



POWER2YOUTH

Youth Activism in Morocco: Exclusion, Agency and the Search for Inclusion

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Abstract

The existing literature on youth participation shows that there is a noticeable tendency of weak participation in formal politics among Moroccan youth. However, it does not tell us much about the alternative modes of youth engagement. During the past two decades, youth have been expressing their positions and views by occupying new spaces outside the formal sphere. They participate in marches, organize sit-ins and post their ideas on blogs. In other words, the youth "do politics in a different way," not mainly through the formal modes of political participation. This paper will first shed some light on the existing spaces of formal and informal political participation. Then, it will explore how the contextual realities shape the perceptions and meanings of the experience of "being young." The third section will analyse how the youth engage in politics and the factors that promote or inhibit their participation. Finally, the paper will discuss youth agency and transformative impact on society, specifically in relation to policies that are affecting them directly.

Keywords: Morocco | Youth | Arab Spring

INTRODUCTION

Since December 2010, the Middle East and North Africa region has been shaken by a wave of political unrest. The protest movements that took place throughout the region were largely led by the youth. The recent dynamic of change portrayed the image of a young generation who are eager to contribute to change in their countries. The Moroccan youth are no exception. Inspired by the events in Tunisia and Egypt, a group of online activists organized themselves in a movement known as February 20th, which called on Moroccans to take to the streets. The youth demanded greater democracy, freedom and social justice, showing their willingness to play a more active role in defining their future. The massive implication of the youth in protest movements is very much revealing of the limits of a previously held thesis which argued that youth in Morocco are depoliticized, uninvolved and apathetic (Bourqia et al. 1995). Rather than a loss of interest in politics, recent social mobilizations show a revival of interest in politics among this generation.

Thanks to the legal framework that has been established since 1962, the youth have the right to engage in public life through different channels. They have been able to be politically involved through a variety of conventional forms of political participation. Indeed, they have the right to vote, to run for elections and to adhere to or form a political party, an association

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or a union. Following the 2011 constitution, more spaces were created by the regime to provide ordinary citizens with channels to voice their opinions or to influence legislation and policies. These spaces are not youth-specific, but young people could benefit from them. The new constitution allowed the creation of the Consultative Council of Youth and Community Work (Art. 33), and introduced the principle of consultation with civil society organizations in designing, implementing and evaluating public policies (Art. 12).² Other constitutional provisions provide the means for citizens to influence legislation through the formulation of draft legislation or the presentation of petitions (Arts. 13 to 15). Following the 2011 legislative elections, the House of Representatives reserved 30 seats on the national list for young people.³

The extent of youth participation through these legally established forms has been rarely investigated by researchers. Empirical studies on Moroccan youth are limited in numbers and provide only partial answers about youth political attitudes, behaviours and perceptions of the institutional framework. The existing literature on youth participation shows that there is a noticeable tendency of weak participation in formal politics among Moroccan youth. For instance, findings from quantitative research conducted in the 1970s on students showed that despite their high level of politicization, the majority of respondents did not vote (Palmer and Nedelcovych 1984).⁴ The majority of students explained their electoral abstention by the lack of credibility of political parties and elections.

Studies on youth participation in the 1990s confirmed the tendency of low participation in formal politics. While the majority of young people continued to be interested in and informed about politics, youth were typically less active in political parties and trade unions (Bennani-Chraïbi 1994). These kinds of attitudes and perceptions are indicative of the disenchantment of the youth with some modes of political participation. However, they do not tell us much about alternative modes of youth engagement. During the past two decades, youth have expressed their positions and views by occupying new spaces outside the formal sphere. They participate in marches, organize sit-ins and post their ideas on blogs. In other words, the youth “do politics in a different way,” not mainly through the formal modes of political participation (Zerhouni 2009).

We contend that in order to understand youth participation, we need to look beyond the dichotomies that have thus far characterized the debate about political participation in Morocco and elsewhere. Rather than making a distinction between “active” and “passive,” “formal” and “informal” forms of participation, we propose to consider the interplay between these different modes of engagement. The formal and informal spheres should therefore not be thought of as mutually exclusive. The youth try to take advantage of existing formal spaces and/or create their own informal spaces to do politics differently. They are continuously and actively in search of new means to make their voice heard.

² Full text of the 2011 Constitution (in French) available in the WIPO website: <http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/fr/details.jsp?id=13535>.

³ According to the organic law issued in October 2011, the age group “young” is under 40 years old.

