the parrhesiate is someone who takes risks, and therefore cannot be of use to 'tyrants' or 'kings'. Here we find his political nature. The one who practices the 'game of parrhesia' is the one who prefers to risk his life in the truth rather than to remain in the lie or silence. So, parrhesia is also a political attitude exercised in the form of power differentiation between two or more persons, and which always comes from the less powerful towards the more powerful. But as we have seen before, the act of parrhesia involves however a condition, which is that the one who speaks is a citizen.

The more serious the misdeeds of a regime, the more the act must join the word of the parrhesia. The gesture of the speech takes precedence over the words. The Parrhesian act demonstrates the possibility of breaking the systematic character of totalitarian rules which are often censorship and the imposition of silence. The act of expressing the truth to others is a voice that breaks the general imposed silence, and the people seize the word. In his research, Foucault notes the existence of a new type of parrhesia. What Foucault says about this new parrhesia is that the change from the parrhesia that could be seen in democratic Greece lies in its performative aspect. The parrhesia must be embedded in practice, not just reside in an opinion. The use of the parrhesia wants to introduce the awakening of fellow citizens, to refuse what they have until now accepted. This point raises questions with regard to the context of governmentality. The act of parrhesia in this sense raises a form of 'insubordination' and a risk of insufficiency of understanding.

In his 1984 lecture at the Collège de France, *Le courage de la Vérité*<sup>17</sup>, Foucault returned to the theme of parrhesia as a political root and a derivation of morality. He raises the question of the subject and truth from a point of view of practice, that is, as a concept from which emerge various problematics such as the analysis of modes of verifying discourse, the study of techniques of governmentality, and the forms of the self-practice of parrhesia. The actuality and

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<sup>17</sup> Foucault. M. (1984). *Le Courage de la Vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*. Cours Collège de France. Edition Gallimard Seuil.

contemporaneity of these practices are a question of attitude. By attitude, Foucault defines it as a voluntary choice that is made by some, a way of thinking but also of acting and behaving.

In modern democracies, Foucault writes on this subject that the problem, at the same time political, ethical, social and philosophical, is not to try to liberate the individual of the State and its institutions, because it is necessary all the same rules in the discourse, but to liberate us from a type of State, such as totalitarian, that would prevent to the citizens or to let them express freely their parrhesia. In an interview with Alessandro Fontana entitled *An Aesthetic of the Existence*, Foucault gives an answer to the question 'is there a truth in politics?': *"I believe too much in truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of saying it. Certainly, one cannot ask a government to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. On the other hand, it is possible to ask to the governments a certain truth as for the final projects, for the general choices of their tactics, for a certain number of particular points of their program: it is the parrhesia (the free speech) of the governed, that can, that must question the government in the name of the knowledge, of the experience that he has, of the fact that he is a citizen, on what the other one makes, on the sense of his action, on the decisions that he took"*.

Michel Foucault would seem to express here the possibility of exercising the parrhesia in the current democracies in the fact that the government, which cannot use the parrhesia, takes into account the questions and remarks emitted by the government which is in all knowledge of the subject. However, individuals escape in a certain way from the relations of power and struggle to free themselves from it. The role of truth here could transform the exercise of democratic power into a permanent state of exception and allow the targeted repression of the past to be replaced by a kind of mutilation of speech.

The concept of truth used here by Foucault does not mean absolute truth. Rather, Foucault explains the relationship between the subject and the subject's life, that is, one's relationship to truth. Parrhesia, the act of telling the truth, can be a political practice for individuals who engage in conversations with others for example. Parrhesia is a concept used not only in the private sector but also in the social sector, especially under a democratic environment. Foucault argues that parrhesia is a general rule for democracy. We can deduce that it is a general principle necessary for democracy. At the time of Athenian democracy, it had the function of an institutional rule allowing citizens to be good citizens. Moreover, parrhesia can be interpreted as a public matter. However, one should not misunderstand this concept. Parrhesia appears as a democratic rule and spreads the freedom of expression, but it does not mean telling the truth out of context. Citizens

using parrhesia do not have to say what they want or when they want. In other words, for Michel Foucault, parrhesia does not mean unconditional freedom of expression.

### *1.2.2. Literature review of Michel Foucault's works on the notion of power and the truth:*

After defining the different elements of Michel Foucault's theory of parrhesia, we will focus on *Society Must Be Defended*. In this literature review, our research will focus on the function of power in society in the 1960s, a concept also studied by Michel Foucault in a post-war context. We saw earlier that the act of parrhesia could only be used by subjects who were not linked to any form of power. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault outlines a genealogy of power and how it can be interpreted.

In the democratic framework, the parrhesia could then be considered as a political right which makes it possible to take an active part by the frankness of its speech. In *Society Must be Defended*, Michel Foucault gives a definition of power which allies as indispensable with the power's rights and the truth. The question here is to see if the discourse of truth establishes the limit of the power's right. What are the rules of right that power implements to produce a discourse of truth? What type of power can produce a discourse of power that in a society like ours, has such powerful effects?

The act of parrhesia illuminates the present regime of power as well as the relationship that the subject establishes with the truth, a counter-truth that directly threatens power and endangers those who utter it. Among Foucault's 'heirs', parrhesia is rather mobilized as a 'political practice'. It is today in resignation between 'political indignation' and recently, on the scene of political resistance to neoliberal mobilization. Whereas in philosophical practice, it rather raised the practice of 'cynicism'. According to the French philosopher and essayist, a process has been underway since the end of the 19th century. According to him, the philosophical force of parrhesia is no longer a force of invention and is no more than a 'witness of a tired modernity having renounced all true work of criticism' frozen in a "*criticism to limited liability*"<sup>18</sup>. During this

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault. M. and Macey. D. (1975-1976). *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France*. p. 18. [MYTH AS CRITIQUE?: REVIEW OF MICHEL FOUCAULT'S <italic>"SOCIETY MUST BE DEFENDED"</italic> \(jstor.org\)](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2345678)

period, he differentiates between two notions, that of Kunism<sup>19</sup> and that of cynicism<sup>20</sup>. The duality between these two words reflects that of parrhesia.

The notion of power is an important point here to approach and study. Indeed, it has a close link with the use of the concept of parrhesia, more often used by the subject. We have seen before that it remains difficult to obtain and put into practice through fear of the 'master', of the 'governor', of the one who possesses the power 'above us'. Indeed, he comes to wonder when we should use this parrhesia. What triggers its interest and usefulness in our society? Foucault defines the notion of power as a function of substituting, for the notion of a dominant system of representation, with instruments and techniques by which power relations are effectively exercised. Foucault substitutes what is understood here by the notion of government in general. Government is understood here in the broad sense of machinery and procedures intended to lead men, direct the conduct of men, and direct the conduct of men<sup>21</sup>. He, therefore, wondered about the meaning of the notion of the abstraction of power.

The society engages in multiple transversal power relations that characterize and constitute the social body. They are inseparable from a discourse of truth. Power cannot be exercised without truth to function. It is not something that can be divided between those who already have it and hold it exclusively, and those who do not have it in its possession and are not subject to it. The notion of power must be analysed as something that is going to circulate or rather as something that can only work when it is part of a chain. Power is exercised through networks. Individuals are not content to circulate in these networks but on the contrary, they are able both to submit but also to exercise this power. Power passes through individuals. Indeed, they are one of the first effects of power, a relay, because power passes through the individuals it has constituted<sup>22</sup>.

The individual, who is naturally endowed with rights and capacities under sovereignty, must become a subject in the sense of an element that is subjectivity in relation to power. The theory of sovereignty shows how power can be constituted in conformity with the law and with some higher foundation that allows rules to function as such. Often the notion of repression is used, which is one. The relations between the different actors rely on each other, are articulated between

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<sup>19</sup> The way of acting publicly against conventions.

<sup>20</sup> The way of acting intimately against one's intimate conviction.

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, M. (1984). *Le Courage de la Vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*. Cours Collège de France. Edition Gallimard Seuil.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 20-26.



them, and how they converge and even reinforce each other in some cases and deny or cancel each other in others. It is then necessary to identify them in order to guarantee their functioning. In this case, civilians are in the best position to tell the 'truth' and denounce the errors produced by the agents of sovereignty, often aiming to accentuate their power relationship. The use of truth here is as a weapon to fight in the balance of power.

Foucault defines power through two aspects, or two faces, throughout Roman civilization and in medieval societies, and they are perpetually conjugated. First, we must consider the legal aspect, that is, how 'power' uses obligation and laws to coerce. And secondly, the aspect of power as function, role, and 'magic' efficiency. Power dazzles but also petrifies<sup>23</sup>. Power uses in some cases, often totalitarian regimes, a discourse of power that serves to fascinate, terrorize and immobilize its population. Sovereignty has a specific function; it does not often bind into unity but enslaves in order to maintain order.

In the essay *Society Must be Defended*, Michel Foucault argues that knowledge and power are intimately linked and that they cannot be separated from each other. It is important to note that any exercise of power depends on multiple sources of knowledge that support it. However, this book, written in the context of the end of two world wars, shows that this combination is often used in practice to legitimize the mistreatment of certain marginalized groups.

In terms of his analysis of power, Foucault is rather pessimistic. He takes note of the context of war that has arisen and become subjacent to civil society, to all types of conflicts, and to the power relationship in general. His analysis goes through three thinkers and political activists: Edward Coke, John Lilburn, and Count Henri de Boulaivilliers. They had common goals, that of establishing the truth as a weapon. However, it is often a disqualified, even actively silenced knowledge, and yet it represents an insurrectionary force against the effects of power in a society like ours. The effect of such a discourse in the hand of the one who revolts, of those who revolt, gives them the courage to revolt, to refuse to be governed in this way, to force fate. refuse to be governed in this way, to forge their own identity.

Foucault views the power wielded by individuals or groups as dispersed and omnipresent. For him, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere, and therefore it is in this sense not only in a structure. It is also found in the regime of truth which pervades society, and which is constantly evolving. In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault uses the term "power/knowledge" to mean that power is made up of knowledge that allows the truth to be interpreted. Each society has

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 66-73.

its regime of truth, 'its general policy of truth', that is to say, different types and mechanisms of discourse to state truths from falsehoods. In his terms, Foucault recognized that the notion of power is not just negative, coercive or even repressive act that will force us to do things against our will. It also recognizes a form of power in truth which can also be a necessary, productive, and positive force in society. Foucault gives a whole new definition of governmentality with an invitation to rethink politics. Institutions are intertwined with power relations. The question is: how is power exercised, not "what is power? By power, it seems to be necessary to understand the multiplicity of the relations of forces which are immanent in those who exercise. The omnipresence of power shows that at any point, or in any relation, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere.

Through this analysis, Foucault believed in the possibility of action and resistance. He was concerned with the abilities of civilians to recognize and challenge socialized norms and constraints. To challenge power is to be in search of truth but also to be able to detach oneself from power. Discourse can be a tool of power and resistance to evade or challenge power strategies. For Foucault, the discourse is not only on the sovereign side, with the aim of submission to power. A discourse is both an instrument and an effect of power but can also be an obstacle to power.

According to Foucault, the political task in modern society is the criticism of the game of the institutions so that the political violence which is exercised is unmasked and one can fight against them. The unveiling of social domination is done, according to him, through different practices of unveiling, among which is the role of truth in order to help make people 'aware'. For Foucault, the exercise of power is an action that acts on the actions of others, power through the government of humans by humans. It is exercised on free subjects, that is to say where freedoms such as conduct, reactions, and free speech can take place. It cannot be said that freedom disappears wherever power is exercised, for there is no absolute oppositional relationship between power and freedom. Nor is there a relationship of exclusion, but a complex interplay in which freedom is the very condition of the existence of power. Therefore, we can deduce that resistance does not come from outside of power, because it also represents the characteristics of power. This relationship to power is at the center of multiple actions so that there is infinite interaction. Foucault shows that the main stake of the struggle lies in the constitution of their ways of being governed or of governing themselves not to be governed. He defines power as an integral part of the subject through 'concern for the self', as an appreciation of the functions of the self but also of the other, as the foundation of a political culture embodied in each individual who states or

evacuates the discourse of truth, who resists, or who controls. By approaching power, Foucault affirms a thought of oppression and resistance without deserting politics.

Indeed, for him, the role and omnipresence of power do not necessarily imply oppression and the non-existence of freedom. On the contrary, Foucault considers power in a broad sense, even though it can be channelled and organized, it can never be entirely contained. There is no final liberation from power but practices of freedom that create new power relations. Foucault's thinking on power has subsequently been recognized as a major theoretical contribution. He developed a negative conception of power where all his reflection on power is placed under the sign of exclusion and prohibition<sup>24</sup>. In an interview with Gilles Deleuze published in *L'Arc* (1972), Michel Foucault underlines that "*there is a system of power which bars, prohibits, invalidates this discourse*" (e.i. of those who struggle). Although Nietzsche's analysis had introduced this point to a political history of knowledge which makes it possible to understand that knowledge can only be a violation of things to know and not the recognition of a pre-established reality. Accordingly, this point reconciles Foucault's conviction that people do not need a superior force of power to develop their own struggles with only their willingness to play a role in a social movement.

Foucault no longer wonders about the question only of power but also of the politics of truth. According to him, power is "*a type of relationship between individuals which is characterized by the fact that some men can determine the conduct of others, other than by resorting to physical violence*"<sup>25</sup>. Society, in any case, it is already entering into a relationship of power. The question of the 'subject' of power relations is here as much associated with the term 'governing' but also closely linked to the term 'conduct'. Individuals can 'lead' others and at the same time they 'lead' themselves. These terms designate both a subject, but also as a being determined by others. The central idea in Foucault's research comes from this power is not external to individuals but that it crosses them and constitutes them. It also requires that the government recognize the individual and also his ability to react, to resist. The question here is: can truth be considered as power? The truth could be a weapon that the dominant can use to fight against the dominant

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<sup>24</sup> Foucault. M. (1971) *L'Ordre du Discours*. Gallimard.

<sup>25</sup> Granjon. M. C. (2005). *Penser avec Michel Foucault*. Théories critique et pratiques politiques. Recherches internationales. Karthala. Chapter 8, p .307.

1.3. *A conceptual politic tool for civil movement:*

1.3.1. *The emergence of civil resistance:*

1.3.1.1. *The civil movements:*

Civil movements first appeared in the United States in the midst of a mass protest movement against segregation and racial discrimination that gained momentum in the 1950s. Through these nonviolent protests, the civil rights movement achieved an end to the segregation of public institutions by 'race' in the South and subsequently achieved a major advance in legal rights legislation for African Americans since the Reconstruction period (1865-1877). Civil struggles began at this time to be seen as a freedom movement seeking not only civil rights reforms but also to confront oppression. A citizens' movement is "*a form of organized collective protest that operates outside of conventional and institutionalized channels of participation. A citizens' movement develops a political strategy to change policies that are an expression of a fundamental aspect of social relations*"<sup>26</sup>. We can see from this definition that citizen movements can exist in a society where power relations are rigid or non-rigid. The effect of a citizen movement is born on the fear of the quality of the political life of a country with the objective of proclamation, participation, and progress within, most often, a democracy. The progressive vision of civil movements is based on changing the government's priorities by making it aware of civil interests that have been neglected. It focuses on participation itself and seeks to broaden the scope of policy decisions that have been made.

Through this form of participation, it is a way for civilians to be 'heard' and to make their proposals available to the public and to the government. It clearly shows that there are political alternatives and that political choices can be reversed. One of the many objectives of these citizens' movements is in particular to increase their potential for participation in government policy.

The French sociologist Alain Touraine (Social Movement theory, 1981) defines these 'social movements' as capable of transforming politics. He believes that civilians expose and express themselves through these protest movements. His sociological approach to citizens' movements focuses on the long-term consequences of their activity and their capacity to mobilize a large part

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<sup>26</sup> Rochon, T. R. (1983). *Political Change in Ordered Societies: The Rise of Citizens' Movements*. Comparative Politics, Vol.15, No.3, p. 351-373. [Political Change in Ordered Societies: The Rise of Citizens' Movements on JSTOR](#)

of the population against the mainstream of society. Indeed, citizens' movements pose a major challenge to the authority of governments and within society. His theories developed during the 1970s and early 1980s. His major work, published in 1988, focuses on workers' movements in Latin America (*La Conscience Ouvrière*, 1988). But he analyzed these political action movements in some twenty books that he published between 1965 and 1984. He focuses his attention on the action and social relations of these movements, as well as on the social conflict they generate. For Touraine, a social movement exists in every society as a project of social change. To reach this status of social change, he expresses three conditions to be filled. First of all, a principle of identity. A social movement can only be organized if we know 'who is fighting', the identity of the actor. Secondly, the principle of totality which refers to the orientation of the stake of the struggle and the models of conduct from which a society produces its practices. Thus, each societal type would then correspond in a third step to a single social movement.

The question of the consequences of civil movements is an essential subject, however complex because of its different social and political configurations, and the search for the identification of the causal link. It is an important notion to be interested in this issue whose implications are extremely important for the understanding of the functioning of political systems. What interests us in this research is to analyse of the 'impact', 'effects', and 'consequences' of these civil movements. These terms are often followed by a clear-cut judgment that qualifies them as either 'success' or 'failure'. In such a case, the impact of a civil movement can be considered above all as a collective good that goes far beyond the sphere of the mobilized group, or even the domain concerned by the protest action. In this case, then, the 'success' or 'failure' of the movement is not important as such in the sense that they bring other retributive effects. On the other hand, a political change of the impact produced is usually and almost always translated into a political, institutional, or legislative adaptation. To say this is to underline that the effects of a social movement can last in time. The impact of a civil movement can also impact a small or large number of people depending on its main purpose and the number of people it affects. On the whole, the impact is all the more important as it becomes irreversible in the sense that it is institutionalized, which makes it long-lasting and gives it a systematic character. We can distinguish three types of consequences or impacts of civil movements<sup>27</sup>. On the one hand, political, is when the activities of the movements modify in one way or another the mode of government and the relations of powers of a society. On the other hand, cultural, when there are

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<sup>27</sup> Chabanet. D. and Giugni. M. (2010). « *Les conséquences des mouvements sociaux* », *Penser les mouvements sociaux*. P. 145-161.

changes in the public environment, such as public opinion. And finally, when participation in a social movement affects the life trajectories of individuals.

The political consequences of civil movements are undeniable, more precisely the external effects. Indeed, the impact of a social movement depends to a large extent on its capacity to bring about a change in the current society and that this effect is favorable to it as a whole. These movements have shown in history how groups succeeded, more or less, in asserting their interests. However, we must not forget that these impacts also depend on the factors of the political context in which the social movements are exercised. According to the American sociologist Edwin Amenta (*When Movements Matters*, 2006), the effects and impact of a movement would depend on the organization and the degree of mobilization but would also be favored according to the institutional political factors surrounding them. It goes without saying that a democratic system is more favorable to social movements to express their political instabilities than a totalitarian system.

Another consequence that interests us in the context of our research is that in discourse and public opinion. Its ability to develop or disseminate an overall interpretation of the problem, the practice of denouncing it. Indeed, this dissemination can be confronted with certain obstacles such as the values and claims already ingrained in society. It happens that these denunciations of political instabilities are opposed to values and are articulated in socially accepted norms. However, as we have said before, the 'success' of a civil movement can be akin to reaching a large audience in order to gain importance. In this sense, the success of the operation depends in particular on the cultural conditions external to the movement. There is no doubt that social movements induce strong political but also cultural transformations. He now comes to study what is this impact of civil movements and the effects produced on people. Polletta and Jasper propose four cases in this regard<sup>28</sup> that a social movement may want to "(1) produce a change in radial identification, (2) affect the identity of individuals who are only part of it, (3) internally produce identities that other movements can later revive, (4) permanently affect the meaning of certain symbols that it would have appropriated and modify their meaning for future social movements".