⁴ Indeed, only 25 percent of respondents had participated in the 1976 local elections and even fewer (3 percent) in the 1977 legislative elections.

As we try to examine youth agency and its transformative impact on society, it is important to take into account the various influences related to agency. The social, educational and cultural *milieux* may either reinforce or impede the potential of youth action and influence. The larger social and political environment in which the young people interact come into play and can influence their perceptions and modes of action. Studies about youth in Morocco have not paid much attention to the perceptions of youth regarding their own situation/problems, neither has there been any sustained attempt to “give them voice” on the issues that they are most concerned about. For example, how does a young Moroccan think about what it means to be young? How do the youth think about the constraining powers of societal norms? These are some of the questions that frame our study regarding youth participation and agency in Morocco.

In this paper, we will first shed some light on the existing spaces of formal and informal political participation. Then, we will explore how the contextual realities shape the perceptions and meanings of the experience of “being young.” In the third section, we will analyse how the youth engage in politics and the factors that promote or inhibit their participation. Finally, we will discuss youth agency and transformative impact on society, specifically in relation to policies that are affecting them directly.

Methodology

The qualitative survey conducted for this study is part of the ongoing project on “Power2Youth: Freedom, Dignity and Justice.” The data come from focus groups and interviews that were conducted between April and October 2015. Five focus groups were organized in four different cities: two in Rabat, one in Casablanca, one in Tangier and the last one in Marrakech. Because of financial constraints, we were not able to cover other cities. We believe that the geographical factor is very important to understand divergences and similarities in the views, behaviours, attitudes and perceptions of the youth in Morocco. The focus groups and interviews aimed at examining youth’s perceptions about their conditions, identifying factors that promote or limit the involvement and participation of young people in the political sphere, and analysing youth agency and youth’s transformative impact on society and more specifically on policies that are affecting youth directly.

The participants in this study belong to the 18-to-30 age group, with a few who were between 30 and 40 years old. To ensure gender balance and the inclusion of individuals who engage through a variety of formal and informal modes of participation, we used selective sampling. A total of 40 young people participated in the focus groups and 30 interviews were conducted. Our sample is composed of 25 young women and 45 young men. Participants in focus groups and interviewees were either university students or holders of a BA or an MA degree. Concerning youth employment, the majority of participants in focus groups seemed to have gained economic “autonomy” at least in terms of employment.

The youth in our sample have diverse backgrounds and engage through different organizations/initiatives, both formal and informal. Some of them are active in political parties such as the Islamist party of Justice and Development (*Parti de la Justice et du développement*, PJD), the Unified Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste unifié*, PSU), the Popular Movement (*Mouvement populaire*, MP), the Party of Independence (*Parti de l’Istiqlal*, PI) or the Socialist Union of

Popular Forces (*Union socialiste des forces populaires*, USFP). Some of our interviewees and participants in focus groups were active within religious movements such as *Al-Adl wa-Ihssan* (Justice and Charity), *Al-Islah wa-Tawhid* (Reform and Unity), the traditional Salafi current and the Soufi. Our sample also includes youth active through civil society organizations. Different associations were represented, such as the Moroccan Association of Unemployed Graduates (*Association des diplômés chômeurs du Maroc*), the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (*Association marocaine des droits humains*, AMDH), the Democratic Association of Women in Morocco (*Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc*, ADFM) and *Achouaala*. Besides human and women's rights associations, the youth engage through cultural, social and social entrepreneurship associations. Informal modes are very popular among the interviewees. Many of them are active through social media or by taking initiatives that aim at sensitizing youth and society about their rights.⁵

1. YOUTH MOBILIZATION: BEFORE AND AFTER THE 2011 UPRISINGS

Moroccan youth participate in the political sphere through a variety of formal and informal channels. In its first constitution, Morocco established the right to vote and to run in elections. Since that time, it has established the principles of individual liberties, freedom of expression, public gathering, forming associations, and belonging to a union or a political party. Moroccans also have a guaranteed right to strike. Since 1963, the regime has organized elections at both the local and the national level. Despite the existence of these established constitutional rights, however, the sphere of political participation was largely controlled and restricted during the first three decades of King Hassan II's rule. State violence was regularly used against youth activists within students unions and left-wing political parties, or because of their involvement in demonstrations.

With the coming to power of King Mohammed VI in 1999, the discourse about the importance of political participation became more pronounced. In a number of speeches, the new king called on Moroccans, especially the young people, to carry out their civic duties by voting. In 2003, the pool of voters and candidates was expanded and the voting age was lowered to eighteen from twenty-one. Following the 2011 wave of protests, the regime adopted a new constitution, and different laws which aimed at reinforcing youth participation in the political sphere were enacted.

It is therefore clear that both the legal and institutional frameworks provide youth in Morocco with spaces to participate in politics. Youth activism has been characterized by the combination or alternation between formal and informal modes of politics. The youth are active within formal organizations such as political parties, associations and trade unions. They mobilize in social and protest movements and are active through social media. They also take different initiatives in a variety of social and cultural fields.

⁵ For more details on the focus group participants see annex 1.

1.1 Youth, Political Parties and Unions

Morocco has had a multiparty system since its first constitution in 1962. The first political parties were created before or soon after independence. The Party of Independence (*Parti de l'Istiqlal*, PI, 1944) gained its strength and legitimacy during the colonial period. The party mobilized many young people who were active both at the level of leadership and within its rank-and-file supporters. As it was the case in other North African and Middle Eastern countries, the Moroccan youth engaged against the colonial power and in favour of establishing constitutional rule (Tripp 2013). The fragmentation of the PI gave rise in 1959 to the left-wing National Union of Popular Forces (*Union nationale des forces populaires*, UNFP), which was itself later displaced by the emergence of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (*Union socialiste des forces populaires*, USFP) in 1974. The bifurcation of political parties has gradually led to the creation of an assortment of pro-royalist political parties of various ideological stripes, such as the National Rally of Independents (*Rassemblement national des indépendants*, RNI, 1978) or the Constitutional Union (*Union constitutionnelle*, UC, 1983). This started to pave the way for the establishment of a fragmented partisan scene largely manipulated by and under the control of King Hassan II.

Over the years, the main political parties have gradually lost their credibility and have been subject to further fragmentation. In the 1990s, new political parties were created as a result of a split from existing political parties, such as the Front of Democratic Forces (*Front des forces démocratiques*), whose leading figures were members of the Party of Progress and Socialism (*Parti du progrès et du socialisme*, PPS). Other parties were created as a result of the integration of or fusion with existing political parties; such is the case for the PJD (1998). Since the ascendance to power of King Mohammed VI, there has been a growing tendency to create small political parties organized around issues related to environment, liberalism and Islamism. During the past 15 years, 23 political parties were created. Despite the 2006 party bill, Morocco continues to have a growing number of small political parties that are not necessarily based on competing "societal projects" but are rather the outcome of "personal projects" of an opportunistic elite aiming at taking advantage of their position as leaders of political parties to approach the inner circle of power (Maghraoui and Zerhouni 2014).

Despite a plural partisan scene, youth activism through party politics has been very weak. Only a few political parties such as the PI, USPF and the PJD have youth sections. Youth representation in the governing structures of political parties remains insignificant. Despite the fact that the 2006 party bill called on political parties to specify the proportion of youth and women in their organizational structures, most of the parties did not respect this clause when organizing their national congresses.⁶ Moreover, youth membership in political parties has been dwindling. An empirical survey conducted among Moroccan students in the early 1990s showed that only 10.8 percent were members of a political party. The survey also demonstrated that there is a high level of mistrust vis-à-vis political parties (98.2 percent) and the State (97.8 percent) (Bourqia et al. 1995).

⁶ Some of the political parties mentioned the clause in their internal regulations instead of their statutes and some other political parties did not comply with it.

The fragmented party system in Morocco was supplanted by a whole range of trade unions.⁷ This contributed to additional segmentation of the political scene and subsequently to the reinforcement of the centrality of the monarchy (Vinogradov and Waterbury 1971). In the more recent past, unions have gone further in terms of deepening their internal divisions. As has been the case for political parties, most of the trade unions have lost their power and ability to mobilize significant numbers of people.

Sociological research on youth involvement within unions in Morocco is rare. The main union which has historically symbolized youth activism is the General Union of Moroccan Students (*Union nationale des étudiants du Maroc*, UNEM). It was established in 1956 and played a major role in youth mobilization and participation during the 1960s and the 1970s. Indeed, student movements were the most critical opposition force to the hegemonic power of the monarchy during this period (Menouni 1972, El-Ayadi 1999). The UNEM was subject to many divisions throughout its history. Ideological divergences among its members and organizational conflicts have contributed to its weakening. From a union which served as a space for youth to criticize the regime and to push for greater democracy in the country, the UNEM has become a space for producing violence and reinforcing conflicts among different ideological currents.