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<sup>28</sup> Polletta. F. and Jasper. J. M. (2001, August) *Collective Identity and Social Movements*. Annual Review of Sociology. Vol.27. P. 283-305. [\(PDF\) Collective Identity in Social Movements \(researchgate.net\)](#)

This identification is part of an emergence of a group consciousness of a dominant culture and necessitates the importance of opposition in the construction of classical ideologies.

### 1.3.1.2. *Civil resistance and civil disobedience:*

Another aspect of the civil impact that seems important to address is the concept of civil resistance. Civil resistance is a way for 'ordinary' people to fight for their rights, freedom, and justice without resorting to violence. People who engage in these movements may employ various tactics such as strikes, boycotts, mass demonstrations, and many other actions to achieve social, political, and economic change. People unite for the same purpose, to act against oppression and challenge authority within an established system. For a century, these grassroots movements using nonviolent strategies have succeeded in overthrowing oppressive regimes, ending military occupations, bringing human rights, and establishing democratic self-determination in societies such as the example in the case of apartheid in South Africa. It also allowed the development of women's rights, civil rights, and trade union rights in the United States.

The concept of civil disobedience is also similar to this notion in the sense that it is defined as the fact of refusing in an assumed and public way to obey a law, a regulation, or a power deemed unjust in a nonviolent way. Civil disobedience is a non-violent and peaceful form of resistance. The term was attributed by the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau who conceptualized it in an essay of the same name published in 1849. This essay followed his refusal to pay a tax to be used to finance a war against Mexico, which caused him to subsequently be earned a night in jail. The concept of civil disobedience still persists in contemporary society and was later clarified by the philosopher John Rawls in *The Theory of Justice* in 1971 where he defined it as "*a public, non-violent act, decided in conscience but political, contrary to law and usually done to bring about a change in the law or government policy. In doing so, one appeal to the sense of justice of the majority of the community and declares that, according to a mature opinion, the principles of social cooperation between free and equal beings are not at present respected*"<sup>29</sup>. Civil disobedience takes place primarily within the framework of democracy in that the latter makes

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<sup>29</sup> Falcón y Tella. M. J. (1997). *La désobéissance civile*. Revue interdisciplinaire d'études juridiques. V. 39, p. 27-67. Éditions Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles. [La désobéissance civile | Cairn.info](#)

possible public demonstrations of disagreement and the absence of immediate and visible violent reprisals.

This definition derives several characteristics. First of all, civil disobedience is an 'act', a factual situation that affects the Law. It is an 'offense', meaning that legal actions, even if carried out as acts of protest, do not appear as civil disobedience. There is a form of inequality in the material sense because it is a question of violating a law in order to challenge it. It is a 'conscious' and premeditated act on the intentional or desired level of the facts, 'public' since it affects and aims at public principles, and 'collective' because it involves the organization and coordination of civil groups.

They refer to legal norms. It is necessary that his action is the fact of violating a legal standard or a non-legal standard called moral for example. The norm to be disobeyed is generally a legal norm that seems unfair to us in a certain context, and which most often results in a sanction. In any case, the violation of this law must relate in principle to any state legality, that is to say, any norm within the law. It is in any case “peaceful” either in the form of non-violent symbolic speech or protest.

In the 1960s, there was a debate about whether violence should be excluded from acts of civil disobedience. The question was whether non-violence was possible against the State, its representatives, and related third parties. Indeed, civil disobedience sometimes admits a certain risk of violence as an unwanted side consequence. For example, in cases of self-defense, proportional to the injustice one wishes to avoid. It does, however, appeal to ‘ethical principles’. John Rawls defines that the justification of civil disobedience must keep a certain relationship with justice, in particular with respect for equality and fundamental freedoms<sup>30</sup>. Civil disobedience pursues innovative ends. It is necessary in particular within democratic regimes in order to show whether the citizens recognize and accept the legitimacy of the constitution. Citizens seek by this means a change in the legislation or in the policy of the government without aspiring at the same time to disintegrate the order.

Citizens have resorted to civil disobedience to deal with several social and political issues such as the climate crisis, police abuse, and social inequalities. This action made it possible to make political opinions visible and asserted and to change the established order. Throughout history, many liberticidal laws have been successfully changed as a result of civil disobedience actions.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



For example, with the movements against racial segregation or for women's rights with the English suffragettes.

Today, civil disobedience actions are also very committed to the environment. When negotiations fail, when dialogue is broken, and when decisions taken by the government endanger everyone's freedom, disobeying and expressing injustice becomes a civic duty. Civil disobedience highlights the violence of abusive institutions to achieve change. These types of actions help attract public attention and influence political or governmental legislation. We can consider this phenomenon as a kind of modern parrhesia. A parrhesiast action that acts as a group to assert its opinion through political actions and by expressing the injustice that is done.

### *1.3.2. Parrhesia, the discourse of the people:*

#### *1.3.2.1. The power of speech as civil resistance:*

In this part, our research will focus on whether the act of parrhesia and civil actions can have a link. The question is whether parrhesia can be an asset in the actions of civil movements or an inadequate means that will only put them in danger. Acts of civil disobedience have been mentioned by several authors who have attempted to appeal to the people to act against injustice. However, civil actions only began to take effect from the 20th century to the present day because of the fear of penalties that could be established for telling the 'truth'.

Indeed, the intervention of civil society in politics is nothing new, however, it has been particularly active over the past two decades. The global civil society acquired a new status in the 1980s. Civil society is commonly used to refer to a 'third system' of agents, that is, it represents privately organized citizens who distinguish between governments or for-profit actors. These were generally anti-government and anti-corruption movements in authoritarian regimes. This development has raised many questions such as the question of their legitimacy. Indeed, civil society movements are consubstantial with representative democracy itself and legitimize the national executive by legitimizing the political regime, and offers a great potential for strengthening security, equity and democracy in the contemporary world. Citizens have attempted to gain a greater voice in post-sovereign governance. Civil society is the bearer of utopias and mobilized hopes which are built on the concrete actions of social struggles for the construction of a new society. It must seek alternative solutions at all levels and build a balance of power that will allow us to make decisions.

One of the first precursors was Etienne de La Boétie. Etienne de La Boétie, in the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* (1577), said about the power of ‘masters’: “*But if they are not supplied if they are not obeyed, without fighting them, without striking them, they remain out of power and defeated and are nothing*”. Indeed, what La Boétie imagine at its time, is that the higher power will lose its power if all civilian people refuse to obey them. But the question here is: is it a feasible concept? La Boétie's point, roughly speaking, the more civilians turn against the governor, the less influence and power the governor will have over its population. A utopia where all people will agree on one idea and turn against their governor. By advocating this notion of refusing to support the politics of the ‘tyrant’, it opens the first earliest definition and conception of the notion of civil disobedience and of nonviolent resistance for civil movements. Here, he has opened up a first definition of civil movement.

Around this question, Hannah Arendt discusses in her research the importance of speech and action. She emphasizes that the action of the word within her civil movements reveals the individuality of humans in relation to their relationship with the world. She affirms that "*a life without words and without action (...) is literally dead to the world*" (Arendt, 1998). Here we can glimpse the important role of speech and action which support the opinions and points of view of individuals within societies. This represents a link between individuals and societies, revealing plurality and the human condition. Arendt specifies in particular that the role of speech and action is like a door allowing each individual to represent himself to others. However, this act can only occur if individuals do not hide their identity and their true fund of thought, hence its link which can be compared to parrhesia. Indeed, when a speaker hides his identity, it is then only a simple speech that generally produces no effect on society.

On the contrary, when the speaker reveals his identity, when he acts in the face of an injustice, even in the face of the risk of sanctions that may be induced as a result of this action, this increases his confidence and allows human unity. Therefore, we can see that identifying and revealing oneself is an important form of action in building a political community. This is how individuals come together and share public issues as a citizen. Arendt defines the polis as "*the organization of the people as it results from action and speech together*". (Arendt, 1998) She adds that the polis is a space where citizens build community together. This space implies that citizens can participate actively and freely in politics through their speeches in the context of pursuing the same political objective.

This form of speech and action within a citizen community is an indispensable and undeniable democratic attribute. By this form of speech, the citizen takes an active part in politics within the polis and can easily express his 'parrhesia', that is to say, to express a truth about a political injustice or a necessary need of change within an institution.

In relation to the theoretical aspects of La Boétie and Arendt, these movements are made in the community and therefore have more importance if they gather a certain number of people. It would have to be concluded then that the denser the civil society that forms under the same ideology is, the more influence it has. However, is it possible to conciliate a whole community on a thought/truth? We have seen before that parrhesia had an effect if the speaker possessed the knowledge but all alone, he would have no influence or recognition of what was pronounced. The thought of political scientist Chantal Mouffe questions democracy. She points out that when multiple perspectives exist within the same community within the framework of a representative democracy based on agonistic pluralism, this can cause a diversity of conceptions of the good that one finds in a liberal society.

What is the best way to consider democratic politics? Chantal Mouffe focuses her research on a model of democracy in an 'agonistic' way, that is to say, one that exists in human relationships. Antagonism manifests itself in political form in the construction of friend/enemy relationships, which can emerge from a great diversity of social relationships, and politics, which aims at establishing order and organizing human coexistence. It recognizes that we live in a world where a multitude of perspectives and values co-exist, but it also recognizes that it is impossible for each of us to adopt them all. From this perspective comes the impossibility of reconciling all points of view.

If we distinguish antagonism (friend/enemy relationship) and agonism (relationship between adversaries), we are able to understand this confrontation which is not in itself a danger to democracy but in fact its very condition of existence. Indeed, democracy cannot survive without this form of 'consensus' which remains a form of legitimacy and adhesion to the political values on the institutions in which they are registered. This 'conflict' allows citizens to express themselves and this requires that they have the possibility to choose. It is therefore necessary to apprehend that politics always presents antagonism.

The analyses of Ernesto Laclau<sup>31</sup> (1935-2014) consider this tension as 'constitutive'. This multitude is not only incapable of building power but represents obstacles to the formation of any political scene. For Laclau, if society becomes entirely heterogeneous, political action will require a process of articulation to structure the tension. For an articulation of a multitude to be possible, hegemony is required. There is no hegemony without the construction of a popular identity from the plurality of democratic demands. It is necessary, however, for an articulation between the different dishonesty to guarantee their integration. The balance of this articulation is however difficult to establish.

All the articulations are not hegemonic articulations. The hegemonic force, which is responsible for the negation of individual or collective identity, will tend to construct the excluded identity as one of the threatening obstacles to the full realization of chosen meanings and options. It ultimately involves some element of force and repression. Things can be more complicated in some cases because the result of the denial of individual or collective identity can take different forms and have different consequences. In some cases, the denial of identity will lead to an open confrontation between the denied identity and the denying force that is constructed as part of an opposing conspiracy. In other cases, it may also lead to seemingly violent acts or to guilt and self-denial.

Popular antagonism would imply a simplification of the social space<sup>32</sup>. On the other hand, the so-called democratic antagonism could make the world more and more complex. The popular antagonisms divide the whole space into two opposite camps. For example, in the cases of the new social movements, which tend to establish a variety of battlegrounds such as polluters and environmentalists, industrialized agriculture and ecologists, patriarchal and feminist structures, etc. Partly because of their success, these struggles tend less and less to be unified as 'popular struggle'. Popular mobilizations are usually against a common enemy, but this has not been necessary to advance the demands of new social movements. Indeed, even relatively small and unorganized movements can succeed in influencing the political agenda. But at the same time, the variety of societal trends tends to prevent the rise of popular struggles.

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<sup>31</sup> Torfing, J. (1999). *Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek. New Theories of Discourse*. Blackwell Publishers. Chapter 6, p. 121-131.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

There is a growing secularization of society into distinct political arenas. This tendency to individualization tends to reduce the possibility of organizing these popular struggles and also creates conditions that are very unfavorable to collective action.

*1.3.2.2. Parrhesia, a tool or a barrier:*

Parrhesia is a form of speech that can be an advantage for civil movements. However, there are many questions about its integrity and especially about its influence within a society. Indeed, will this impact the credibility of the citizen's speech? Or would parrhesia produce more obstacles in politics than benefits in a democracy?

Parrhesia is a fundamental political concept. It designates the outspokenness that Foucault designates as having two versions, one negative and the other positive. The negative side of parrhesia implies the articulation of everything, even the derogatory. It is illustrated by Plato in *The Republic*, where, in a democratic city, everyone tries to impose his own desires on others. On the contrary, the positive sense implies that the truth will be stated without dissimulation, without reservation, without fixed clause or dissimulation. But for Foucault, it is not enough to say everything and to tell the truth. It can be difficult to obtain this so-called 'positive' state because it is hard to acquire within the political sphere, even within a democracy. But in reality, claiming to be parrhesia is not enough to practice it. Indeed, as we said before, telling the truth is also linked to the fact of having the courage and taking a risk. The act of parrhesia is linked to someone who has the courage of his conviction. However, the existence of parrhesia means demanding democracy. One of Foucault's most interesting elements is his effort to demonstrate that parrhesia can nonetheless exist under tyranny without its most essential characteristics being undermined.

However, parrhesia also involves several paradigms such as the model of the politician who uses his own influence to communicate the truth or at least what he thinks is the truth while respecting the principles of democracy. Or, of the individual who totally refrains from using parrhesia in order to avoid having to take into consideration. Athenian democracy seems to have been less concerned with the understanding of an ideal parrhesia than with the search for the best way to interpret a politician's statement when he says he is telling the truth. With *Laws*, by Plato, parrhesia appears as a suspicious and dangerous attitude that must be controlled by restrictive legislation. At the center of Plato's reflection on this concept is the idea that parrhesia is a passion and that it must be repressed by a higher authority.

Foucault gives an indication of the issue by using the case of parrhesia in a monarchy. Indeed, the rulers of a monarchy do not allow any means of free expression of these opinions of others to act in political governance. In contrast, in a democracy, politicians in a democracy try to listen to the citizens.

There is no wrongdoing in representatives embodying their 'truth' as this can draw the public into politics. However, we must keep in mind that politicians use it as a strategy to strengthen their influence. It is a clear and effective political strategy since the more people think that politicians are like them, the more people vote for them. The notion of 'representative government' has taken hold in the last quarter century. Free expression of opinion without sanction is the most liberal principle of representative democracy. It is a motto that threatens these new systemic forms of democracy, where the question of power dissolves and is no longer a question of exercising it as soon as the generalized discussion seems to be able to change society. One can thus wonder finally about the resistance of the "representative government" to the social and political change that we live.

This dream of an original freedom of speech appears in La Boétie's Discourse on Voluntary Servitude with the admiring evocation of Hippocrates' parrhesia. La Boétie dreams of this insolent freedom that the parrhesia releases but that he however does not manage to implement during his time where the exercise of the parrhesia remains silent. In Rabelais (1534), self-censorship functions as a partial renunciation of parrhesia. Rabelais emphasizes here that the best way to say something is not always oratorical elegance concerned with propriety, but on the contrary perhaps with an inconvenience, an impertinence. In Montaigne's *Essays*, parrhesia is forbidden, which is why Montaigne will invent a "backroom" parrhesia, where the private sphere prevails over the public sphere and makes parrhesia possible. *"It is necessary to reserve a back store all ours, all frank, in which we establish our true freedom and principal retirement and solitude"*. It is the essay *On verses of Virgil*, which reveals best the desire of Montaigne for the parrhesia; he calls there to shake the conventions and to practice a freed speech.

Overall, the public spaces for parrhesia seem limited. Rabelais, Montaigne, and La Boétie show towards the power is brought to attenuate their exercise of parrhesia. Citizens need a public space to exercise their political voice and opinion. A space where they could be heard by politicians. The right to vote in a democracy has opened a new door to the influence of the citizen in politics. However, is their participation taken into account in its entirety? Is the governor committed to the truth and to representing the popular word? Indeed, as we have said above, the governor can choose the truth he wants to convey, and it is up to the citizens to interpret it.

## Chapter 2 –

### The influence of parrhesia within political regimes

In this chapter, it will be a question of applying the different notions and theories seen in the first chapter through different historical acts related to civil movements. The act of free speech, parrhesia, could be illustrated through several examples in many democratic countries. It will be a question of analysing here the tools and the various objectives acquired by this act of freedom of expression in order to understand this phenomenon and to see if the citizens are in capacity by this means to change or to influence the policy in its together, and if this objective of the change is achieved, to see if it is permanent and sustainable over time. We will first see that the act of free speech has evolved in a contemporary era with the appearance of new technological tools, but which was however first of all weakened and evolved in a democratic context scarred by the war which gave way to totalitarian regimes and the rise of fascism. However, these contexts of oppression have allowed evolution and an opening in the public space and for the civil movements towards an end of an improvement and a sustainable democracy. Then, in a second step, we will analyse the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet in particular social networks for parrhesia. Finally, the research of this thesis will focus on its means of application in which the parrhesia to be illustrated in our society and politics but also to analyse its limits of action.

#### *2.1. A deployment of the parrhesia:*

##### *2.1.1. A post-war democratic context:*

The parrhesia develops thereafter in a continuity of a democratic political context. However, non-linear with two world wars during the 20th century which will leave a population under the emergence of a totalitarian and fascist policy breaking the public space allowing the parrhesia to establish itself.

One of the first contemporary examples of parrhesia could be illustrated by the Resistance during the Second World War where the citizen people fought against fascism. Especially through the book, *Every Man Dies Alone* by Hans Fallada. This book shows the true story of the married working-class couple Otto and Elise Hampel<sup>33</sup>. They are a couple of German resistance fighters living in Berlin during the Second World War. The story takes place during World War II in 1940, after the German victory against the French in the Battle of France. They circulated for two years

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<sup>33</sup> Otto and Anna Quangel in the book.

in their neighborhood postcards with a message against the Gestapo as a sign of protest, decrying the fascist regime. They were executed for 'high treason'. Although they knew the law made it a capital crime, they continued this work for over a year until they were betrayed and arrested. After their arrestation, they were tried by a Nazi judge, and then executed in Plotsensee prison. Hans Fallada published this book in 1947, just two years after Europe was released from the Nazi regime. It is one of the first anti-Nazi novels to be published by a German after World War II.

This book shows the first example of civil resistance but in the context of protest against an authoritarian regime. The couple's main goal here was to show and spread their messages to the German people after the death of their only son at the front against France in hopes of inspiring people to resist and overthrow the Nazis. The couple began to commit acts of civil disobedience. With this gesture, they risked their lives to spread the truth about the Gestapo regime by writing the consequences of their acts on postcards and leaving them in public places such as on the stairs of buildings or in mailboxes. letters. However, it was not a good time for civil resistance and social movements in a context where the fascist regime suppresses all rights to freedom of expression and left the room only for corruption and propaganda.

Civilian acts of resistance and disobedience during World War II illustrate modern examples of parrhesia. Through their actions, the resistance fighters risked their lives, punishments of torture, and the death penalty by the German Nazi regime, in order to divulge the truth to other citizens. In a post-war context under a fascist regime, Europe rebuilt itself as democratic opening up even more possibilities for freedom of speech and citizen action in the public space and participation in the politics of their country. These acts of resistance have allowed for change within democratic politics in order to make it more just, equitable, diversified, and representative of the different citizen communities. The end of fascism allows democracy to resume its free course and the Resistance against the Nazi regime shows the influence that civilians can have within a policy even at the risk of their lives.

In those years, Europe underwent a period of 'democratic transition' after the fall of an unrecognizable democratic regime. Civil movements have increased tenfold in order to open up a more equitable democracy in the policies of the different countries but also with the aim that it is sustainable and that the texts are ratified. This scale of civil movements is also due to a fear of a return to fascism. The will of citizens is growing and speaking out for the truth in the face of often repressive policies for certain communities has expanded after the post-war context.