In general, the state creation of diverse venues of participation was intertwined with a strategy of tight control over these spaces through the use of repression or through the orchestration of parties and labour union fragmentation. There is a gap between the enabling legal framework and the discourse on youth participation in formal politics, on the one hand, and the actual practices of youth exclusion and repression on the other. To a large extent, it was the use of repression against youth activists in leftist political parties in the 1960s and the 1970s that eventually determined youth demobilization (individually or collectively) in favour of informal politics and away from the formal political institutions.

1.2 NGOs and Youth NGOs

Over the past two decades, associational life in Morocco has flourished. Many associations were created to target a variety of issues, ranging from human rights and civic education to local development, environmental issues and good governance. The monarchy attempts to keep civil society actors under its control by promoting and sponsoring pro-regime associations (Sater 2007). However, contesting voices persist and a number of associations have become very active in more independent human rights associations, cultural associations and women's associations (Maghraoui 2008). Following the adoption of substantial amendments to the Decree on the Right to Establish Associations in 2002⁸ and the constitutional reform in 2011, the legal framework became more enabling for Moroccans to create associations and

⁷ The most important union organizations in Morocco are the Union of Moroccan Workers (*Union marocaine du travail*, UMT), the Democratic Confederation of Workers (*Confédération démocratique du travail*, CDT), the General Union of Moroccan Workers (*Union générale des travailleurs du Maroc*, UGTM), and the Democratic Federation of Workers (*Fédération démocratique du travail*, FDT).

⁸ Despite the enabling legal framework and the growing number of associations and programmes, some challenges persist either because of the restrictive nature of certain provisions (the law on associations does not allow the creation of associations whose main objectives are "contrary to good morals" or "undermine" Islam, or the monarchy, or the country's "territorial integrity," or that are deemed to "call for discrimination"), through non-observance of progressive provisions of the law, or because of organizational and financial constraints.

to influence legislation and public policies (Touhtou 2014).

A recent report by the Ministry of Interior states that the number of associations has grown significantly from 40,000 associations in the late 1990s to 116,836 in 2014 (Zoubairi 2014). Since the launching of the National Initiative for Human Development (*Initiative nationale pour le développement humain*, INDH) in 2005,⁹ 10,000 associations were created every year. According to the Ministry of Interior, 14,000 associations were created in 2009 and 12,000 in 2013. In 2014, only 5,300 associations were created.¹⁰

There is no mapping of youth-led associations or youth-oriented associations in Morocco. However, different reports and studies have shown that the youth favour participation in the public sphere through associations. According to a 2014 study by the Ministry of Interior, 8 percent of the associations are created and led by young people between 20 and 30 years old. Reports by national or international organizations give a glimpse of youth involvement in the governing structures of associations and the number of associations which target young people. In a national survey conducted on a sample of 7,274 associations by the High Commission for Planning (HCP) in 2007, more than half of the associations target youth between 15 to 35 years old (29 percent) and children (28 percent) (HCP 2011). Another survey with a sample of 1,254 associations in the field of development showed that 8 percent of the management structure of associations is composed of young people who are less than 25 years old (MSFFDS 2010). The World Bank has shown that the INDH increased youth inclusiveness in decision-making at the local level. Youth were represented in local governance structures by 12 percent and were involved in participatory processes by 37 percent. They made up 56 percent of those who benefited from improvements in access to basic infrastructures and socioeconomic services following the INDH interventions (World Bank 2013).

But the mere number of associations created by youth is not a sufficient indicator of youth activism in associational life. Besides legally created associations, the youth in Morocco engage at the level of their universities and schools by creating clubs. They are active in their neighbourhoods and communes by creating informal *associations de quartier*, or by organizing festivals and sport competitions. During the past fifteen years, both domestic and international NGOs have implemented programmes which target young people in the field of civic education. For instance, the USAID supported initiatives by youth to create local councils that are involved in political and social activism (Snijder 2015).

The pervasiveness of informal modes of political participation is a common feature in most countries of North Africa and the Middle East (Alhamad 2008). Under repressive authoritarian rule, the citizenry very often has recourse to informal networks or alternate modes of political action. Moroccan youth are no exception. When youth conventional activism is highly circumscribed, young people mobilize through alternate channels such as social movements,

⁹ An initiative launched by King Mohamed VI to improve access of the poor (14.2 percent) and the vulnerable (23 percent) to basic services.

¹⁰ Concerning the field of action of associations in Morocco, the study of the Ministry of interior ranks social and charity associations in first place with 24 percent active in this field. They are followed by environmental and sustainable development associations (21 percent), while the third position is that of associations active in the field of sport and leisure (19 percent). In the fourth position, the study emphasizes the tendency to create, during recent years, associations that are active in the fields of human rights, gender, entrepreneurship and employment.

the street, the virtual sphere or social (non)movements, to use Asef Bayat's notion (Bayat 2010).

1.3 Youth and Religious Movements in Morocco

Religious movements in Morocco are diverse both in terms of their ideological orientations and in their stand vis-à-vis the regime. Historically, the monarchy has used different strategies ranging from repression and confrontation to cooptation in order to control these movements. In parallel, politico-religious movements have evolved following different paths, some of them integrating into the political system through party politics, and others refusing to take part in the political game that has often been orchestrated by the regime.

In the 1960s, we saw the emergence of the Islamic Youth Movement (IYM) as one of the first movements inspired by religious ideology. The IYM was officially established in 1972 under the leadership of Abdel-Karim Mouti but it was quickly dissolved in 1975 and fragmented into smaller groups. In the early 1980s, one of the leaders of the IYM, Abdelilah Benkirane, decided to separate from them and create an organization called the Movement of Reform and Renewal (*Harakat al-Islah-wa-Tajdid*) which would later become the Movement of Unity and Reform (*Mouvement unité et réforme*, MUR or *Harakat al-Islah-wa-Tawhid*). Throughout its history, the MUR has mobilized different age groups around its activities. Young high school and university students were a main component of its members (Mahmi and Jebbar 2015). In order to attract more young people to its ranks, the movement organized activities ranging from religious lessons to trips and camping. In 2010, the consultative council of the MUR reduced the voting age from 20 to 18. This is part of its attempt to encourage more young people to join the MUR and to involve them in the implementation of its activities.

In the early 1980s, the second main Islamic faction in Morocco, the Justice and Charity Movement (*Al adl wa al-Ihssan*), was founded by its leader Abdelsalam Yassine. Since then, the movement has grown to be one of the most important oppositional religious groups in Morocco. Well established in different cities, the movement managed to attract significant numbers of sympathizers among the middle class, youth and women.

Sufism and Salafism are also important components of the religious sphere which attracts youth in Morocco. Sufism has often been an important part of the spiritual map of Morocco and more recently it has been associated with a tolerant Islamic tradition. Politically instrumentalized, it is attractive to segments of society that are in constant search for answers to societal problems. Sufism is attracting more young Moroccans to regular gatherings to pray, chant and debate timely social and political topics. In parallel, Salafism has gained in visibility and importance during the past fifteen years. As part of controlling the Salafists, King Muhammad VI granted a royal pardon and released some prominent Moroccan Salafi leaders who were allegedly linked to the 2003 Casablanca bombings. The Salafi were subsequently allowed to join the Renaissance and Virtue Party (*Parti de la renaissance et de la vertu*, PRV) as part of a moderate Islamist faction but with a limited political integration. They have in exchange gradually accepted to support the King's legitimacy and to move towards political participation (Masbah 2013).

The religious landscape in Morocco is very diverse and heterogeneous. Starting in the 1980s, Islamic discourse became more appealing to the younger generation and there has been a growing influence of political currents with Islamic reference. As demonstrated by a survey conducted among high school and university students in Rabat in the 1990s, “the retraditionalization” of the mindset and the valorisation of religion was common among the majority of respondents. Indeed,

91.9 per cent of the sample considered that religious criteria should guide people’s decisions in the fields of economics and commerce and almost the same number of respondents (90.7 per cent) favour the intervention of religion in administrative and political life (Bourqia et al. 2000:19).

While political parties have been very weak in terms of integrating youth, Islamist movements were relatively more successful in mobilizing young people in their ranks and providing them with a space for expressing themselves and being actors of change. A recent anthropological study on the MUR stressed the fact that the young members affirm their identities through the movement which, according to their statement, assures them a sense of religious security. In the study, youth refer to the movement as a second home that “provides them with voices and allows them to act and react, assuming the responsibility of ‘reforming oneself as well as the Islamic nation through peaceful daawa (call to Islam)’” (Mahmi and Jebbar 2015:264). The authors conclude that belonging to the MUR “goes beyond religion for religion’s sake and becomes a means to gain social and political power” (Mahmi and Jebbar 2015:280).