In the 1970s and the 1980s, some European countries started to abolish classify homosexuality as a sexual deviation. Sweden was the first country in the world to remove this label. Indeed, between 1944 and 1979, homosexuality was classified as a ‘disease’ as a mental disorder. But it wasn’t endorsed by the Swedish government. It was the result of a long resistant campaign, which involved a sit-in by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW), and the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Rights (RFSL) encouraged people to “call in sick” to the Social Insurance Agency (SIA) and to claim that they were unable to work because they were homosexuals. Michel Foucault called this act as a formation of ‘reverse discourse’ (1976). Indeed, gay people used the category by which they were labeled against their government. It is not a matter of a discourse of power or a counter-discourse, but it should be seen as “*tactical elements or block operating in the field of force relations*” (Foucault, 1990). It is a resistance strategy of the gay movement in 1979 by using reverse discourse as a resistance tactic.

But is this resistance tactic’s success different from those who emerge in authoritarian regimes because it was in a democratic country? The article<sup>34</sup> suggests that the distinct subversive methods in Sweden in the 1970s were made possible “*due to the specific political system that was established*” (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). Indeed, Sweden is a consolidated democracy. It was probably facilitated by the structures of political opportunity. So, we can say that the space of maneuver is presumably greater compared to authoritarian regimes.

Through these strategies which happened in Sweden in 1979, we can say that reverse discourse can be used as a way to make seen a situation where subordinated individuals involve and vocabularies the dominating power and/or superior norm in order to contest them (Butler 1995). The reverse discourse can be parasitic on the ‘dominant discourse’ that it contests, and resistance appears as an effect of power but also, as part of power itself (Butler 1995)<sup>35</sup>. According to David Butz and Michael Ripmeester (1999), resistance practices “*manage to disrupt or partially subvert*

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<sup>34</sup> Baaz. M. and Lilja. M. (2022). *I Felt a Little Homosexual Today, So I Called in Sick: The Formation of “Reverse Discourse” by Swedish Gay Activists in the 1970s*. University of Gothenburg, Sweden. [Full article: I Felt a Little Homosexual Today, So I Called in Sick: The Formation of “Reverse Discourse” by Swedish Gay Activists in the 1970s \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

<sup>35</sup> Butler. J. (2020). *The Force of Non-Violence: An Ethico-Political Bind*. Fayard.

*local conditions of domination or oppression, without aligning themselves in opposition to those conditions.*” As a norm’s content changes, it becomes more legitimate, and it has also been assigned new interest and new meaning in the early-2000s.

Through these examples, we can extract different characteristics defining these acts and also deduce that the act of parrhesia is widely expanded in our contemporary era.

First of all, the parrhesia remains, as previously described, non-violent. Indeed, it contests an act that is often a priori violent or that politically affects a certain part of the population negatively because of a law or an authority superior to the citizens. But this parrhesiate act, which was described as a single person disclosing the truth, turns into a unity. Angela Davis describes this unity as: *“The legacy (of nonviolence) is not that of an individual legacy but a collective legacy of vast people who stood together in unity to proclaim that they would never surrender to forces of racism and inequality”*. Judith Butler describes civil resistance in *The Force of Nonviolence* as those who *“claim that violence alone has the power to effect radical social and economic transformation and others who claim, more modestly that violence should remain one of the tactics at our disposal to bring about such change”*.

In this book, Judith Butler makes an analysis of these non-violent citizen acts. *“Nonviolence is very often understood to be a moral position, a matter of individual conscience or of the reason given for an individual choice to not engage in a violent way. (...) Nonviolence as a matter of individual morality”*<sup>36</sup>. What motivates these nonviolent acts is finding moral or political ways that actively seek, if possible, to preserve life. Indeed, often the end of acts of civil disobedience or citizen resistance results in violence, in a sanction, and often even at the risk of their life in response to the organization of their non-violent act in order to improve their rights, el human rights in general but also only with an aim of making heard their truth and their opinion on the policy of their country. Indeed, a political defense of non-violence has no meaning apart from a commitment to equality<sup>37</sup>.

As for example in Turkey with the case of the 'standing man' in Taksim Square in June 2013. He was part of the protest movement against the Erdogan government and in particular against the privatization policies and its authoritarianism. The standing man, Erdem Gunduz, is a symbol of peaceful protest. His performance has been widely shared on social networks internationally. The

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 15

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 104.

hashtag #Duranadam was very popular. In particular, this act encouraged others to act and protest. A young Turkish woman standing in Taksim Square had read a book, blindfolded by a scarf.

Other unconventional forms of participation are emerging and gaining strength, evolving an old concept of parrhesia among today's society and deploying voice within politics. Petitions, demonstrations, speeches in forums, commitments in collectives, etc. expand the public space for speech. These practices of citizens towards those they have elected are necessary to the structure of democracy. The demonstrators have wide means of expression. These acts and decisions must indeed be able to be submitted to citizens in order to raise public opinion. However, we should not fall into a glorification of all the protest practices emerging from civil society, or a lack of global apprehension of the problems linked to the organization of a common world, to impolitic.

### *2.1.2. Revitalizing democracy through civil society:*

The notion of parrhesia raises the question of the place of speech and public opinion within politics and in the public space. The question here is whether this political parrhesia can influence the decisions taken by the government. Indeed, parrhesia could be considered a political asset. Civil speech is an important notion to take into account because it allows the legitimization of government decisions and a collective representation of the different communities that are an integral part of society, particularly concerning minorities. Could parrhesia also be a new way and form of civil protest in order to revitalize the current democracy and improve it in order to update itself on the new current problems of society?

Indeed, taking into account the opinion of citizens and letting them participate in the political choice responds to the democratic impulse. This can be seen as an opportunity to reduce the distance between those who make political decisions and those who are affected by them. Public debate by all those concerned and involved in the implementation is necessary to give political agreements a truly democratic aspect. When the public debate is closed and closed to citizens, this is what will trigger the possibility of civil disobedience.

So, in this case, democracy can be defined as a form of political organization that allows a form of conversion of the expression of the popular will into binding rules for the members of the society as well as for the whole state. For this to be possible and legitimate, the process of law-making and decision-making must take into account, among other things, the non-institutionalized elements of citizen participation. Citizenship as legislative power and opinion

formation is found in different types of associations such as trade unions, non-governmental organizations, etc... These constitute the civil society and is a real network. This is where the formation of public opinion and the formulation of concrete political and democratic needs lies.

This participation represents and plays a decisive role in the expression of the common will and the acceptance of the wills of political control. In fact, this point can also lead to improving the quality of life and influence the opinions within the society. In other words, "*social innovations are often the work of marginal minorities, even if they are then generalized to the whole society at an institutional level*" (Habermas, 1990)<sup>38</sup>. Organized protest in a social movement is an important point that can lead to the creation but also to reform of the law or to the design and implementation of new policies. This citizen participation allows the legitimacy of democracy.

However, it comes to raise certain questions in our reflection. First of all, it is a question of asking in what circumstances civilians can refuse to obey a government or a law created by democratic procedures. or, as a citizen and members of society, can we engage in our acts of civil disobedience in order to change those policies and laws to which we have theoretically consented through the vote? Shouldn't we wait for the next elections from a democratic point of view to express our disagreement, given that they constitute the will of the majority? And finally, should democratic society be tolerant of forms of civil resistance or civil disobedience?

The exercise of these acts of protest represents an important means of peacefully and firmly expressing one's disagreement. It also makes it possible to represent minority communities within society and to sustain democracy. Indeed, we can see that for example in totalitarian regimes, citizens generally have no right to protest or demonstrate without endangering their integrity. It is only in democratic societies that civil disobedience is most commonly and freely practiced.

However, we find ourselves in a paradox. Indeed, the actors of these protests should not aim so much to be superior to any real form of government for moral reasons. The democratic process remains recognizable if it facilitates the exercise of popular sovereignty with the application of majority rule while enforcing the effective enjoyment of human rights. It would not seem reasonable to question this procedure and try to politically justify civil disobedience.

These acts of civil non-violence are not only a political instrument to reject the decisions of the majority and/or the established power. We find this right of protection in certain texts which have not existed for a short time. This right to resist oppression or to express one's political opinion

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<sup>38</sup> Habermas. J. (1990), *L'Espace public*. Payot.

was proclaimed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 for a guarantee of protection of human and citizen's rights. In international legal texts, there is also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) of the United Nations which protects these forms of protest. Its preamble states: "*Considering that it is essential, so that man is not compelled to resort, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that the rights of man be protected by rule of law*".

These forms of citizen participation and resistance are welcomed in democratic societies. This term has come to be referred to as a form of exemption recognized as such, legal, which is why they are no longer strictly speaking a form of disobedience because they represent a duty of the citizen. Between the expression of citizens' discourse and politics, there is a close link. Speech given as an alternative to violence to solve problems that affect the community is part of politics. This idea is defended by Habermas who considers this model to be unavoidable in the existence of forms of political intervention. Within this framework, speech becomes a form of political action: "*A thoughtful theory of political deliberation cannot rely solely on the power of reason and must explore when protest is justified, in what form, and how it can be integrated into a rational dialogue*" (Parekh, 2000)<sup>39</sup>.

This idea, however, generates concerns such as the dynamism of public space and the desire to recognize the importance of political activity. Arendt on this subject indicates that their influence is decisive in his conception of public opinion and in the political communicative power. This idea is also in agreement with John Rawls who conceives civil disobedience as the execution of non-violent actions partly against the laws in force in order to influence and modify certain laws or governmental decisions.

On this subject, Habermas indicates: "*The concept implies a symbolic bending of the law as a last means of appealing to the majority so that, in matters of principle, it can once again reflect on its decisions and, if possible, revise them. This therefore assumes that we are in a state of law, and also a psychological identification of the person who breaks the law with the judicial system in place, considered as a whole. Only then can he justify his protest by resorting to the same constitutional principles to which the majority resorts in order to be considered legitimate*" (Habermas, 1990)<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Parekh. B. (2000). *Rethinking Multiculturalism*. Macmillan. p.306.

<sup>40</sup> Habermas. J. (1990), *L'Espace public*. Payot.

For this reason, political dissent has its legitimate place in a democratic state. It represents the acceptance of the legitimacy of the system and also allows its maintenance and is fundamentally expressed within the framework of peaceful protest. If these forms of protest generate a form of occasional violation of certain regulations, it is nonetheless a strategic and calculated method in order to make the public aware of the error of certain political or judicial decisions, or of the need to take steps to adapt these current constitutional principles to changing social circumstances within society. The sphere of action of civil disobedience or civil resistance can be defined by this hypothesis. Issues relating to the legitimization of public opinion are important in the sense that it allows a guarantee to avoid a reaction of civil disobedience. This legitimization should be subordinated without reserve to the problem of the guarantee of legality.

What if citizens choose to go beyond the spoken word and choose to respond to oppression with violence instead of remaining in peaceful action? This is often the case, but rather under the context of civil war or under a totalitarian regime rather than a democratic one. The question that emerges here is the exemption from the possibility of self-defense in a framework where the State would choose to respond to violence instead of taking into account public opinion and the moral action produced by the citizens. It would be necessary to emit a means before choosing any violence to include/understand the claims undertaken by the civil movements. Yes, they defend for themselves, for their relatives, others who belong to their community, my nation, or my religion, or those who share the same language.

Without self-defense, the act of state violence would not be a case of inequality or separatism. Indeed, as we have seen in the case of the demonstrations in France in April 2023 against the pension reform. The government left a large free will to the police authorities, not letting the demonstrators express their demands peacefully. Some demonstrators have decided to react and respond with violence in the face of police violence. In this context, Frantz Fanon called this form of violence 'the zone of non-being', that is to say: "*One of the strongest arguments for the use of violence (..) which is tactically necessary to defeat structural or systematic violence, or to dismantle a violent regime, such as apartheid, dictatorship or totalitarianism.*" We have notably been able to see this situation also in respect of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Indeed, democracy is built on a double relationship of trust but also of political mistrust. Democratic citizenship is based above all on a relationship of trust between members of the community, for this it has just established a civil dialogue and a common commitment from political institutions. However, the functioning of these democratic institutions is based on the idea that the good behavior of those who govern should not be taken for granted in its generality

because collective confidence in the democratic regime paradoxically requires the integration of mechanisms that rest and are based on distrust.

Moreover, democracy as a whole is based both on an ideal of collective consensus and on an ideal of political pluralism. Since the theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the democratic ideal has been closely associated with the notion of a general will and, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau points out, the formation of this general will does not designate the addition of individual wills, but the construction of the will of the sovereign body as a whole. However, democracy can never take this will for granted since it is in the grip of citizens, opinions, perceptions, and different preferences of society.

It comes to consider this civil act of speaking out as a form of behavior linked to their moral convictions. The subjugation or rejection of the political order in question or of a particular law is a decision undertaken by a single individual, but which also takes into account this strategic form of collective action concerning a particular reference considered to be neglected, that is to say, more of an objection for reasons of conscience which should be better defended. It is clear that the exercise of this represented the capacity for public autonomy or the putting into practice of the self-determination of the citizen. In fact, by opposing certain government measures through these various actions and means allow our citizens to engage and actively participate in the public life of society and to exercise their political influence through the government.

Through these civil actions against social injustices, they are particularly explicit attempts to capture the attention of the public and a vocation for reform or social change in expressing their opinion for a better representative democracy.

Today, public citizen initiatives are undertaken more through non-traditional channels and policy options. In this sense, these incentives have now created the transnational reach that has enabled globalist impact. The transnational civil movement has succeeded in presenting a public opinion in a way that is increasingly global and that makes it possible to represent the needs of the poorest, of the environment, of the extension of democracy, and of human rights. Unconventional participatory actions are undoubtedly a good reflection of the dissatisfaction with democratic flaws. Indeed, if this dissatisfaction persists, it marks a political influence because remaining inactive to the dysfunctions observed in democracy would be a deterioration of democracy.

An adequate interpretation of civil response would be to see it as a complement to the democracy necessary for the development of participatory politics. Indeed, the development of democracy can only be viable if dissent is permitted. It can become an indispensable instrument for increasing public opinion and public debate. By developing participatory means of representative democracy, civil speech must be taken more seriously.

## *2.2. Internet, a powerful tool for civil movement for showing the truth:*

### *2.2.1. A new space for parrhesia and new resources for social movements:*

Nowadays, another obstacle to parrhesia is technological evolution. Beginning with the Renaissance, when the written word came to dominate society, parrhesia becomes a possible obstacle to truth-telling in a society that increasingly has the power to impose its 'truth'. Parrhesia takes a new turn with new technologies, particularly with the arrival of the Internet. The public opinion finds its place in a wider, infinite public space, a haven for individual choice and horizontal democracy.

In Chapter 1, we looked at Foucault's theory of parrhesia from a political point of view. What happens if we apply Foucault's model to the network, and Web 2.0 in particular?

As far as its democratic potential is concerned, we can say that the operability of some of the specific forms of communication found on networks contributes to the growth or revival of democracy. Through networks, they open up a space for new forms of direct democracy, particularly populist ones, such as an online "public space". Since the birth of the first exchange networks in the 1960s, the practice of sharing ideas online has been developing, with a strong sense of a new active citizenship, including in political terms. The recent period has also seen the growth of ways of broadening participation through new possibilities for user activity, such as online news sources. The Internet is becoming an asset for the parrhesia of participation in a democracy, with a broadening of the spectrum of subjects who can take part in decision-making in real-time, and an increase in the availability of information that creates empowerment for the citizen, potentiating possibilities for participation in the public arena and in the decision-making process.

The Foucaultian theme is that of parrhesia, the act of telling the truth in formal social contexts, carried out by subjects whose vocation it is to do so. As in Antiquity, we find the same limits on the Web: the superimposition of two oppositions, that of the minority and the majority, that of the



best and the worst. Foucault's reflection on parrhesia in classical society provides us with necessary and important elements for considering the problem of the relationship we may find between Web 2.0 and democracy.

Often in the public debate of the networks, the contrast lies in the fact that most of the expressions uttered may be more unfounded in the present political and cultural debate than close to the truth, and therefore contrary to the principle of parrhesia. Nevertheless, Web 2.0 remains an essential tool and motor for the revitalization of democracy that can take place on the Web. It seems that Foucault's reflections could pose the question differently, allowing us to question the link between truth and democracy, and thus not only the freedom of speech that it engenders but also the responsibility that this speech entails for those who benefit from the right to take it. Even if responsibility means a commitment to telling the truth, to risking danger, Web 2.0 above all enables us to form our own opinions through research and the freedom to express ourselves.

The question of whether the Web is negative or positive for democracy is basically irrelevant here. The question we should be asking ourselves is whether Web 2.0 makes for better or poorer quality public debate. Indeed, democracy is morally founded on this subtle notion of sharing, and we can observe the disjunction between its broadcast value as a tool for accessing public debate. There are several issues at stake here: firstly, it's well known that the number of subjects accessing networks and engaging in communicative interaction is much greater on Web 2.0, making it more difficult to achieve equality of voice. We find a reproduction of the minority-majority system seen earlier, i.e., certain subjects will capture public attention on their own opinions, information, and content, against a vast number of other subjects. At this point, the question arises as to whether those who have the majority in the Web 2.0 debate are the ones most able to speak on behalf of the community, whether they are concerned with the public good, or in short, potential parrhesiates. This point remains difficult to prove.

While the Internet may broaden democracy, its possibilities also raise the question of 'truth' and give rise to doubts. Indeed, with the Internet, the mediators of public opinion are not just politicians or transnational actors, but digital networks extend the relays of opinion to a wider public. Obtaining the truth can be compromised with Web 2.0, just as it can be an unconscionable advantage for broadening one's influence and visibility as a citizen. Particularly with social networks, they develop a strategy of omnipresence and are at the service of political and social stakes and strategies of attention and visibility as individual actors or political collectives. Here, we can see that the dynamics of opinion are now played out online, prompting a reorientation of classic tools such as surveys, petitions, and polls.

Is it possible to think of a universal access to debate, a mass activism that would imply that all citizens in democratic choices better guarantee the presence of parrhesia in public debate? It's an argument that's hard to sustain, given that on the networks we find many violations, abuses of the right to speak, lies, and even fake news, alongside truthful words, courageous prose, and revelations. In short, if we focus on the fact that democracy is not only a quantitative but also a qualitative issue, then in this context, Web 2.0 is no less democratic than any other public space. What's more, we must also take into account those who remain silent in the debate on the networks. In fact, disqualifying the silence of some as political non-participation admits that only being present in the debate on the networks qualifies them as an instrument of democratic action. In short, then, we can conclude that Web 2.0 can be an effective instrument for maintaining and revitalizing democracy, but for all that, it does not constitute a public space or a more democratic instrument than any other.

With the development of digital social networks, these tools are leading to a reconsideration of the notion of the public. The use of Web 2.0 gives citizens and political actors new resources for action and expression, on a large scale. We can therefore assume that mediators are active players. These new practices of action and expression are technically made possible by the Web, replacing traditional channels of expression. Thanks to these, new mediators can intervene in public debate and disseminate their opinions using these integrated devices on numerous platforms. The Internet (blogs, tweets, Instagram, etc.) is creating new micro-spaces of discussion that seek to influence public debate and consist of an activity of sharing information relating to political opinions.

The participative dimension of Web 2.0 makes it possible to mobilize large numbers of people. More clearly, Web 2.0 enables Internet users to take center stage in the public arena, allowing them to interact and identify with a community. The Internet thus offers a new perspective on democracy, providing a new tool for mobilization, advocacy, and diversification of action.

Digital technology has the potential to renew forms of political participation. Indeed, the Internet could give all citizens the means to express themselves without temporal or spatial boundaries and would tend to break down the barrier between rulers and ruled. If so, will the increasingly widespread democratization of ICTs revolutionize political participation? Some analyses of the Arab Spring speak of a Facebook or Twitter revolution and point to the rise of social networks as the main cause of such protest movements. The network of networks is seen as an alternative space conducive to the development of individual or collective actions outside the institutionalized forms and gaze of the state. The Internet becomes a tool for rethinking political action and reconfiguring political practices to empower citizens.

Dahlberg speaks of a ‘counter-public’<sup>41</sup> democracy, means a movement based on the formation of digital usage, of more or less formalized groups, and contesting instituted powers. Civil movements are increasingly organized on social networks. Examples include online petition platforms such as Change.org or Avaaz, which invite citizens to mobilize online. These tools break down the barriers between those who govern and those who are governed and encourage those who govern to make use of these tools themselves, enabling broad citizen participation in politics.