1.4 Youth and Cyber-activism

During the past fifteen years, Internet access in Morocco has increased substantially. The number of Internet users increased from 100,000 in 2000 to 20.2 million (which means 60.6 percent of the total population) in 2016.¹¹ It is no coincidence that youth took advantage of connection tools to create new spaces to socialize, network, play and voice their demands and grievances. Youth communicate through forums, blogs and YouTube videos. They generate their own media content and act as citizen journalists by presenting counter-narratives to the official media. The virtual sphere has provided them with a space to express their views and communicate freely. It is within this context that online activism emerged in Morocco.

By the mid-2000s, young people had become more active on the web sphere and created a myriad of blogs and Facebook groups.¹² Critical voices and young activists used social media to raise awareness, inform and mobilize around a wide variety of issues. The case of the “Targuist sniper,” widely covered in 2008, is one of the first instances of cyber-activism in Morocco. A young man called Mounir Agueznay from the small northern city Targuist posted a video on YouTube of traffic police officers taking bribes from drivers. The video was widely viewed (half a million viewers) and broadcast by different TV channels outside of Morocco. Thus, the new digital media has triggered “a revival of the watchdog function of the media

¹¹ Internet World Stats, *Africa 2016 population and internet users statistics for 2016*, June 2016, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>.

¹² In 2010, Morocco was ahead of Algeria and Tunisia with 1.8 million Facebook users. It was exceeded by Egypt and Saudi Arabia with respectively 3.4 and 2.3 million users. Facebook is largely a youth media; the 18-24 age group is first in the charts, followed by the 25-34 age group. For more information, see Toutain (2011).

and paved the way for it to act as a fourth estate in monitoring political abuses by the regime" (Zaid and Ibahrine 2011:43). The Targuist sniper served as a model for other cyber-activists who are critical of the high rates of corruption and social inequalities in Morocco.

Similar to what is going on in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, young Moroccans used digital technology to help organize and expand their demands for change during and before the 2011 uprisings. Facebook was instrumental for the activists of the February 20th movement to coordinate their action and to mobilize around their demands. Before the uprising, many Facebook groups were created to tackle issues related to democracy (Moroccans Converse with the King), individual liberties (*Alternative Movement for Individual Freedoms/Mouvement alternatif pour les libertés individuelles*, MALI), cultural rights and freedom of speech (Bensalah 2012). These groups played an important role before and during the protest. Blogs were also popular among the activists. They served in disseminating their views and in reaching out to a large number of protestors. The young people posted videos on YouTube to inform Moroccans about the extent of mobilization and to counter the state-controlled coverage and broadcasting of protest.

The virtual sphere in Morocco remains a complex terrain of activism. Despite the fact that it has low entry barriers, it is restrictive, manipulated and controlled by the state. The Internet and social media were an important tool to mobilize for change during the uprising; however, it has also helped governments to "spy on activists, to disrupt campaigns, to spread their own messages through well-funded advertising and to create an illusion of popular support" (Hill 2013:14). Moreover, online activists who touch upon the "redlines," such as the monarchy, are arrested and sentenced to jail. This was the case for the blogger Mohammed Erraji, who was arrested in 2008 and sentenced to two years in prison for criticizing King Mohammed VI's charitable habits towards Moroccans.

Social Media in Morocco provide young activists with "another space" to express discontent and to exercise their citizenship rights in innovative and creative ways. While there are differences in use of the Internet among youth across gender, rural or urban areas, class and level of education, most of youth carry features of a "wired generation" (Herrera and Sakr 2014). The Internet and social media were instrumental for activists to circumvent state censorship, the hierarchies and the lack of internal democracy of formal political institutions. However, the impact of this form of activism on long-term political and social change remains to be seen.