One example can be related to the ‘Twitter revolution’<sup>42</sup>. It is distinguished from other forms of activism by the ways in which activists communicate and aggregate through Twitter. It is an example of how social media facilitates communication between people on a global scale in political revolutions. It challenges the traditional relationship between political authorities and the people, allowing the powerless to collaborate, coordinate and give voice to their concerns. The dissemination of information increases public attention on a regional and global scale.

According to Habermas, public space is the place where life in the city takes place, and where public opinion is exercised as an actor in the debates that animate society. In other words, it's the place where people exercise their role as citizens. The emergence of social networks has opened up new ways of interacting. In his 1962 thesis, Jurgen Habermas defines the public sphere as a sounding board for problems that cannot be solved anywhere else<sup>43</sup>. This is the kind of space that could be developing on the Internet, with the sacralization of almost absolute freedom of expression. In this new public space, we are witnessing a new type of collective organization, different from that found in traditional public space, that is, outside the digital realm. Thanks to the Internet, citizens can unite, enabling the creation of groups or associations based on a common interest. According to Pierre Rosanvallon<sup>44</sup>, the Internet is a political form, because it is becoming the instrument of a surveillance democracy. Thanks to the Internet, citizens have become the people watching and the people judging. In this new public space, from the 2000s onwards, the

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<sup>41</sup> Dahlberg. L. (2011). *Re-constructing digital democracy: An outline of four 'positions'*. New Media and Society. p. 855-872. [\(PDF\) Re-Constructing Digital Democracy: An Outline of Four 'Positions' \(researchgate.net\)](#)

<sup>42</sup>The Twitter revolution is a term used to describe various revolutions and demonstrations characterized by protesters using the social networking site Twitter to communicate with each other.

<sup>43</sup> Habermas. J. (1990), *L'Espace public*. Payot.

<sup>44</sup> Rosanvallon. P. (2006). *La contre démocratie*. Du Seuil. p. 346

value of this new form of freedom of expression took on an unexpected dimension of contestation. The transformation of the public sphere began with the speaker: everyone was free to speak.

In 1994, the journalist Howard Rheingold published a book on the emergence and role of these new technologies, comparing the Internet to 'Habermasian public space'<sup>45</sup> a space capable of revitalizing democracy. In 1999, urban sociology professor Ray Oldenburg published a book in which he described the Internet as a "*third place*"<sup>46</sup> that is important for civil society, democracy, and civic engagement. But his research also shows that this space is being used as an access point for extremists. What's more, this new space is not totally parrhesiate in the sense that anyone can speak openly in the digital space, but debate can be closed, or the surfer hidden by a pseudonym or false identity and therefore not reveal his true face, which is one of the requisites cited in Chapter 1.

Web 2.0 has gradually established itself as a tool of state surveillance. In 1949, George Orwell expressed his fear of seeing the development of a veritable surveillance society in his book 1984, even though the Internet was not yet as widespread as it is today.

Even though the Internet has broadened the possibilities for mobilizing and expressing public opinion in the public arena. However, Internet is still maintained in a form of control. Firstly, traditional political institutions, whose repressive force is particularly evident in non-democratic countries. In fact, even democracies apply network controls in a policing form, but these are subservient to the laws that protect citizens and guarantee them freedom of expression. And secondly, the users themselves. Foucault taught us that the specific forms of power do not only concern the vertical relationship between institutions and citizens but also and more profoundly the horizontal relationships in the family, in socialization organizations, in concrete situations of relationships between genders, generations, roles, and so on.

Cyberspace is a place of freedom because every Internet user can express themselves freely and take part in the debate. It's also a place where all the world's Internet users can participate, debate and express their opinions. The Internet enables the creation of an international society.

But will it foster democratic debate? The aim is to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve democracy and democratic institutions. This tool also enables citizens to participate in this democracy with their leaders. To achieve real participatory

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<sup>45</sup> Rheingol. H. (1994). *The Virtual community. Homesteading on the Electronic frontier*. Harper Perennial. p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> Oldenburg. R. (1999). *The great good place*. Marlowe and CO.

democracy on the Internet, we need to reorganize the relationship between the state and citizens in the digital space. A concept contested by Vedel to avoid state control over which citizens cannot intervene<sup>47</sup>.

### 2.2.2 *New tools for speaking without total freedom:*

The ICTs open a large door for civil movements. ICTs accelerate the diffusion of information and transcend barriers of time and pace to mobilize protest. It empowers citizens living under authoritarian regimes, enabling them to mobilize together, to attract global support, and create a defiance of state power for embracing political change. Social movements can be understood here as “*networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict based on a shared collective identity*” (Diani 1992). Social movements are seen as “*a universal feature of current societies, with arguments that they have been catalyzed by both globalization and the spread of information and communication technologies*” (Tarrow 2011).

Originating in the USA, the term cyberdemocracy refers to the idea of using ICTs to improve democracy through the direct and active participation of citizens in democratic decision-making processes. Levy speaks of a “*new space of communication, inclusive, transparent and universal, which is set to profoundly renew the conditions of public life in the direction of greater freedom and responsibility for citizens*”<sup>48</sup>. Cyberdemocracy thus appears as a new space for democracy. ICTs provide media that can revolutionize certain democratic practices and usher in a new era of democracy. For Benjamin Loveluck, the Internet is reconnecting with democracy in several ways, sanctifying the spoken word in a new way that promotes equality, direct citizen participation, and transparency of speech<sup>49</sup>.

What's more, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram make it easier for citizens to express their point of view. For Cartier, digital democracy is “a means of exercising participatory democracy through ICTs. Digital democracy is by no means a new form of democracy in itself; it is simply the application of participatory democracy using the tools offered

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<sup>47</sup> Vedel. T. (2003). *L'idée de démocratie électronique, origines, visions, questions, paru dans Le désenchantement démocratique*. Editions de l'Aube. p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Levy. P. (2002). *Cyberdémocratie*, Odile Jacob. p. 36.

<sup>49</sup> Loveluck. B. (2008). *Internet, vers la démocratie radicale*. Le Débat. No. 151, p. 150-166.

by technology<sup>50</sup>. As a result, the Internet and new information and communication technologies (ICTs), as we see them today, have become the means of exchange that provide citizens with a special forum for association. ICTs are becoming essential to democratic expression. However, can we say that cyberdemocracy will be the solution not only for a representative democracy but also one that is sustainable over time?

In 1995, six years after the creation of the Internet, Bernard Manin published a book in which he noted this new form of an emerging democracy, which he called "public democracy". For Manin, *"the form of representative government that is emerging today is characterized by the appearance of a new protagonist of public deliberation, the informed citizen (...). Citizens are better informed politically so that they can subsequently discuss these matters. Citizens can watch what's going on in government live on the Internet or television"*<sup>51</sup>.

These new tools have given rise to a new form of influence on democracy, allowing the governed a space for free speech in order to influence the policy of the governing and improve the rights of all. In particular, they have led to several breakthroughs. Former Swiss Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger, speaking in Vienna on June 25, 2007, declared that *"information technologies have enabled civil society to be the true guardians of democracy worldwide, those oppressors can no longer hide behind national borders, but that a strong civil society connected to the world around it by modern means of communication can no longer allow this to happen"*. As a result, the Internet has become an essential tool and space for exercising participatory democracy.

The various uses of ICTs in political activity examined so far highlight their extension of populism and civil action. On the other hand, the development of digital applications is perfecting citizen action and providing a new way for so-called minority groups to have their say. These means stimulate transparency, the disclosure of truth, and the possibility of mobilizing crowds.

The question here is: can everyone participate in this new digital space, and is everyone equal? In 2011, the European Centre for Collective Intelligence conducted a study on the introduction to the decision-making process in cyberdemocracy. The use of ICTs to participate in participatory democracy requires a certain number of criteria, such as *"knowing how to read and write"* and *"having access to information and communication technologies"*. So, if these conditions are not met, some citizens are excluded. This point represents a fragile aspect of cyberdemocracy and

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<sup>50</sup> Cartier. M. (2002). *Les groupes d'intérêts et les collectivités locales : Une interface entre le citoyen et l'État*. L'Harmattan. p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> Manin. B. (1996). *Principes du gouvernement représentatif*. Champ Flammarion. p. 259.

creates a digital social divide in which not everyone is equal on the Internet since some will be integrated into this space of free speech, while others will not have access to it.

Another problem that can be encountered in this digital space is the encounter between citizens who don't have the same opinion. As a result, they choose with whom they wish to exchange views, which could have the effect of depoliticizing democratic debate. In this case, the general interest disappears in favor of the individual interest. New information and communication technologies can also be a means of reinforcing the separation between the governing and the governed, and the distrust between citizens and governors.

For several years now, digital tools have been an integral part of civil movements and political commitments within human societies. This medium has made it possible to challenge the political systems in which it is deployed and to revitalize democracy. Taking note of this reality, Professor Philippe Ségur has mobilized the dimensions and implications for democracy. His research focuses on the investment and intergenerational nature of the Internet and digital technology, in particular how they fundamentally impact the democratic system. "The Internet is not a tool like any other," says Dominique Cardon. Indeed, the era of digital technology and social networks is not just one advancement among many, but an improvement on several vectors and techniques of communication that has enabled a social mutation far more powerful than a revolution. The advent of Internet tools has inexorably brought about a sea change in our society and politics.

First and foremost, the pace of politics has quickened considerably thanks to these new vectors for disseminating information. In particular, social networks such as Twitter have enabled the ubiquitous exchange of political ideas, which has not failed to influence political parties, especially during elections. As a result, the democratic political habitat has been rapidly and substantially reconfigured. The transparency of the Internet, which makes information directly accessible to as many people as possible, has doubled its immediacy and contributed to democracy. Above all, it has contributed to and encouraged the emergence of the individual as a permanent player in political life, and ICTs are fed by the ordinary citizen, who now coexists on the same platform as the political activist or the elected official in charge. These platforms also facilitate the emission of opinions, liberating and nourishing ideological fields that remained contained or within the private sphere before their emergence, making it possible to publicize opinions. What's more, these new modes of interaction have stimulated the regeneration of the traditional representative democratic model through sites, blogs, forums, new 2.0 media, and social networks. In particular, they have considerably enriched political reflection and opened up



the debate to all. As part of this ‘democratic effervescence’, the Internet has enabled innovative processes of political socialization and opened the way to participatory democracy.

However, the advances made by the digital world and networks have come up against many obstacles. On the one hand, there is a digital divide, or inequality of access to the Internet, which means that not everyone, depending on their geographical location or social background, can integrate or participate with the same ease as others in the world. This divide occurs not only between the most and least technologically advanced countries but also within state borders, between different social categories that do not have the same resources at their disposal. In fact, the gaps between them are still significant.

On the other hand, the multiplication of public institutions specializing in the surveillance and tracking of digital behavior, at both international and national levels, attests to an attack on citizens' zone of freedom in order to regain control of it. If we return to the parrhesia act of telling the truth, we can cite the case of Julian Assange as a prime example. Considered an enemy of the government, he has been under criminal investigation and charged with conspiracy and espionage since 2012. Despite himself, the WikiLeaks founder has become a symbol of truth-telling. Indeed, without WikiLeaks, there would have been no revelations about the hidden face of the war in Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria... Through this digital medium, hundreds of millions of citizens have had access to this disclosure of the truth. The Internet has become a fast and easy medium for disclosing the truth, enabling whistle-blowers to denounce democratic or human rights violations at the risk of their lives or punishment. The classic struggle to monitor and punish reprehensible actions demonstrates the need for parrhesia.

Another obstacle that these digital resources may come up against is censorship. Freedom of expression is often accompanied by a censorship regime, which has both a preventive and repressive aspect. With the evolution of the Internet, states often use this means in the public sphere when they feel that this freedom of expression action affects or would be a threat to them. Repressive censorship is an infringement of parrhesia that is growing with the evolution of the Internet. While it might appear to be a way of escaping censorship, this is not always the case.

The Internet arouses certain misgivings because it is a new public space beyond the reach of public authorities. For this reason, some states have sought to set up an arsenal of means to monitor, limit and censor any expression that might disturb. The best-known example is China, which has created its own Internet portal so that the population has access to nothing but the information on it. China has multiplied the levels of regulation and control, leaving little room or freedom for parrhesia for its citizens. China even employs over 2 million people to censor the



Internet, as well as thousands of police officers to monitor Internet cafés. China has even created an official list of words banned from the Internet<sup>52</sup>, including "*democracy*", as well as "*Tiananmen*" and "*Tunisia*", which refer to demonstrations.

China is not the only country to deprive its citizens of this freedom of expression. In Iran, Internet networks are controlled by the mullah regime, which controls all Internet infrastructures and regulatory bodies in order to constantly monitor Iranian citizens and suppress dissident voices. Like China, the country also censors a list of forbidden words to which the community cannot have access, such as independent sites or those opposed to the country's political regime. In 2011, Iran set up the country's first cyber police to monitor the Internet and gather information, block sites and censor content. Examples include Gmail, which was suspended in 2010, and Youtube, which is regularly blocked. By censoring freedom of expression, the regime ensures that all dissenting opinions that could harm it are outlawed. Similarly, the NGO Reporter Sans Frontières<sup>53</sup> had pointed out that the Iranian regime was conducting propaganda against the Internet, and that the Iranian state considered Facebook and Twitter to be hidden enemies of the country. Iran's Internet legislation is particularly repressive. Article 18 of the Cybercrime Act (2009) provides for up to two years imprisonment and a fine for anyone found guilty of "*disseminating false information likely to disturb public opinion*". Opponents and activists thus find their freedom of expression repressed, and without a public space in which to share their political opinions, they are deprived of their rights and subject to pressure from the government, which has no hesitation in arresting and convicting them.

From these two examples, we can see those obstacles and repression to parrhesiate acts, or free speech, remain confined and in a restricted space for authoritarian countries or those under dictatorship. The risk is much higher in these regimes, and parrhesia is much weaker there, even in the age of the Internet and new technological means of dissemination and communication. We can deduct from this that parrhesia is not total, unrestricted freedom since there are many obstacles and restrictions put in place by certain governments. Some governments even misuse it to prevent their citizens from expressing themselves freely, leaving no room for them to divulge the 'truth'.

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<sup>52</sup> AFP. (2013, October 5). *La Chine emploie deux millions de personnes pour censurer Internet*. L'Expansion. [La Chine emploie deux millions de personnes pour censurer Internet - L'Express \(lexpress.fr\)](http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/la-chine/la-chine-emploie-deux-millions-de-personnes-pour-censurer-internet_1771111.html)

<sup>53</sup> Reporters Sans Frontières. (2014). *Les Ennemis d'Internet*. Rapport spécial. [2014-rsf-rapport-les-ennemis-dinternet.pdf](http://www.rsf.org/rapport-les-ennemis-d-internet_1771111.html)

ICTs had played an influential role in the socio-political evolution. They could be seen as inclusive in that they facilitate the organization of sub-political actors and also enable new formalized forms of civic engagement and potentially extend the public sphere. These technologies are inclusive in regard that they give access as far from universal. These communication tools efficiently and effectively operate to allow everybody to use them. From a participatory perspective, ICTs are seen as an opportunity to open up potentialities and opportunities in the realms of informal political processes and social movements organizations. Indeed, as argued before, the goal of social movement organizations is to adopt strategies to influence the formal political process and achieve very political goals.

The use of ICTs permits mobilization, activating engagement, influencing the public sphere, and permitting direct action. Furthermore, it provides a platform that can display the development of alternative discourses and shape policies with the influence of public opinion. It provides a list of instruments that can be used to foster engagement in political debates and also democratize the public sphere. The use of these Web 2.0 instruments can permit in facilitating debate, and discussion and open the voice and concerns of civilians. The growth of this kind of informal engagement from civil society can facilitate engagement and be active in the protest against international institutions to maintain and represent democracy.

Nevertheless, the enabling role of ICTs encounters also certain constraints which have to be taken into account. These tools have also enabled new forms of state control, often intending to reduce freedom of speech. These forms of use can be an infringement of the parrhesia act. This is problematic from a participatory perspective and also in terms of the social movement's interests in what they defend. In the last section of this chapter, we will discuss and develop this view. Indeed, ICTs can be often reduced to regulation which can lead toward censorship.

The digital revolution should not be underestimated, however, in the sense that it is overturning and emancipating itself from the sovereignty of states, bypassing regulations. This digital sphere is giving rise to mobilizations against various social injustices and for the price of political truth.

### 2.3. *The limits of digital democracy:*

#### 2.3.1. *Authoritarian regimes strengthened by digital approval:*

This new digital environment of social networks can be a tremendous source of hope for our societies. Social networks have established themselves as a new space for exchange and debate, where anyone can post their opinion or parrhesia anywhere in the world. These networks would be a space of absolute and instantaneous transparency, and the Internet would enable civilians to broaden their social and political environment on a global scale. We have already mentioned this tool in a rather positive light for the commitments of civil organizations, where exchanges and debates could unfold without limits. Web 2.0 could open up new possibilities for debate and freedom from political censorship. Indeed, social networks would enable free exchange without passing through the filters of state censorship.

But perhaps the parrhesia can be exerting its influence from a distance in order to question a political fact that it seems to them to be considered unfair. For example, at a conference held at Ohio State University by then-Secretary of State Madeline Albright on February 20, 1998, a student demanded answers about her governance of bombing Iraq because the American government designated Saddam Hussein as a dictator while the government sells weapons to Israel, which allows them to assassinate Palestinians, and to Indonesia for the purpose of war crimes against the people of East Timor. This student took the courage to speak during this conference in order to 'tell the truth', and also to denounce the actions of the government. He supports his speech in particular by emphasizing that the people do not want to support governors who promulgate violence. Popular speaking internationally can undoubtedly obtain more influence than in an authoritarian country and spread more widely via social networks.

Indeed, social networks have proven their ability to change the world, or at least to act as a lever for shaking things up in the 'real world'. As Daniela Roventa-Frumusani and Elena Farcas point out: "*Originally a simple tool for private expression, Facebook has become an important instrument for the public expression of organizations, institutions, political parties and so on. In terms of political communication, Facebook is becoming a free and powerful instrument for deploying innovative political marketing strategies: expressivism, connectivity, and mobilization.*"<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Roventa-Frumusani. D. and Farcas. E. (2020). Réseaux sociaux, construction de l'identité institutionnelle et nouvelles formes de visibilité. *Communication*. Vo. 37/1. [Réseaux sociaux, construction de l'identité institutionnelle et nouvelles formes de visibilité \(openedition.org\)](https://www.openedition.org/revue/371)

Social networks present themselves as an instrument with the potential to open a window of visibility for those who have none and allow civilians to participate in political debates while expressing themselves through parrhesia without speech limits. As with the worldwide hashtag #MeToo, which gave voice to the truth about victims who had previously been ignored. These digital tools have enabled liberation of speech and a technical evolution of the act of parrhesia.

If we return to our main research question, it's whether speech (parrhesia) with civil status could have an influence on the political game. With the arrival of the Internet, this public sphere of speech has been amplified, enabling the use of new digital tools that open up new horizons in the era of mobilization in civil society. However, many authors have debated this issue and remain pessimistic about the influence of this milieu.

In Politics as usual, *Politics as usual: The Cyberspace Revolution* by M. Margolis and D. Resnick (2000)<sup>55</sup> defends the idea that those who are active online are those who were already offline. In other words, only those individuals who were already interested in politics will be able to turn to online political content, thereby multiplying their sources of information. A pessimistic vision of the digital age. For E. Morozov<sup>56</sup>, online political practices have no influence whatsoever on political decisions, and only serve to make Internet activists think that they are contributing to the political game. More recently, the work of Rémy Rieffel feeds this thesis, considering the Internet as "*a new repertoire of collective action*", while at the same time indicating that it is symbolic of a reappropriation of public debate by the most politicized citizens"<sup>57</sup>.

In another context, we've seen that Internet debates have a direct and active influence, and provide a free platform for exchange and information, particularly in democratic regimes. What about authoritarian regimes? With the two examples of Iran and China cited above, we can see that these digital tools remain limited and restricted by governments, leaving no space for free speech and thus no possibility of mobilization for civil society movements. What's more, human rights defenders are often the first users of these digital tools, but they are also sometimes and regularly their first victims.

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<sup>55</sup> Margolis. M. and Resnick. D. (2000) *Politics as usual: The Cyberspace Revolution*. Sage.

<sup>56</sup> Morozov. E. (2011). *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York Public Affairs.

<sup>57</sup> Rieffel. R. (2014). *Révolution numérique, révolution culturelle?* Gallimard.

While it is always difficult to anticipate the extent to which the power of the Internet could upset our democracies, the fear of seeing the emergence of Internet censorship adds to the feeling that democracies too could be threatened and destabilized by digital technology, which is confronted with obstacles.

In these situations, authoritarian states can use 'repression technology' in response, they also used ICTs for repressive purposes: hacking websites, email/mobile accounts, planting disinformation, and using viruses and other tools of cyberwarfare to attack political challengers. So, social movements will have other challenges and obstacles to confront in contrary of democratic countries. Also, as for example in Iran, civils can be arrested, tortured, or executed so they have a larger risk than in democratic countries. However, these mechanisms have been able to involve the civilian population at their level and at the international level. By using technological tools, a new possibility for countries under authoritarian regimes is the willingness to speak the truth on a larger-than-regional scale in order to change what they consider to be unfair policies. The international civil reaction can then push their country to act towards the country in question in order to obtain changes within their policy in conflict with its population.

We can see that civil society promising democratic ideologies and social movements have a tumultuous relationship with authoritarian regimes. While major web platforms were designed to break away from state authority and defend democracy, authoritarian regimes profile surveillance measures creating a 'tyranny of transparency'.

In 2017, a strong appropriation of digital technology by authoritarian regimes appeared, reinforcing the repressive activity they initially had at their disposal. For example, on December 12, 2017, the Russian authorities stifled a civil society movement by blocking five websites following a decision by the Russian Prosecutor's Office to block five websites of the Open Russia movement. The movement was founded by former Russian prisoner of conscience Mikhail Khodorkovsky. In this case, the Russian authorities are aiming to stifle pluralism in Russian politics and society. Previously, in November, the State Duma (Russia's lower house of parliament) adopted a legislative amendment to facilitate the procedure for blocking websites deemed to be "*undesirable organizations*".

Far from being digital laggards, countries such as China and Russia, but also Iran and Saudi Arabia, are seeking to control this new space for speech in order to maintain their control and restrict freedom of speech and mobilization towards civil movements, notably by using ubiquitous surveillance systems to reinforce their Internet censorship systems. To this tool is added a new sovereignist and repressive role and dimension, which runs counter to the freedom

of speech and political participation of civilians. The act of cutting off the Internet has become a new weapon for authoritarian regimes, and preventing access to networks is a technique increasingly used to curb a popular movement. Especially regarding the African countries. While the majority of the population does not yet have broadband access, authoritarian governments are restricting access in order to control this space in times of crisis. In 2022, around one in six Internet outages worldwide were caused by an African state, often as part of a protest movement<sup>58</sup>.

We can see that civil society promising democratic ideologies and social movements have a tumultuous relationship with authoritarian regimes. While major web platforms were designed to break away from state authority and defend democracy, authoritarian regimes profile surveillance measures creating a 'tyranny of transparency'.

During 2022, governments cut off and obstructed Internet access 187 times in 35 countries around the world, according to a report by AccessNow and #KeepItOn<sup>59</sup>. Some governments use the Internet as a weapon of control over their populations, in order to restrict and hinder their freedom of expression. In most cases, it's a case of governments not wanting to let the 'truth' out into the open. The Internet has made many human rights violations visible, and a broad international mobilization to restrict their credibility through the freedom of information that citizens can now find via these digital tools. For example, in 2022, the Russian army cut off the Internet 22 times in the occupied territories of Ukraine, in the midst of a war situation and missile strikes against physical communications infrastructures and cyber-attacks against Internet service providers.

While social networks are often a unique source of means, however precarious, for protesting against institutions and making the popular voice heard, they notably form a space for contestation and dialogue in the public sphere. And yet, this is a fearful situation for authoritarian regimes. Social network surveillance is becoming increasingly widespread, and many states are implementing tools to monitor Internet users. When social unrest breaks out, the whole of Web 2.0 is cut off. Another strategy used by authoritarian regimes to control social networks is to promote, or even impose, entirely national digital services under tight government control.

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<sup>58</sup> Holzinger. F. and Rubrice. L. and Simonnet. V. and Didier. E. (2022, January 31). *Couper Internet, une arme pour les régimes autoritaires africains*. Le Monde. [Couper Internet, une arme pour les régimes autoritaires africains \(lemonde.fr\)](https://www.lemonde.fr)

<sup>59</sup> AccessNow, #KeepItOn report, Weapons of Control, Shields of Impunity. Internet Shutdown in 2022, February 2023. [Internet shutdowns in 2022: the #KeepItOn Report \(accessnow.org\)](https://www.accessnow.org/)

Under Putin's Russian regime, there's VKontakte and Telegram, two Russian social networking services that had to change owners because their ideas were considered too libertarian. They are now owned by people close to Vladimir Putin.

Even if the Internet is a democratic tool, it can also become a dictatorial weapon for others. In this respect, the use of the Internet by a population and its government makes it easy to define and distinguish between so-called democratic and dictatorial regimes. Governments' control and use of the Internet echo a political reality. Indeed, while for one it means an instrument for maintaining democracy, for dictatorial regimes it is a threat and a risk to the maintenance of the order established by the government. In these regimes, we can see that governments have control over the digital equipment present on a national scale, and that the Internet can also be misused to monitor citizens. However, the use of this network remains a major tool for expressing freedom in the hands of citizens for the purposes of regulating democratic values. For example, the Snowden affair illustrates the complexity introduced by the use of the Internet by state actors and demonstrates the weakening that can occur between different democratic systems. In June 2013, during this period, NSA (National Security Agency) analyst Edward Snowden revealed the existence of a surveillance program involving American authorities. Several programs (PRISM, XKebyScore) were created for the purpose of mass surveillance to collect data on American citizens but also on thirty-five state leaders such as Angela Merkel or François Hollande. This event shows that even in democratic regimes, the Internet can be used by governments for non-democratic purposes. This revelation has raised international awareness of the threats that the Internet could pose and dissociates the democratic ideal associated with the Internet.

Initially, we looked at the Internet's potential as a democratic tool for citizens to produce a discourse (*parrhesia*) on an international scale, but also as a more influential instrument for citizens *vis-à-vis* their government. However, we can also see negative effects in the sense that this 'democratic' tool can also be used against citizens by governments in order to establish broad surveillance control over their population. The evolution of the Internet, which up to now has been a hope for a wider space to produce *parrhesia*, means the truth, is now also becoming a tool for dictatorships. If the various uses of the Internet by state actors have been underlined as democratic, the analysis carried out demonstrates a new aspect of the links between the Internet and the notion of dictatorship.

In a report, the Oxford Internet Institute analyzes the manipulation of social networks by political actors in 80 countries in 2021, as well as the global disinformation produced on an industrial scale by major governments and political parties. In this report, we can see that numerous private ‘strategic communications’ companies are playing an increasing role in the dissemination of computerized propaganda, with researchers having identified state actors working with these companies in 48 countries<sup>60</sup>. Secondly, we can see from these examples that more and more countries are using the Net to manipulate opinion. In this sense, the Internet is becoming an attack on parrhesia and democracy. The techniques used for propaganda in certain countries are diversifying online. This practice is becoming increasingly common, and not only in authoritarian regimes. Indeed, authoritarian regimes do not have a monopoly on online surveillance propaganda.

### *2.3.2. Case study on Iran:*

The question here is whether the influence of the Internet can be exercised freely, or whether parrhesia acts as it would in a democratic regime within an authoritarian one. We have seen that the evolution of the Internet has greatly contributed to widening the scope of parrhesia, albeit within the framework of a democratic regime. The question that arises here is whether the influence of parrhesia can also be produced under an authoritarian regime, in order to assert democratic values within a totalitarian society. To this end, we will focus on the situation of civil mobilizations in Iran.

In the early 1900s, Iran had a goal to become a democratic country. However, since 1979 Iran finds itself under a theocratic Islamic Republic which first spawns the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Iranian activists have sought to resolve the crisis of state legitimacy by developing a regulatory framework that recognizes the sovereignty of people and the rule of law. In this context, the Iranians began to claim their rights and wanted to obtain greater support from the population and public opinion. In Iran, religion has played a dual role in promoting and undermining democratic values.

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<sup>60</sup> Bradshaw. S. and Howard. P. and Bailey. Hannah. (2021, January 13). *Social Media Manipulation by Political Actors now an Industrial Scale Problem Prevalent in over 80 Countries*. Annual Oxford Report. Oxford Internet Institute. [OII | Social media manipulation by political actors now an industrial scale problem prevalent in over 80 countries – annual Oxford report](#)



As for the current policy of Iran ensures its control of its population and the state extends its control over the public sphere. Censorship, for example, is one of the results. Iran operates in the context of a rather authoritarian regime. In the 20th and early 21st centuries, Iranians demanded the sovereignty of the people, the rule of law, and democracy which were at the heart of the constitutional revolution. Iranians have used the same strategies and tactics to protest against corrupt and authoritarian governments.

The situation of Iranian democracy in the 2000s and 2010s can be analyzed as a deficient democracy floating between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. If democratization would take place under an authoritarian regime and could not reach the level of liberal democracy.

This political context then shows a limited political participation from the civilian population. The participation of Iranian citizens then remains limited to the right to vote. Most people do not have the opportunity to participate as widely as they would like in all the decisions that affect them. Iranians until today have rather limited the expression of their public opinion and the mobilization of their public sphere within Iran. For good reason, the consequences and implications of the protest movements are deeply rooted in the collective memory of Iranians. In the 1990s, they consciously refused to engage in protests because they knew riots and revolts would lead to increased repression by a political regime that tolerated no opposition, legal or illegal.

Social movements are the embodiment of the efforts of a seemingly powerless people to resist repression and political and cultural subordination, and Iran remains a closed space for the reception of democratic values. With the constitution of 1979, Iran is also not an appropriate legal framework to defend the rights of Iranians whose human rights are absent. The last decade of the 20th century saw the emergence of a social movement and politics in Iran, in the sense of a set of activities deliberately based on shared ideas about the dignity of the human being, a unifying belief in nonviolent action against a repressive state, and a common agenda for the dialogue between individuals and groups<sup>61</sup>. Nevertheless, the state still exerted control partly through the society's authoritarian political culture, and partly because it used religion as a legitimizing factor to define new actors and weaken others in any domain. Iranian citizens, from an authoritarian point of view, are excluded from politics. It can be noted in particular that in the Persian language,

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<sup>61</sup> Mohammadi. M. (2018). *The Iranian Reform Movement, Civil and Constitutional Rights in Suspension*. Palgrave Macmillan.

the word citizen, 'shahrvand', simply means the inhabitant of a city and is not associated with the political, social and cultural rights of European societies. As for the Arabic word 'tābe', used in Persian, means subordinate (to the state). The terms such as "*national interest*" and "*civil society*" were not widely used in the public sphere.

As mentioned earlier, the Internet was also the engine for building networks and circulating information for social movements in Iran in the 2000s. However, the Internet will not destroy Iran's authoritarian regime, but will bring all new ideas about it into the public sphere. Indeed, the potential impact of new technologies, particularly on developing societies, is largely ignored (Schwartz 1996). There is no specific study of the impact of the Internet on the public sphere of these regimes in the sense that authoritarian regimes find ways to control and counter the political impact of Internet use, although they cannot control the impact of the Internet on the public sphere. It does not allow authorities to restrict dissenting communication by blocking popular access to the Internet and prohibiting the use of other communication technologies. The authoritarian faction of the current regime in Iran controls the political and social impact of the Internet through censorship schemes similar to those devised by authoritarian regimes in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates since the 1990s (Human Rights Watch). As Internet access in Iran increases, Internet use may indeed play a greater role in contestation.

Iranian civil society can use the Internet to support their protest actions, especially for the public dissemination of information and their public opinions. In many cases, this can play a crucial role in opening up the public sphere to push for open debate on political issues, either by triggering debates and discussions that delegitimize an authoritarian regime. Discussion forums, mailing lists and some websites have facilitated the creation of online civil society institutions in Iran. The use of the Internet is often crucial to the success of their activities as the most important means of connecting Iranian activists to international advocacy networks, and Iranian exile communities around the world. Moreover, with the censorship process, most Iran-related political information on the Internet does not come from domestic sources but from foreign websites that attempt to influence Iranian politics. The current regime has no control over the use of the Internet outside the country and this type of international use of the Internet has undoubtedly reinforced a revelation of the truth about the effects of the authoritarian regime as well as an influence on it via the impact of the international reaction.

This growing popularity of the internet has given Iranians new ways to communicate with the outside world and is forcing an authoritarian regime to rethink its approach. Iran's experience with Internet use from 1997 to 2001 illustrates the experience of those states that perceive technology

adaptation as a potential social and political problem with the closure of Internet cafes in 2001-2002, then filtering most websites and nearly all blogs as early as 2003. This was undertaken under the guise of protecting the public from “subversive ideas” or defending “national security and unity”. The main principle of authoritarian speech is to limit speech by suppressing any new mode of communication. The Internet is more controversial in Iran than in any other country because it could delegitimize the regime in place<sup>62</sup>.

The current regulation of the freedom of citizen mobilizations in the Iranian legislative context means more limitation and less multiplicity and diversity. In cases where the use of the Internet seems threatening to the regime, authoritarian states will react and even try to get ahead of them with the aim of keeping control over their population, leaving no space for possible parrhesia and democratic openness. These include limiting network access, filtering content or blocking websites with software tools, emailing viruses to Protestants, monitoring users' online behavior, and even completely prohibiting the use of the Internet. These strategies represent efforts to spread propaganda on the Internet. The objective of this repression is to seek support for the filtering, surveillance, deterrence, and self-censorship of content.

As more and more young Iranians access the Internet, they are becoming more aware of foreign and Iranian culture, different political norms and values, and the diverse conditions of other people around the world.

When on September 16, 2022, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini died in the custody of vice police last year, after being arrested for allegedly wearing a headscarf loosely, years of pent-up anger and resentment erupted in the big day. Protesters' demands for the abolition of compulsory hijab quickly turned into a call for regime change. In addition, this event granted a liberalization of the speech of the Iranian people as well as international visibility. Indeed, it was not only citizen mobilizations that took place only in Iran but also in the whole world taking all the space of the international public sphere whether in the street or on social networks giving global visibility on the actions of the Iranian regime.

Right after Mahsa Amini's funeral, several hundred people gather. Subsequently, several videos and images were posted on Twitter to challenge the international community. Despite the risk that the Iranians incur in disclosing the parrhesia (the truth), they take this courage in order to improve their political conditions so far always under a quasi-authoritarian and repressive regime. The massive protest after the death of Mahsa Amni has gradually turned into a multitude of civil

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p.81.

disobedience initiatives by Iranians, especially on social networks like TikTok or Twitter. A strategy that responds to the brutal government and police repression, which has claimed more than five hundred dead in five months since the beginning of the movement and more than 120,000 people have been arrested, of whom at least 137 have been executed for participating in the demonstrations (UN). The Iranian interpreter and soldier Ryma Sheermohammadi, for her part, believes that this movement has made it possible to "awaken the conscience of Iranians".

The spread of the Internet in Iran does not necessarily mean the end of authoritarian rule as the Iranian government mainly focuses on using the Internet for propaganda purposes. The Internet is not an inherently democratizing and emancipating technology. Indeed, in many authoritarian regimes like Iran have transferred a long and successful history of control over information and communication technologies to effective control of the Internet with reactive strategies ranging from access restriction to promoting self-censorship. Authoritarian regimes can successfully limit the potential challenges posed by various types of Internet use directed at the public sphere in order to consolidate state power. Nonetheless, authoritarian regimes will need to continually adapt their control measures if they are to effectively counter the challenges of future variations in these technologies. Prospects for greater Internet diffusion in Iran remain uncertain and how authoritarian states can counter the many challenges posed by Internet development. There are many differences in the history and current state of the Internet in each state as well as in the reactive strategies of various regimes to control Internet use and development.

We can conclude from this focus on Iran that parrhesia is still limited under an authoritarian regime despite the evolution of digital and communication means. Its influence remains very restricted and limited, and still a very slow process in the sense that the risk of speaking remains more dangerous and riskier in this type of regime. In other words, civil disobedience can be implemented in a country where real reform is possible and where the power in place tolerates peaceful dissent. In a country like Iran, where the regime is repressive, civil disobedience does not lead to the overthrow of the regime. The regime responds with the most violent repression to any demonstration threatening to overthrow it. This is evident from the history of the regime, marked by the violent repression of dissent.

### **Chapter 3 - The Impact of the parrhesia through social media**

In this chapter, we will identify major citizen mobilization events where the participation and use of parrhesia as an act of speech within the connected public sphere have been influential on state policy. This section will focus in particular on the use of parrhesia through new digital tools such as social networks, which have been at the heart of many mobilizations around the world, and on their activist emergence, notably through the first major events on the issue, the Arab Springs in the Middle East. We will develop the various impacts and limits that can emerge from these connected civil movements, in order to then analyse and focus our research on the possible political influence they can have on the authorities or governments as civilians. Initially, our research will focus on the impact of connected protests around the world, and the beginnings of the success of the influence of social networks on popular mobilizations. The first major event in this form of civil discourse, the "Arab Spring", will be analysed. Then, in the final section, we'll conclude with an analysis of two different recent cases where civil society has made a big impact with regard to human rights with the situation of repression of the Uighur community by China, and then in the political influence of their country as well as the population with the case of the Gilets Jaunes protests in France.

#### *3.1. The impact of connected protest:*

##### *3.1.1. Focus on Zeynep Tufekci's works:*

Since the Arab Spring, numerous popular movements have erupted around the world, using social networks as a tool for protest. The uprisings against dictatorial Arab regimes at the start of the decade were initially dubbed the 'Facebook revolutions' by the press, as its use as a political tool appeared to be a novelty within the political sphere. Several years after this event, other countries made use of it, notably those under dictatorial regimes. A multitude of popular revolts and mass protests spread across all continents, making use of these new digital tools.

Anthropologist Alain Bertho describes them as an 'uprising of the living'. At the turn of the century, a break occurred in the political dialogue between the population and the powers that be, breaking the traditional implicit political and democratic pact in which the powers that be can no longer be deaf to the people. Although these movements are not identical in their context, they do have some similarities: they are civil mobilizations that often put their lives at stake in the face of violent repression, to highlight the urgency of the political situation in their country. They often

share a common demand for democracy. Digital technologies play a central role in these revolts, alerting and informing public opinion, denouncing violence, and making demands on an international scale. These tools are a new way of informing and alerting civilians to political malfunctions, as they have generally not had the opportunity to inform on their own scale until the emergence of these digital tools.

Zeynep Tufekci's book, *Twitter et les Gaz Lacrymogènes* (2019), proves important on this subject. In it, the truculent American researcher and professor at the University of North Carolina trace the process of digital civil mobilization. Her research focuses on understanding the particularities of social movements in the Internet age. First of all, Zeynep Tufekci describes the first characteristic of these networked movements as their ability to amplify the logic of political homophily, i.e. social dynamics that bring people together based on shared ideas. We saw earlier in our research that one of the obstacles to the act of parrhesia could be that an opinion expressed is not shared or is only influential if it is shared by a dense group. Indeed, the Internet enables people who are not necessarily part of a political organization, trade union, association, etc., to find online those with whom they share an affinity, an opinion, a social representation, or an opinion on a situation, and then to be able to exchange and act together.

This process of online political socialization quickly leads to actions decided and implemented by connected individuals without any form of prior organization or coordination. The emblematic and representative example on this subject is the Gilets Jaunes mobilization in France. According to Zeynep Tufekci, this facilitation of aggregation by digital tools of a multitude of individuals based on shared demands or anger explains this sudden new irruption of movements that can then gather up to thousands of people in record time. Before the emergence of the Internet, for example during the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s, the author recalls that in the pre-Internet era, social movements took years to culminate in such demonstrations. Another difference that can be noted in connected social movements, the researcher calls the principle of adhocacy, i.e. decision-making is not done as in traditional social movements, i.e. with pre-established procedures and elected leaders. Instead, they are based on an ad hoc logic, based on the punctual availability of movement members and their will expressed and coordinated in real-time via digital social networks. In this context, the example of the Gilets Jaunes is still well represented in the sense that their decision-making procedures were pronounced in Facebook votes.

What's more, the strength of these movements is also their weakness, as Zeynep Tufekci points out. Indeed, being able to rapidly set in motion this type of networked mobilization on a massive scale can deprive them, for example, of the long experience needed to set up decision-making processes and the ability to respond to repression, for example. As we have already seen, parrhesia can only be influential if it is produced by someone with the necessary knowledge. In this context, the consequences for social movements can be a deadlock in which they no longer know what to do other than to act, without being able to modify their actions, or translate their mobilization into concrete demands and political pressure capable of pushing those in power to change. Another obstacle to these digital mobilizations could be the lack of a structure capable of producing legitimate representations, resulting in a de facto representation by the most popular people on social networks representing these movements.

Another weakness that could be analysed for social movements is their dependence on digital platforms to draw public attention to the causes they defend. This situation could make them vulnerable in the sense that the political power they oppose could use this weakness against them. However, relying on the Internet to inform public opinion and coordinate actions is still an effective tactic. Even if this dependence forces movements to conform to the affordances of the platforms. For example, during the Gilets Jaunes social movements in France, Facebook's recent algorithm change may have enabled them to multiply live videos in order to disseminate alternative images to those broadcasts in the media with the greatest possible impact. On the other hand, social movements' dependence on the Internet exposes them to the risk of censorship. In an article by Mediacités, we saw that Facebook had censored numerous activist pages without explanation<sup>63</sup>.

Social movements attempt to mobilize citizens into action in order to bring about change and political participatory influence. On the other hand, the political powers that be aimed to demobilize this new form of opinion in order to maintain the established order, particularly in dictatorial movements. For Zeynep Tufekci, the state has the power to discredit a social movement in the eyes of public opinion, even through the use of communications media.

Zeynep Tufekci's book offers a new vision of this new digital public space, in which new forms of 'connected' civil movements are also emerging. A field that is still complex and vulnerable to manipulation of all kinds, but also more open to a potentially emancipatory concept.

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<sup>63</sup> Lopez.L (2019, September 25). *Cette gauche radicale et locale mise à l'index sur Facebook*. Mediacités. [Cette gauche radicale et locale mise à l'index sur Facebook \(mediacites.fr\)](https://www.mediacites.fr/this-left-radical-and-local-is-indexed-on-facebook)

### 3.1.2. *The beginnings of the Arab Spring:*

In 2011, as the first uprisings of the Arab Spring shook the world, the Internet opens up new possibilities for dissidents. The year 2011 seemed to herald the dawn of a new era in a transformed communications landscape. By this time, the process by which people were being disenfranchised had been completed, with thousands of people in these countries tweeting, streaming, and reporting on the situation on the ground via social media.

The term Arab Spring comes from the wave of protests and revolutions that swept across Europe in 1848, dubbed the People's Spring, which was attributed in particular to the emergence of the written press and the telegraph, but also to the many people carrying leaflets and manifestos. All this took on greater importance with the arrival of the Internet. Social movements are taking on a new scope of intervention in the public sphere, with social networks becoming a means of exposing to the public an injustice that needs to be redressed or a change that needs to be made<sup>64</sup>.

Activists can act as catalysts for wider audiences to be mobilized, or to make a significant impact through social networks. As mentioned earlier, parrhesia is effective if it is carried out by a large number of participants. Through the presence of social movements on the Internet, it also shares a great deal of knowledge with those who have no particular political experience and are not often in contact with political dissidents. Good knowledge of the subject is also an important factor in the effectiveness of parrhesia.

Indeed, for decades, the authoritarian states of Egypt, Tunisia, and other countries in the Arab world have implemented strict censorship and control of the media, which is the most powerful means of dissemination and communication within society. As a result, the public sphere is padlocked, controlled, and censored. Digital technologies have turned this situation on its head. In 2009, Facebook launched its Arabic version and extended its coverage to the digital population. Its strength lies in the fact that it could not be closed down as easily as a site reserved for activists. This social network enabled the start of protests in North Africa and the Middle East, starting with Tunisia. In 2009, at the time of the strikes and demonstrations in Gafsa, Facebook counted just 28,000 registered users in Tunisia<sup>65</sup>, but by the end of 2010, the number of registered Tunisians had reached two million. The community of Tunisian bloggers is also booming, all fighting against the repression exercised by the regime.

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<sup>64</sup> Fraser. N. (1990). *Rethinking the Public Sphere*. *Social Text*. No. 25/26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>

<sup>65</sup> Al-Gasimi. J. (2008, September 3). *Ben Ali Rescues Facebook from Censorship*. Middle East.



In 2011, the regime of President Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) did not immediately crack down on online media. At the time, governments, including Mubarak's, had a naïve view of the Internet's influence and didn't take seriously acts of "online" activism, which at the time were considered harmless. Online political activity was called 'slacktivism'<sup>66</sup>. In his book *The Net Delusion*<sup>67</sup>, Belarusian-American researcher Evgeny Morozov argues that slacktivism distracts people from productive activism. However, most individuals who become activists use social networks as a means of interacting with previous and personal dissident ideas, whether online or offline. And, as such, are among the most effective spaces in which to push someone toward activism<sup>68</sup>.

The early days of Internet activism were marked by governments' ignorance of these new digital tools, which were then described as politically inoffensive. Yet the Internet is an area of economic activity and development, so much so that some activists decide to set up businesses in order to hide their political activism from the authorities<sup>69</sup>. Thanks to this 'blindness' on the part of the authorities, political activists in many countries, including Egypt, have been able to express themselves online with relative freedom. Admittedly, repression and censorship are still in place in some regimes that repress online conversations. However, since the Arab Spring, regimes have recognized that a connected public sphere, free to express itself, threatens political control. The political Internet during this period not only published political essays but also exposed the actions of governments by transmitting images and videos as evidence of their free speech. What's more, Facebook changed this landscape by opening up the connected public sphere to the masses. Tunisia's former president, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, made a furtive attempt to ban Facebook, but this backfired as large numbers of Tunisians used the platform, making it difficult to ban. As a result, the platform has become a political dilemma for authoritarian governments.

In 2010, Khaled Said was brutally tortured and killed by the Egyptian police for a minor offense, with no real cause. The police were able to act with impunity. A relative took a photograph of his butchered face, which went viral on the Egyptian Internet. Wael Ghonim, an Egyptian working for Google and residing in the United Arab Emirates, was outraged, as were other Egyptians, and later created a Facebook page called "*We Are Khaled Said*" to express his outrage. The page quickly gained an ever-growing following and became the preferred space in Egypt for debating

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<sup>66</sup> Le slacktivism est un mot-valise développé par Dwight Ozard et Fred Clark en 1995 pour désigner l'activisme dit paresseux (*slacker* pour fainéant), une forme de militantisme purement numérique.

<sup>67</sup> Morozov. E. (2011). *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York Public Affairs.

<sup>68</sup> McAdam. D. and Paulsen. R. (1993). *Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism*. American Journal of Sociology. No.99.3, p. 640-667. [mcadampaulsen.pdf \(ucla.edu\)](http://mcadampaulsen.pdf(ucla.edu))

<sup>69</sup> Tufekci. Z. (2019). *Twitter et les Gaz Lacrymogènes*, C&F éditions. p. 64.

dissident political ideas. This event illustrates the political potential of the Internet. It was one of the precursors of Internet activism in the Middle East. After the fall of Ben Ali, this page became even more animated, with thousands of Egyptians debating in a bid to democratize the country. Following the success of this page, Wael Ghonim later created a Facebook event inviting the Egyptian population to come to Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011, unaware that this event would lead to the ousting of Mubarak. Instead of a small group of around a hundred protesters, the Facebook event brought together thousands of people who were not necessarily highly politicized or convinced activists. In 2011, social networking took a new turn and became politically active. The crowd of demonstrators became large enough to disturb the authorities, especially with the presence of digital cameras and internet connections. As a result, the authorities could not respond brutally to the demonstrators, risking unfortunate consequences for the regime, because with these digital tools, the demonstrators had the power to quickly share what was happening during the protest with a large number of people. The crowd in Tahrir Square thus became powerful, firstly because of the sheer number of people present, but also because it was able to display its opinions to the whole of Egypt and the whole world via digital networks.

The connected digital public sphere helps individuals reveal their political preferences and opinions and discover other like-minded people. This then shows that they are not the only ones dissatisfied with a political fact. These networks contribute to both individual and collective action. Given the pluralistic ignorance of certain repressive regimes at the time, technology poses a major threat to them. Even in the presence or absence of a repressive regime, there will always be a societal influence thanks on this sense of belonging. What's more, these connected digital networks keep the population informed, enabling them to share their opinions more widely. This explains, for example, why a country like China spends vast sums of money (e.g. Chapter 2) to crack down on the Internet because one free blogger can quickly become a hundred or thousands. This is what happened in Egypt, which led to the Arab Spring uprising, thanks to just one Facebook page.

Another case in point is Turkey, with its Kurds. The Kurds are a minority group living in southeastern Turkey and have long been denied official recognition and linguistic rights. The "Kurdish question" has always been a sensitive issue in Turkey, rooted in conflict. Allegations of widespread violence against Kurds began to circulate. However, under the influence of government censorship, which did not allow any criticism to go unchallenged at the risk of torture or execution, few Turks heard anything about it. In 2011, all hell broke loose with one journalist, Serdar Akinan. He decides to take a flight to the Kurdish region. On arrival, he discovers a procession of coffins winding their way down a hill. Moved by this image, he took out his iPhone

and took a photo, which he posted on the social networks Instagram, which had been created two years earlier, and Twitter, which had been in existence for around five years. With this act, he challenged the Turkish government's censorship of the Kurdish massacre in Roboski after the Turkish army bombed a group of Kurdish civilians on December 28, 2011, killing 34 innocent people. The images subsequently went viral, notably on Twitter, and triggered a government crisis.

Another obstacle to censorship is the spread of false information. Indeed, the fact that everyone can express themselves on the Internet is not necessarily an advantage, particularly in a country where the media, and especially the news reporter, are under control. This makes it much more difficult to find 'the truth from the falsehood'. That's what the 140journos website and Twitter account set out to remedy. 140journos is a citizen journalism collective and became one of the most reliable sources during the Gezi protests. The group of volunteer journalists started going to events, particularly important political trials that were not mentioned in the general press. They covered these events by tweeting live from the courtroom<sup>70</sup>, and were often the only journalists in the room after the judge had been fired. Indeed, young journalists with their telephones seemed harmless to them during this period. Their first type of journalistic action was to relay information from where they were, which limited their scope for relaying live information. Secondly, they also decided to pick up information relayed by social media users, verify it afterward, and publish it on their own news feeds. Using their notoriety to share free information in the public sphere.

This information system was also used in Tunisia at the start of the Arab Spring as an intermediary in the public sphere. Both Tunisia and the outside media were in the dark about the events that were unfolding. The anti-censorship Tunisian activist group Nawaat formed a few years earlier, was collecting important videos during this period, which mass media around the world picked up to relay the information. Gathering journalism can be a real support for the public sphere in bringing in video content or images missing from the news, and also in distinguishing false information in order to best inform the population with the "truth" and bypass censorship. What's more, social networks have enabled instant interaction during protests, and these media are often the first to divulge news in the national public sphere. The 140journos collective has opened up a new way for political activists to interact in Turkey's connected public sphere. Other groups of young civil activists began to follow suit, for example, Istanbul University's 'Digital Troublemakers' round table.

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<sup>70</sup> Idem. p. 95.

During the Gezi protests in Turkey in May 2013, demonstrators were protesting against the destruction of Gezi Park during the urban renewal orchestrated by the Turkish government, notably Prime Minister Erdogan, to establish the construction of new buildings to improve the economic model and which awarded a large number of important contracts. The bulldozers threatened the destruction of Gezi Park, one of the last open spaces towards Taksim Square. The Prime Minister was notably involved in this project. Initially, only a few people went there to save Gezi, without much success. However, on May 30, 2013, the municipal police launched an attack on the protesters' tents, burning them and pepper-gassing the demonstrators. One image that attracted international attention was that of a woman dressed in a red dress being pepper-sprayed in the middle of the park<sup>71</sup>. This image went viral on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other digital networks, spreading the Gezi Park situation all over the social networks, whereas there was no news on the subject in the "classic" media such as television, evident with the media censorship present in the country. Eventually, the crowd of protesters began to have an impact, and as tens of thousands of people occupied Gezi Park, the police finally backed down. As a result, members of the demonstration met with representatives of the authorities, including the Prime Minister and members of the government, for a negotiation meeting to save Gezi Park.

We can see from these protest situations that the use of digital technologies has the power to quickly bring together large numbers of people and draw sustained attention to their demands. However, the success of these connected mobilizations depends in particular on the involvement and constant interaction required of protesters to ensure that the networks remain both functional and durable social and political structures. These networks keep the action going over time by involving activists from all over the world who, via social networks, take part in the protest movements of the moment, giving the reason for protest a scope that goes beyond the country's governments and political authorities. These protests cannot be described as a single entity, based on the governance of a single leader, because they don't have one. They present themselves as a multitude of components bearing a claim, to demand the adoption of new policies for democratization, or seek to draw attention to certain national political fractures within their country. Demonstrations are also spaces for self-expression, community belonging and reciprocal altruism, amplified by the use of social networks.

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<sup>71</sup> Williamson, L. (2013, June 5). *Woman in Red Sprayed with Teargas Becomes Symbol of Turkey Protests*. The Guardian. ['Woman in red' sprayed with teargas becomes symbol of Turkey protests | Turkey | The Guardian](#)

### 3.1.3. Impacts and limits:

In 2011, in the early years of the Arab Spring uprisings, social media were indeed at the root of movements more often referred to as "*Twitter revolutions*" or "*Facebook uprisings*".

However, it's the power of people, not technology, that creates these revolutions. It's people who make things happen. But do they act in the same way in this new technological context? Would the results have been the same without these digital tools? It would be difficult to determine causality here. Activists use these technologies for a variety of purposes, such as breaking censorship and making their opinions heard. It is considered that previous technologies would not have given them the same possibilities. Social media allow a certain influence and possible results of human action without representing a single, omnipotent actor.

If we return to Aristotle's schema, the driving cause is the act that brings about change, i.e. it best corresponds to the common meaning of 'cause'. First and foremost, the driving cause concerns the action and the people behind it. For example, those who take to the streets, post messages on social networks in favor of democracy, or to break censorship, or as a sign of protest in the face of repression, are the driving forces behind a movement. The driving cause focuses and concentrates on the ability to act.

As for the final cause, also known as the root cause, it concerns the objective that catalyses the events leading to a result. It represents the reason why activists join or contribute to a social movement, the political and democratic dissatisfactions that motivate them to engage in the parrhesian act and expose themselves to the risks that surround them. In the case of the Arab uprisings, through these technological means, they had a means of expressing themselves freely, but also of having a say in their national politics. This was the ultimate cause of the uprisings.

Social media provide a new power and influence in the political structure of a country, but also in the world, and enable its people to make their voices heard, even under a repressive regime. Social media offer the possibility of autonomous protest. There's no longer any question of appealing to a TV station or newspaper for permission to broadcast a video or piece of information to millions of people, which in most cases is an act reserved for the elite or under government control. Often referred to as 'technology is just a tool', they nevertheless offer a wide range of consequences and potential uses.

Historian Melvin Kranzberg refers to technology as a tool that "*is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.*"<sup>72</sup> We can conclude from this quote that technology is a tool that not only changes the landscape in which human social interactions take place but also alters the balance of power and influence between actors. It is certainly not the only factor in a given situation, but to ignore its role as a factor, or to assume that technology could just as easily be used to achieve any outcome, would be irrelevant.

The main question of this research, however, would be whether parrhesia can have a real impact through these new technological materials to influence policy. If we consider technology to be no more than a tool, then we would be rejecting the idea that technology can exercise real power in a given situation. The Arab Spring proved, however, that these technologies can have a multitude of impacts, such as optimizing the visibility of a violation of human rights or democracy, opening it up to the international arena, or facilitating the ability of activities to extend their influence. These seemingly insignificant interfaces can have a real influence, even just by pressing the 'like' button on a Facebook publication or 'retweeting' a Tweet on Twitter, they can represent significant repercussions on political movements. Technologies can change society in general by creating, influencing, and using these technological means.

A limit that could be analysed in this process would be Facebook's policy regarding the desire to compel or push people to use their "real name". Facebook's policy on usernames can be a real constraint for many movements and activists. Indeed, if we take the case of Wael Ghonim's Facebook page "*We are all Khaled Said*", Ghonim chose to remain anonymous as the page's administrator in order to avoid falling into the hands of the police. However, the choice of this name was also an activist perspective to raise the issue of Khaled Said's assassination by the authorities and to focus attention on political issues and not on himself. However, in November 2010, two months before the real uprising in Egypt, Facebook deactivated the page. It was immediately speculated that the government was at the center of this action for the purpose of censorship. Facebook later confirmed that it had taken this decision without pressure from the Egyptian government, but that the platform had deactivated the page because its owner had used a pseudonym instead of his real first name<sup>73</sup>, and that the use of a fictitious name represented a

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<sup>72</sup> Kranzberg, M. (1986). *Technology and History: Kranzberg's Laws*. Technology and Culture. No. 3, p.445.

<sup>73</sup> O'Brien, D. (2010, December 1). *Facebook gets caught in Egypt's Media Crackdown*. Committee to Protect Journalist. [Facebook gets caught up in Egypt's media crackdown - Committee to Protect Journalists \(cpj.org\)](http://cpj.org)

violation of its terms of use and led to the page's deletion. Under this policy, Facebook subsequently censored one of Egypt's most important political gathering places.

The international human rights community subsequently lobbied Facebook to reverse its decision. And, in the end, the page was reactivated, in particular after the act of an Egyptian woman living abroad who offered to link the page to her real name when she risked permanent exile from her native country. However, without her act, the page would probably not have been reactivated. This policy is very restrictive. The activities are not ordinary users of social media, and in some cases, people who campaign and express their opinions on social networks are generally more exposed and their lives and those of their families may be at risk. This increases the vulnerability of free speech, with people expressing their opinions on social networks even more at risk of being directly targeted, particularly under repressive regimes.

In addition, Facebook has other moderation policies, which are to remove publications and pages linked to any violence, such as terrorism, pedophilia, nudity... This can potentially prevent and limit the circulation of certain publications by journalists and activities. For example, in the case of Turkey's internet conflict with the Kurds. In 2012, a leaked document from Facebook's monitoring team showed that Facebook had ordered its employees to ban "*any content supporting the PKK*<sup>74</sup> or related to the PKK and lacking context" or "*supporting or showing the founder of the PKK currently in prison*"<sup>75</sup> . A possible explanation for this decision could be the massive reporting of PKK-related publications and pages by Turks featuring images of demonstrations or other political events using Facebook's moderation mechanism.

The connected public sphere has many advantages, but it does not remain an open, uniform space without obstacles or structures. Indeed, sometimes the regulators of social media platforms are powerful enough to have the right to block content as they see fit. They can choose their regulatory policy unilaterally, unlike other mass media. Their processes will filter and prioritize content, which can have desirable effects on social movements.

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<sup>74</sup> Kurdistan Workers' Party.

<sup>75</sup> Chen. A. (2012, February 16). *Inside Facebook's Outsourced Anti-Porn and Gore Brigade, Where Camel Toes Are More Offensive than Crushed Heads*. Gawker. [Inside Facebook's Outsourced Anti-Porn and Gore Brigade, Where 'Camel Toes' are More Offensive Than 'Crushed Heads' \(gawker.com\)](http://www.gawker.com/2012/02/16/inside-facebook-s-outsourced-anti-porn-and-gore-brigade-where-camel-toes-are-more-offensive-than-crushed-heads/)

But where does the power of social movements come from? What political influence can they hope to wield? Indeed, we can deduce that the strength of social movements lies in their ability to master discourse (parrhesia), drive electoral or institutional change, and upset the status quo. Charles Tilly calls the capacity of social movements WUNC e.g. Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment<sup>76</sup>. We can see here that capacity encompasses different characteristics.

Through discourse, participants can bring about various changes. Virtually all movements must first be able to convince others that the issues they are addressing are important causes to campaign for and defend, but also to demonstrate that these are legitimate causes to be defended. Indeed, the results depend in part on the legitimacy accorded to protesters. During the Arab Spring in 2011, a few thousand people were able to trigger a chain of events, and the powers that be were ready to interpret these protests as a signal of real capacity requiring a reaction on their part. The activities of the Arab Spring can be seen as the pioneers of social media. Thanks to their blogs and publications on social networks, they were able to free their speech, and arouse national and international interest. Digital tools have greatly affected social movements, empowering them and giving them new ways of using their parrhesia.

### *3.2. A real springboard for human rights and representation:*

#### *3.2.1. Parrhesia and social networks:*

##### *3.2.1.1. The #MeToo movement:*

The era of social networks has been a springboard for the liberation of speech and truth, particularly for social movements. It has brought together a large number of people to interact and act on injustice in the instantaneous to a wide audience.

One of the most popular 'connected' movements will surely be the Me Too hashtag. The movement began with founder and activist Tarana Burke, who used the phrase in 2006 to raise awareness of violence and abuse against women. But it wasn't until eleven years later, in 2017, that the expression found its primary social platform, which would be Twitter. American actress Alyssa Milano's tweet on October 15, 2017, would launch the beginning of the movement and encourage other women to reuse the hashtag when talking about their experiences of sexual

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<sup>76</sup> Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768-2004*, Routledge, 2004.



harassment and assault. The movement quickly gains momentum on the new social platform and notably becomes a catalyst for global awareness.

The Me Too social movement has encouraged women to speak out and express themselves with the help of social networks about sexual violence. This movement gained momentum, particularly around the time of the Harvey Weinstein affair in 2017, an influential figure in the American film industry. The New Yorker and The New York Times reported a dozen of women in October 2017 who accused Weinstein of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or rape. In the wake of these accusations, more came to light, and Harvey Weinstein was eventually fired from his company, Weinstein Company, and excluded from other professional associations. Following this affair, Harvey Weinstein was sentenced in 2020 to 23 years in prison for rape and sexual assault of two women.

The particularity of this movement will be that it will not take place in the streets and will not create large-scale demonstrations in the streets. #MeToo marks a turning point, as it's the first major popular mobilization to take place mainly on social networks. It will have an impact on real life, and codes will be shaken up only by the use of liberated speech via digital tools. By using speech to reveal the truth about a large number of women, this movement has shaken up a large number of societal codes that oppress women and aims to change societal norms over the long term. The mobilization on social networks is so large and influential that the pressure of the movement will have an impact on politics and industry. The social movement that is Me Too is forcing politicians to look at social networks, and therefore everyone's word, and become aware of injustices and violations that impact many women in society. In terms of economic impact, the most notable example is the 16% fall in the Wynn Resort group after the CEO was accused of sexual harassment and the 21% fall in the Guess group for the same reasons<sup>77</sup>. These examples show us that this social movement can have many impacts on societies, and in particular on companies and politicians.

Parrhesia is an expression of the truth to all through speech, and the truth disturbs because it shows an embarrassing reality that many know about, but fear reprisals and the risks that follow. The allegations that followed the Me Too movement were initially greeted with a certain hostility, precisely because they revealed an embarrassing reality that affected the vast majority of women

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<sup>77</sup> Roches. F. (2022, June 1). *Gilets Jaunes, #Me Too : l'impact des réseaux sociaux sur les manifestations*. Polytechniques Insights, la revue de l'institut polytechnique Paris. [Gilets jaunes, #MeToo : l'impact des réseaux sociaux sur les manifestations \(polytechnique-insights.com\)](https://polytechnique-insights.com/fr/gilets-jaunes-me-too-l-impact-des-reseaux-sociaux-sur-les-manifestations)

around the world. What's more, it also revealed the lack of protection and policy towards women the world over. The Me Too movement shone a spotlight on the behavior and values of certain industries and society as a whole and also freed victims to speak out on the subject. It triggered an awareness of the systematic scale of sexist and sexual violence and the cracks in women's rights and made it visible thanks to women speaking out via social networks. This was followed by a series of legislative developments and actions on the ground to enable and prevent such violence at both individual and institutional levels, in order to improve women's rights and effectively punish the perpetrators of such violations.

Another point that enhances parrhesia through this movement is that the #MeToo hashtag has managed to reach all social circles. With this social movement, she is largely taking into account the concerns of women from all classes, whether elitist or working-class. This liberalization of speech thanks to social networks has raised awareness of what women can fall victim to in their daily lives. A new door is opening for feminism, which is taking on a new institutional and political scope.

The movement that began in the United States has since spread internationally. It mobilizes a large number of women, without the support of a specific activist organization, and opens up the debate in private and public spaces, enabling women to talk about the assaults they have suffered. The process can take place in private as well as in the workplace or at university. Testimonies are multiplying, denouncing a pervasive atmosphere of aggression in international society. The #Me Too hashtag has been circulated in at least 85 countries<sup>78</sup>.

Here are just a few examples of the impact of this social movement:

### *Europe*

In April 2023, the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality voted 28 in favor and 5 against, underlining the fact that EU governments and institutions have been keen to make changes to combat sexual violence and support victims since the Me Too movement went viral<sup>79</sup>. The Members of the European Parliament called for a common European

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<sup>78</sup> Strum. L. (2017, October 25). *Twitter chat What #Me Too says about sexual abuse in society*. PBS NewsHour. [Twitter chat: What #MeToo says about sexual abuse in society | PBS NewsHour](#)

<sup>79</sup> Communiqué de presse Parlement européen. (2023, April 25). *Me Too : les députés demandent plus de mesures contre le harcèlement sexuel dans l'UE*. Actualité Parlement européen. [MeToo: les députés demandent plus de mesures contre le harcèlement sexuel | Actualité | Parlement européen \(europa.eu\)](#)

definition of sexual violence and harassment, in order to remedy the differences between member states in terms of women's rights and, in particular, victim protection.

### *East Asia*

In East Asia, mobilization through the Me Too movement has led to improvements in the body of legislation. In South Korea, for example, leading figures in politics, education, sport, culture, and the Catholic Church were forced to apologize and resign their positions. Several of these men were prosecuted and sentenced to two years in prison<sup>80</sup>. But these institutional changes did not call into question the political system in these countries. In Japan, there is no law explicitly prohibiting sexual harassment. One of the only notable changes in Japan after the Me Too movement was the revision of the Penal Code, which increased the penalty for rape from 3 to 5 years. As for China, 2018 saw a revision of the Chinese Civil Code. In 2020, the Chinese government will pass a new law codifying it. What's more, in the political context of certain countries, change is difficult to bring about by freeing women's speech, as it is still impossible to denounce politicians under penalty of having their words systematically censored and repressed by the government, often followed by arrests or suspension of the use of social networks.

Take, for example, the Peng Shuai affair. On November 2, 2021, the Chinese tennis player published a long message on the Chinese social network Weibo describing a forced sexual relationship as well as a toxic sentimental relationship with a former Chinese leader, Zhang Gaoli, before and after he assumed high office in 2018. Following this publication, Peng Shuai disappeared for over two weeks. Following pressure from world tennis personalities, the UN, and several countries, Chinese media aimed at foreign audiences began to publish statements, photographs, and videos relating to the tennis player. On November 17, 2021, the CGTN television channel published a screenshot of an English-language e-mail attributed to Peng Shuai stating that the allegations of sexual assault were false, leaving the international community with no answer as to the truth of the story. As a result, however, China has been suspended for 16 months from women's tennis tournaments in China by the president of the WTA (Women's Tennis Association) until Peng Shuai "*is allowed to communicate freely*". Beijing subsequently reacted

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<sup>80</sup> Sang-Hun. C. (2019, January 23). *Ex-Prosecutor in South Korea #Me Too Case Is Sentenced to 2 years in Prison*. New York Times. [Ex-Prosecutor in South Korea #MeToo Case Is Sentenced to 2 Years in Prison - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/23/world/asia/south-korea-me-too-prosecutor.html)

by denouncing the "*politicization of sport*"<sup>81</sup>. On April 13, 2023, the WTA announced the resumption of tournaments in China for the month of September, acknowledging that no change in the situation had been established despite the repeated demand for an interview with tennis player Peng Shuai.

### *The Arab world*

In the Arab world, many voices have been raised against violence against women. Social networks have given a strong impact on mobilizations, and demonstrators are calling for tougher legislation on sexual violence against women. However, governments do not tolerate these demands in the political sphere. Unlike in other countries, feminist activists have to raise their voices in the face of a repressive regime that controls all free speech and access to parrhesia within their society. The reception of the Me Too movement in the countries of the Arab world is negative and shows that the social movement seems to be a privilege of free expression in some countries. The results of women's condition in some Arab countries are manifold, and the Me Too movement seems rather stifled. This has led to some changes, however.

In October 2019, in Tunisia, in the midst of an election campaign, a young girl posts photographs of a member of parliament whom she accuses of sexual harassment. After that, Tunisia subsequently passed a new law regarding violence against women. This was followed in 2020, in Egypt, by a number of testimonies from women accusing a high-society man of rape. In Tunisia, as in Egypt, this period saw a vast liberation of women's voices. Local hashtags such as #EnaZeda (me too) in Tunisia and #Masaktach (I will not be silent) in Morocco emerged on social networks alongside the Me Too movement<sup>82</sup>.

Digital technology plays an undeniable role in amplifying and consolidating the liberation of speech and new connected social movements. Among these examples, we can see that the liberation of speech, or parrhesia, is producing the possibility of change in the rights of women,

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<sup>81</sup> Unknown. (2023, April 14). *Disparition de Pen Shuai : la WTA relance les tournois en Chine, retour sur la chronologie de l'affaire*. Midi Libre. [Disparition de Peng Shuai : la WTA relance les tournois en Chine, retour sur la chronologie de l'affaire - midilibre.fr](https://www.midilibre.fr/2023/04/14/disparition-de-peng-shuai-la-wta-relance-les-tournois-en-chine-retour-sur-la-chronologie-de-l-affaire/)

<sup>82</sup> Chalandon. M. (2022, October 5). *De l'Egypte au Maroc, une révolution étouffée*. France Culture. [De l'Egypte au Maroc : une révolution étouffée : épisode • 3/4 du podcast #MeToo, cinq ans... et après ? \(radiofrance.fr\)](https://www.radiofrance.fr/fr/culture/20221005-de-l-egypte-au-maroc-une-revolution-etouffee-episode-3-4-du-podcast-me-too-cinq-ans-et-apres-?replay=1)

who are finding a wider public voice through social networks. The Me Too social movement has provided an impetus to shake things up by allowing victims of sexual assault to speak out and share their stories without necessarily having to reveal their identities. Publications on the networks often subsequently translate into political and legal action. In particular, the scale of the movement has had an impact on governments, forcing them to listen to victims and take action to improve the status of women's rights.

### *3.2.1.1. The « Gilets jaunes » movement:*

Another striking case of the impact of speech through digital tools that might be considered is the French "Gilets jaunes" movement (The Yellow Vest). This is a movement that grew out of individual online initiatives and ended up aggregating a great deal of support. Indeed, the way in which the Gilets jaunes have appropriated digital tools such as Facebook, Twitter, or even Youtube, shows that digital technology has taken on a whole new dimension and that it has become an indispensable tool for protest and the expression of speech. This social movement echoes similar ones such as the Outraged in Spain or Occupy Wall Street in the USA in 2011<sup>83</sup>.

The Gilets jaunes movement was a social movement that developed mainly between November 2018 and December 2019. The forms and types of mobilization are taking place mainly via social networks, with mobilizations taking place every Saturday. These protests have given social mobilizations a new lease of life in order to demonstrate their ability to make themselves heard. The Gilets jaunes process raises questions about the transformations of social mobilizations and their place through new digital tools in social and political debates.

Through this movement, researchers, including Anastasia Kavada<sup>84</sup>, have highlighted various socio-digital capacities such as: gathering audiences, organizing instant mobilizations, and generating different types of collective action mobilizing the commitment of participants. What's more, the forms of militancy observed online with the Gilets jaunes fall within a logic described

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<sup>83</sup> Occupy Wall Street is a peaceful social movement denouncing the abuses of financial capitalism. The protest movement began on September 17, 2011 on Wall Street in New York. The movement takes its inspiration from the Arab Spring and the Indignés, using social networks in particular during protests.

<sup>84</sup> Anastasia Kavada, *Creating the collective : social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor*, Taylor & Francis, Article, 29 of November 2014. [Full article: Creating the collective: social media, the Occupy Movement and its constitution as a collective actor \(tandfonline.com\)](https://doi.org/10.1080/10590489.2014.988888)

by the sociology of social movements inherited from Alain Touraine (1970-1980), which he defines as "*the organized collective conduct of a class actor struggling against his class adversary in a concrete collectivity*"<sup>85</sup>." As for the American political scientist Lance Bennett, he speaks of "*connected actions*" rather than "*collective actions*".<sup>86</sup>

The use of socio-digital social networks enables people to express their personal political and societal views individually, and often this can lead to the same collective engagement. Through the Gilets jaunes movement, we can see that political participation is increasingly associated with personal expressive content that is subsequently shared with others on social networks. Digital platforms have opened up a whole new opportunity to bear public witness and to find like-minded people, which subsequently often leads to the creation of new social movements or indeed protests.

The actions that result from these "*connected actions*" give rise to calls for new actions and the organization of several demonstrations across France. The Internet is a privileged space for the free circulation of ideas. The web brings an opening up of public space (Baptiste Kotras, 2018)<sup>87</sup>. The internet is an alternative public space allowing a space of free expression for those who feel rather powerless or invisible, particularly in political participation. Many of the Gilets jaunes say the elites have forgotten them, and the majority feel scorned by the authorities and the government. In the annual barometer of political confidence by Opinion Way for Cevipof, between December 2009 and December 2017, in question 18 (In your opinion, do political leaders, in general, care very much, fairly, little or not at all about what people like you think) 39% answered "not at all" and 44% "little" against 14% "fairly) and 2% "a lot", representing a total of 83% who think that political leaders don't care about the so-called working-class part of the French population.

Dismayed by the lack of visibility and coverage in the mainstream media, the Gilets jaunes decided to use the power of social networks to make themselves heard. The Gilets jaunes movement was also born out of a distrust of the traditional media. Journalists are then perceived as disconnected from the realities of the people. French sociologist Jean-Marie Charon

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<sup>85</sup> Starck. P. (2005). *Un nouveau mouvement social ?*. VST. No. 85, p.84. [Un nouveau mouvement social ? | Cairn.info](#)

<sup>86</sup> Bennett. L. and Segerbeg. A. (2012). *The Logic of Connective Actions*. Cambridge University Press. [The Logic of Connective Action \(cambridge.org\)](#)

<sup>87</sup> Delacroix. G. (2018, December 7). *Sur le web, les gilets jaunes apprennent à vitesse grand V*. Mediapart. [Sur le web, les «gilets jaunes» apprennent à vitesse grand V | Mediapart](#)

investigated where this rejection of journalists by the gilets jaunes came from. The result of this research is that the Gilets jaunes feel in relation to the traditional media as perceived as a "social outsider" and with the feeling of "being stigmatized, caricatured in the treatment that is given to events. Not to mention the fact that journalists are criticized for only taking an interest in areas like the suburbs when violence is flaring up."<sup>88</sup> With social networks, the Gilets jaunes have been able to share their demands and unite.

The result is a real 'war' on social networks between the demonstrators and the political leaders in power who accuse each other of manipulating public opinion. The Gilets jaunes changed the perception of social movements that became perceived as a negative image through media coverage and the "war of opinion" between protesters and political representatives. For example, the Interior Minister active during the protests in 2018 Christophe Castaner is accused by the opposition of amalgam and reducing the Gilets jaunes. Violence between the police and demonstrators is mounting. On December 5, 2018, Christophe Castaner, and the Director General of the National Police Eric Morvant foresees in response to the mobilizations of a possible intervention of the RAID<sup>89</sup>. In addition, the right to demonstrate was also discussed. The amount of the ticket for participation in a prohibited event was increased by €3.50, or €135. Indeed, social networks are often the source of some of the information in which a detail becomes a norm. These two sides oppose using one argument to invalidate the other with the use of digital. In the viral nature of publications and information on platforms then become a means of confronting truth instead of change and understanding. The various riot scenes during this period could give the impression of a civil war. The social networks have transformed the various facts into immediacy that prevents the remote setting. The movement of the Gilets jaunes by its novelty has partly upset the modes of representation of social movements as well as their perception.

A movement that was able to emerge thanks to Facebook's new algorithm that favors exchanges between friends within Facebook pages. Facebook played a central role in allowing them to coordinate their speeches, communicate, debate, and inform themselves. This new algorithm helps communication within this social movement and has also contributed to its emergence. The platform brought together a group of people who used it in a political way to unite their words. But how did social networks act on the words of the movement? Facebook is improving their way

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<sup>88</sup> Charon. J. M. (2022). Les Gilets Jaunes : Un défi journalistique, Edition Pantheon-Assas.

<sup>89</sup> Search, assistance, intervention, deterrence.

of communicating and demonstrating, but what impact and consequence on changing politics, and also making themselves heard by the government?

Indeed, this movement started with the increase in the price of fuel in France at the beginning of 2018, and seemed to concern the motorist user, but becomes more of a generality to become citizen claims. The place of the politicization of socio-digital practices must be seriously measured in this case because its importance is often diminished especially by the authorities and political figures. In the case of the Gilets jaunes, unlike, for example, other movements such as the Arab Spring, the media coverage was negative overall. This subsequently generated a strong conflict between the parties, which discredited the image and speech of the social movement. Media coverage has struggled to cover the phenomenon.

Regarding the political impact, the social and fiscal inequality issues advocated by the movement have not been able to achieve any real results from the government. However, there has been a real challenge to the political system. At the end of 2018, the French Presidency announced that the tax increase, one of the demands of the Gilets jaunes, will not be included in the next draft law for 2019. In particular, it opposes the reinstatement of the solidarity tax on wealth (ISF)<sup>90</sup>, a request from certain of them. Rather, the French government's response was perceived by international organizations as a disproportionate police response. Leaders of the Council of Europe and the UN have expressed their concern about police violence and respect for the right to demonstrate. From an economic point of view, the impact of the Gilets jaunes has been rather positive on French growth. INSEE estimated an overall cost of the move of 0.1 percentage point of GDP growth in the last quarter of 2018. In addition, President Emmanuelle Macron subsequently presented a set of economic and social emergency measures including an increase in the income of a SMIC<sup>91</sup> worker of 100 euros, an increase in the activity premium, social security and tax premiums, and the re-indexation of pensions below EUR 2000.

The first lockdown related to the Covid-19 pandemic will put a stop to the movement's actions, which will only recover sporadically at the end of the lockdowns but will have lost its influence and notoriety thereafter.

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<sup>90</sup> The Solidarity Wealth Tax (ISF) is a former French wealth tax paid by individuals and couples holding net taxable assets strictly in excess of a certain entry threshold on January 1 of the year in question. It was created in 1989, and replaced on January 1, 2018 by the impôt sur la fortune immobilière (IFI).

<sup>91</sup> The minimum wage of a minimum salary in France.



### 3.2.2. *A concept that drives change and representation:*

#### 3.2.2.1. *The situation of the Ouighours in China:*

Today, social networks are a well-established tool of protest in the political sphere. They help to amplify the discourse of citizens' movements. A major event produced on social networks showed that international mobilization can create a surge of solidarity in the face of a human rights violation, not only to highlight it but also to bring about far-reaching change within the political sphere. Their influence can encourage governments to take swift action at both national and international levels.

Indeed, as with the situation of the Uighurs. The Muslim minority community has been silenced and given little prominence by governors. Following the release of a report by the Australian organization ASPI, the situation became visible to all, on an international scale, and led to great indignation on the part of the international community. Faced with the governors' failure to react, citizens around the world decided to use social networks to highlight what is currently happening in Xinjiang.

At the start of 2020, the Australian organization ASPI identified 83 international brands that it believes are linked to the forced labor of Uighurs<sup>92</sup>, a Muslim community in northwest China's Xinjiang province that has been suffering from a policy of repression implemented by Beijing for several years. This Australian report accuses the Chinese government of organizing forced labor for the Uighur minority in subcontracting factories for major international brands. More than 80 multinationals are involved, particularly in the textile, new technologies and automotive sectors. The extremely well-documented report by the NGO ASPI details in its entirety the vast labor transfer program operated and created by the Chinese central government. Uighurs are sometimes taken directly to re-education camps. ASPI was able to identify a total of 27 factories, located in nine different provinces. The factories include forced-labor-like conditions, or subcontracting factories. The majority are part of the supply chains of major international brands such as Nike, Apple, Adidas, Lacoste, Mercedes and many others.

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<sup>92</sup> Xiuzhong Xu. V., Cave. D., Leibold. J., Munro. K. and Ruser. N. (2020, March 1). *Uyghurs for sale, Re-education, forced labour and surveillance beyond Xinjiang*. ASPI Canberra. [Uyghurs for sale | Australian Strategic Policy Institute | ASPI](#)

Between 2017 and 2019, the report has estimate that more than over 80 000 Uighurs were transferred to detention camps. They were transferred out of their home and out of Xinjiang to work inside these different factories across China. Even some of them were sent directly to detention camps. This estimated figure is even more likely to be much higher as a result of China's repressive policies. China has attracted international condemnation for its network of re-education camps. In particular, it targets Uighur forced labor as part of a state-sponsored labor transfer program that supplies the global supply chain.

Since 2017, more than a million Uighurs and members of other Turkish Muslim minorities have disappeared within this vast network of “*re-education camps*”<sup>93</sup>. Uighur workers find themselves in these camps in appalling working conditions. They can't go home for the vacations, their comings and goings are monitored by a police station equipped with facial recognition cameras, and in the evenings, they are forced to study Mandarin, sing the Chinese national anthem and attend 'patriotic' education classes. Some experts refer to this network as a systematic program of cultural genocide run by the Chinese government<sup>94</sup>. In these camps, detainees are forced to renounce their Muslim religion and culture and are also subjected to political indoctrination. In some cases, they are subjected to various acts of torture by the camp authorities<sup>95</sup>. A 2019 local government work report states that “*for each batch (of workers) trained, a job batch will be organized, and a batch will be transferred. Those who are to receive in-depth ideological education and remain in their jobs.*”<sup>96</sup>

The organization ASPI has noted in its report that “*only a small number of brands, including Adidas, Bosch and Panasonic, have indicated that they will end their relationships with these suppliers in 2020*”. These companies’ reactions were made possible by an international citizens’ reaction created by Member of the European Parliament Raphael Glucksmann. In the wake of the Australian report, Glucksmann decided to launch a campaign to challenge companies with the

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<sup>93</sup> Zenz. A. (2018, November 1). *Brainwashing, police guards, and coercive internment: evidence from Chinese government documents about the nature and extent of Xinjiang's “vocational training internment camps”*. Journal of Political Risk. ASPI, Canberra. [Cartographie des camps de « rééducation » du Xinjiang | Institut australien de politique stratégique | ASPI](#)

<sup>94</sup> Leibold. J. (2019, July 24). *Despite China's denials, its treatment of the Uyghurs should be called what it is: cultural genocide*. The Conversation. [Despite China's denials, its treatment of the Uyghurs should be called what it is: cultural genocide \(theconversation.com\)](#)

<sup>95</sup> Schmitz. R. (2018, November 13). *Ex-detainee describes torturer in China's Xinjiang re-education camp*. NPR. [Ex-Detainee Describes Torture In China's Xinjiang Re-Education Camp : NPR](#)

<sup>96</sup> Work report of the People's government of Moyu county in 2019. Moyu county government Network (2019, November 12). [GOVERNMENT WORK REPORT 2019 \(www.gov.cn\)](#)

massive help of Internet users. Since then, there have been several responses from brands. Lacoste, for example, has pledged to cease all business with Chinese suppliers and subcontractors involved in the exploitation of Uighur forced laborers. This major human rights violation has created an opinion movement born entirely of social networks.

The aim of this public campaign is to call on these brands to modify their production lines so that they no longer benefit from the enslavement of a people. This movement is representative of the influence that public opinion can have. Indeed, despite the fact that this repressive action against the Uighurs is a violation of human rights, foreign governments have not stepped up their pressure on the Chinese government to put an end to the use of forced labor and the detention of the Uighur population. In particular, there could have been pressure for China to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labour Convention (No. 1930), and the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention.<sup>97</sup>.

Through this mobilization on social networks, the public was able to influence these brands. Adidas, for example, initially assured the public that it had no direct links with companies involved in the forced labor of Uighurs. However, after heavy pressure from civilians on social networks, the brand stopped doing business with subcontractors involved in the exploitation of forced laborers.

This event underscores the importance of social networking as a way for citizens to have their say and gives a new influence that until now has been silent. Thousands of people around the world shared posts on their social networks - Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in particular - denouncing the repression of the Uighurs. The movement gained such momentum that the repression of the Uighurs was brought to light and led to concrete action being taken. On Instagram, from October 1, 2020, tens of thousands of users showed their solidarity with the Uighurs, notably by posting blue on their Instagram accounts.

This digital impact shows a new form of political engagement that can be produced by civilians in the form of mobilization or even civil disobedience to express disagreement or a need for change within society. Social networks bring to bear a public opinion that can be influenced by 'giants' much larger than themselves and influence these political and economic issues in order to push for change and respect for human rights. This phenomenon is in keeping with the logic of

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<sup>97</sup> The Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, entry into force 9 of November 2016. [Protocol P029 - Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/convenc/declaration/1930/protocol/2014)

agenda setting (M. McCombs, D. Shaw), the theory whereby the mass media bring specific issues to the forefront of public opinion, prioritizing them in terms of importance and urgency. The political sphere is thus obliged to turn its attention to these subjects and integrate them into public policy. In the case of the #FreeUyghurs digital civil movement, it's the social networks that are bringing this hitherto invisible issue to the fore. We're seeing a shift in the setting agenda that goes beyond the traditional media, as civil mobilization is born on social networks.

Parrhesia takes on another meaning here. Through social networks, civilians find it easier to express the 'truth' quickly and to a wider audience, and this parreshiate act is directly more influential in the political sphere as it makes it easier for civilians to express themselves and with minor fear to speak the truth to a superior such as the governors of the political sphere in order to establish a major change towards an act of human rights violence either within the state or to influence another producing this violation.

This digital strategy has produced more concrete results. In fact, the mobilization of Internet users has had concrete effects, firstly in terms of greater media sharing than the major mass media. After the publication of the API report, very few media such as press groups, digital media and audiovisual media shared the situation of the Uighurs, unlike Internet users on social networks. Finally, political leaders also took to the social networking craze to raise the Chinese government's policies in their speeches. In addition to public denunciations, European organizations seem intent on taking concrete action. The European Union has proposed that China send independent observers to Xinjiang, and the European Parliament has passed a resolution calling for targeted sanctions against leaders and companies that contribute to crimes against humanity. As for the United States, it has opted for economic sanctions, banning imports of several goods originating in Xinjiang. They have also drawn up a "blacklist" forcing companies such as Amazon to cease collaborating with dubious suppliers, under threat of economic reprisals.

This digital mobilization has used social networks as a real springboard to emerge in the public debate. Particularly in this context, because in the case of the Uighurs, they have been silenced. Through social networks, the international community is spreading the word that the Uighurs don't have because the Chinese regime oppresses them, leaving them no room for a possible parrhesia at the risk of torture and even death.

Until now, the Uighur community has suffered repression in silence for over a decade. Despite the Chinese government's determination to keep what is happening in the re-education camps under wraps, a great deal of evidence of persecution has come to light about their condition, which represents a serious breach of human rights. This silence was also prolonged by the non-reaction

of the governors. It is for this reason that new digital strategies are being put in place to bring justice to this persecuted Muslim Uyghur minority in China's Xinjiang province. With the creation of the hashtag #FreeUghurs to express support for the Uighur population, and the commitment of European MP Raphael Glucksmann to the recognition of the crime, silence has been broken.

As a result of the scale of the sharing on social networks and the international mobilization, this mobilization exercised entirely on speaking out and sharing posts on social networks, has had a real impact and influence on the international political sphere and particularly within the European Parliament. Since this public opinion campaign, the European Parliament has been working on a directive on the duty of care. At the end of 2022, the Council adopted its position on the corporate duty of care directive. The aim of this directive is to strengthen the protection of the environment and human rights within the European Union and beyond.

The Due Diligence Directive lays down rules on the obligations of large companies with regard to the actual and potential negative environmental and human rights impacts of their activities and those of their business partners. In particular, it sets out rules for sanctions and civil liability in the event of violations of these obligations. In particular, it requires companies to adopt a plan to ensure that their business model and strategy are compatible with the Paris Agreement<sup>98</sup>. Presented by the European Commission on February 23, 2022, the European Parliament is expected to adopt its amended version of the draft directive on sustainable corporate governance. The text will be validated by MEPs on June 1, 2023. The European directive on the duty of care will apply to all companies with more than 250 employees and sales of 40 million euros.

The draft directive approved by the European Parliament goes further than national legislation in that it will be much more precise, particularly on climate issues. Under the text adopted by parliament, victims will be able to take legal action. Companies will have to ensure that their subsidiaries, subcontractors and business partners respect social and environmental rights. The directive establishes a right of access to justice for victims of damage caused in the value chain of these companies. The draft directive creates a right to information for victims and allows them to be represented by associations such as NGOs or trade unions.

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<sup>98</sup> Conseil de l'UE. (2022, December 1). *Règles sur le devoir de vigilance pour les grandes entreprises : le Conseil adopte sa position*. Communiqué de presse. Conseil européen, Conseil de l'Union européenne. [Règles sur le devoir de vigilance pour les grandes entreprises: le Conseil adopte sa position - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/press-room/en/infobox-item-0)

This event shows that parrhesia can have an influence in the political sphere in order to revitalize democratization and uphold human rights on an international level. Through this situation, we can see that by speaking out en masse on social networks, civilians have the power to create change within the political sphere, particularly on issues like this under a repressive regime.

#### 3.2.2.2. *Greta Thunberg:*

It was on September 23, 2019, that Greta Thunberg, at just 16 years old, chastised world leaders at the United Nations Climate Action Summit, telling them that they weren't taking action against climate change and that "it's all wrong". This direct speech takes parrhesia's practice of speaking truth to power into the public sphere, especially when it's risky.

Thunberg's status as a child makes her outspokenness transgressive in the face of adult world leaders. Through the prism of parrhesia, she challenges citizens to wake up, to refuse what they previously accepted, or to accept what they previously refused<sup>99</sup>. Greta seizes on the Parrhesian discourse to urge her audience to make significant changes to avert climate catastrophe. Her call to action takes place within the framework of parrhesia through her performance and the ensuing global response to it within the framework of traditional democracy, which has often constrained and prevented people from speaking out and overcoming their fears of speaking boldly. Parrhesia, as a citizen's duty, takes on a new meaning in demonstrations to save the climate and push leaders to act more quickly and effectively in the face of the climate situation. In this register, children and adults alike are legitimized as citizens, and therefore potential parrhesiates. Greta Thunberg's performance shows how parrhesia can be used by everyone, as a civic duty but also as a civic demand on the part of those who are most often excluded from this role.

Her message has been heard and replayed in the media by millions of people around the world. Her actions on climate change have attracted attention and brought together thousands of like-minded people to denounce the lack of action by governments to address the consequences of climate change.

Greta Thunberg is a representation of parrhesia in the sense that, as an orator, she chooses not to remain silent, opting instead for candor rather than persuasion when speaking out. While in ancient Greece, parrhesia belonged more to those in positions of political power, this tradition of truth-telling is spoken by the majority of people, and is applicable to a variety of political, public

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<sup>99</sup> Foucault, M. (2001). *Fearless Speech*. Semiotext.

and social contexts. Today, parrhesia is a source of popular spokesmen who confront politicians as "impolite and disruptive". Thunberg rebukes those in power, transgressing and upsetting the norms of who is allowed to speak with a message that is hard to hear.

Indeed, parrhesia requires the speaker to challenge the powers that be. A complicated role for her when women, children and disabled people are generally excluded and ignored from decisions contributing to political decision-making.

The conventional position of excluding children from one's role as a citizen has been challenged by social policy professor Ruth Lister, who then examines what it means to be a citizen and what criteria of citizenship children can include. She compares the direct exclusion of children from politics and citizenship. Greta Thunberg speaks of parrhesia from the point of view of a part of the population that is under-represented, despite the fact that children make up a large proportion of the world's population today (27% in 2019, according to the United Nations' World Population Prospects<sup>100</sup>). Children are generally silenced and excluded from political decision-making. Parrhesia seems significant for them in the sense that, in order to make their voices heard, children have to transgress social norms by pushing back the obstacles they have to overcome in order to speak out.

Greta Thunberg disrupts by expressing a parrhesia with well-known statistical references to the threat of climate change. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, parrhesia is considered influential and effective if spoken by those with the knowledge and courage. Through Thunberg's various speeches, it's clear that she is an informed and courageous speaker to tell the truth as a representative of her community. Chastising the public is part of parrhesiate action, as she mentions when pressing the phrase "How dare you!" in order to push for climate action.

It will be heard by world leaders, climate scientists and members of the public. However, the overwhelming evidence of climate change and its rhetoric, and the social protests, will do little to spur world leaders into action. Thunberg would even call this response "a betrayal" after the publication of the UN group's latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) synthesis<sup>101</sup> on March 20, 2023.

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<sup>100</sup> United Nation. (2019). *World Population Prospect*. [World Population Prospects 2019 Highlights \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/world-population-prospects-2019-highlights)

<sup>101</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). [IPCC — Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/synthesis-report/)

## CONCLUSION

We've seen throughout history, particularly in ancient Greece, that parrhesia was a notion signifying access to discourse and the right for everyone to have access to the expression of discourse. For the Greek author Polybius, parrhesia was even part of an ideal form of democracy within a polis. The privilege of parrhesia did, however, take on a number of characteristics during this period, namely that it derived privilege from the status of nationality. This status allows the right of speech within a city. However, our research reveals a number of obstacles to this right of free speech, with certain constraints, such as the fact that civilians were sometimes reduced to silence by their masters or governors. In particular, sometimes because they are afraid of the repercussions and risks that their speech may engender, such as hurting someone, or the risks to themselves from their masters. The difference in status during this period already shows a constraint in the act of speaking freely, frankly and transparently, and silence is often forced upon the disciple. However, in the Greek tragedies, parrhesia remains an important character in representing a good citizen in being able to express freely what is an unjust act, and in being able to tell everyone about it.

For Michel Foucault, parrhesia is the obligation to speak the truth, to speak frankly and the power to say anything. In his research, he demonstrated that the notion of parrhesia was a good way of liberating people who had been silenced by the system throughout history. Parrhesia is above all an act that problematizes politics and the personalities that make it up. However, parrhesia can be a good attribute to awaken new reactions, to raise new discussions and debates, and to create crises in political practices, habits and institutions, so as to be able to represent everyone within a society.

For Michel Foucault, no power can be exercised without the presence of truth. This ideology has also been taken up by Raphael Glucksmann, a member of the European Parliament, who asserts that no politics can be just without the struggle and presence of truth within our democratic politics. Parrhesia is therefore just as important today for our democracies and for the fair and equal representation of our human rights. Parrhesia is an instrument for expressing opinion in the face of political indignation, as we saw in Chapter 3 following the various cases represented in this research. Indeed, power can terrify and immobilize a people in order to maintain order. Parrhesia symbolizes having the courage to revolt and express what seems unjust, with the aim of influencing one's opinion within the politics in place and changing it or making new adjustments in order to enhance democracy.



The power of truth can be highly influential and is necessary for the viability of democracy and human rights. Parrhesia plays an important role in taking action, but the parrhesiate must face up to a number of risks as a result. For this, the population needs access to a public sphere. The public sphere means being able to participate freely and actively in politics through their discourse. Forms of discourse for citizens are indispensable and undeniable to democracy, so that citizens can play an active role in it.

Social movements have proved to be a good way of sharing parrhesia and turning it into an influential movement by bringing together a certain number of people. It's true that it's impossible to get everyone to agree on the same idea, but ideological divergence remains an important feature of democracy. Nevertheless, parrhesia remains a notion sharing a common truth that affects and shocks the majority. Through civil movements, this notion should be seen as a complement to democracy. What's more, in the age of the Internet, parrhesia finds new sources of action and expression as new tools of expression, making it easier to divulge and share with a greater number of people, more quickly.

Even so, parrhesia finds it difficult to establish itself in authoritarian regimes. These regimes have shown certain obstacles to parrhesia and include greater risks than democratic governments. Access to the truth and its expression will be more compromised. Repressive technologies have used ICTs for repressive purposes in the action of hacking and controlling websites, emails and social networks in order to implant disinformation and maintain the order of their regime. However, the Internet, and in particular social networks, still represents a useful tool for divulging the truth even in a certain context where it may be restricted, and change may take longer to achieve. It can still be a means of informing nationally and internationally, of showing the acts of injustice produced by the government, and of gaining the support and influence of the international community by sharing parrhesia through social networks to create pressure on these repressive regimes.

In my opinion, the power of truth can be a real political weapon, whether in the face of democratic or authoritarian regimes. In the age of the Internet, parrhesia has been given a new lease of life by social movements. Everyone agrees that the exercise of seeking the truth in order to gain the attention of our governors in the expectation of change or to bring about a new aspect necessary to the democracy or democratization of a society or country. Truth, and therefore parrhesia, is a fundamental element of the democratic system. It plays a role in the institutions and effectiveness of government. Without truth, there can be no democracy. First and foremost, it enables governors to have an honest relationship with their electors, and with the rest of the population they govern.

But also, the truth expressed by citizens can be an asset to democracy, enhancing and improving it to establish a society with equal rights for all, and better governance and respect for human rights.

It has already been shown that revealing the truth through social networks represents an effective means for citizens to exercise influential power in order to get their governor to act politically both nationally and internationally. In the case of the Arab Springs or the Gilets jaunes movement. The expression of parrhesia leads people to gather in large numbers in order to make themselves heard and influence political decisions at their level. In the case of international influence, through social networks, citizens of a country living under a repressive regime or wanting to show the world a serious injustice, sharing it to the world through these digital tools has proven to be a fast and effective way to inform the world. We saw this in the case of the Uighurs. Mobilization by sharing a blue image on Twitter and Instagram and seeing the scale and number of mobilizers expressing their desire for political action to address the situation of the Uighurs was heard.

However, parrhesia must be limited so that it doesn't end up being used as Fake News or to manipulate public opinion. Above all, it must be a means for citizens to influence and participate in the politics of their country or even the international community.

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