1.5 Youth, Protest and the February 20th Movement

Recent youth mobilizations in Morocco are the result of a process which started a few years ago. Since the 1990s, youth have expressed dissent by occupying the public space and by becoming very active in grassroots movements and associations such as the unemployed graduates. Youth activism has been dispersed and atomized and occurred largely outside existing parties and outside university campuses. Like their counterparts in the Middle East and North Africa, a group of online activists led the calls for nationwide protests in favour of major political changes. They organized themselves in a movement called February 20th (M20). The first demonstrations were massive and mobilized some 200,000 citizens in 53 cities across the country. The movement attracted different age groups and was originally

composed of a mixed group of opposition forces with different ideological backgrounds, ranging from left and radical left-wing political parties to Islamist movements. The most active and involved among them were the Islamist Justice and Charity Movement, the United Socialist Union (PSU) and the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH). The M20 was also composed of those who called themselves independents.¹³

Unlike protest movements in other Arab states, M20 has maintained its call for “reform” rather than for the “overthrow” of the regime and has not questioned the monarchy as such. The movement asked for a democratic constitution, the independence of the judiciary and the media, as well as the separation of wealth and political power to leave behind the politics of a rentier economy and the monopolization of resources.

Youth played an important role in organizing the protest and in mobilizing Moroccans around the main demands of the movement. Despite their divergent political orientations and expectations from change, youth were able to cooperate and to come to agreement on their platform and on other specific issues. Most of the decisions were taken in General Assemblies organized in informal settings or in the offices of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH), leftist political parties that joined the movement or the Union of Moroccan Workers (*Union marocaine du travail*, UMT). Deliberation was a key feature in the decision-making. Indeed, the movement provided an opportunity for young activists to unify their forces and to turn from dispersed divided action to active communication and organization. More importantly, the movement provided a space in which marginalized opposition actors and atomized agents could make their voice heard. The youth of the movement translated their dissent into collective action by occupying the streets, a space which escapes to the full control of the regime. The youth joined a movement that was predominantly non-ideological in nature, leaderless, diverse and inclusive.

Despite weakening of the movement through tactics ranging from reform to repression and cooptation, the youth continue to be active and to defy state repression and control over spaces of participation. During the past decade, protest actions increased substantially. Moroccans in general, including youth, have become fervent adepts of protest. A study by sociologist Abderrahmane Rachik (2014) on social movements in Morocco showed that protest actions, whether the organization of sit-ins, demonstrations or marches, rose significantly between 2005 and 2012. Indeed, the number of protest actions rose from 700 in 2005, an average of two sit-ins per day, to 5,091 in 2008, 6,438 in 2009 and to 8,600 in 2010. With the Benkirane government, the number of protest actions is multiplied by 26 compared to 2005. In 2012, 17,000 protest actions took place, an average of 52 actions per day.

To conclude this section, youth activism in Morocco is characterized by the constant interplay between formal and informal modes of political participation. The regime has created formal channels because it is not in its interest to have mobilization of the citizenry be left to radical groups or to other movements, whether peaceful or violent. In this context, the youth either try to take advantage of existing spaces or create their own spaces to do politics differently. The “street” and well as virtual and artistic spaces serve more and more as spaces for the

¹³ The independents refer to youth with no political affiliation. Some of them had been members of political parties or associations, but disengaged from conventional politics before 2011.

youth to claim their citizenship rights. The formal and informal spheres are not mutually exclusive. Youth could make use of institutional politics and be at the same time active in the virtual sphere or through art. Youth activism in Morocco illustrates what Bayat has called the “art of presence”: “the courage and creativity to assert collective will in spite of all odds, to circumvent constraints, utilizing what is available and discovering new spaces within which to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized” (Bayat 2010:26).

But the diversity of spaces of participation does not mean that these spaces are providing efficient channels to make the voices of youth heard, nor does it mean that their needs and demands are being addressed. Only an interaction between these spaces could provide young people with an enabling environment to influence social change and youth policies.

2. BEING YOUNG IN MOROCCO: THE MULTIPLE LAYERS OF EXCLUSION

Youth in Morocco are part of a diversified social category. There are therefore various factors, such as gender, class, ethnicity and other divides, that come to frame the experiences of being a young Moroccan (Herrera and Bayat 2010). In the following section, we will look at the ways in which individual perceptions and experiences inform us about the multiple facets of what it means to be young in Morocco.

2.1 Youths and the Family

During recent decades, Moroccan society has undergone meaningful social and cultural changes. Besides the demographic transition,¹⁴ the country witnessed rapid urbanization, transformations in the family structure and in the relationships within the family.¹⁵ According to the 2004 Survey on Values in Morocco, 60 percent of families were nuclear and more than 20 percent were directed by women.¹⁶ More importantly, intergenerational relations inside the family shifted toward an important process of individualization and autonomy of the youth (Gandolfi 2015:4).

Despite these changes, our study shows that young people are still facing a tension between a process of becoming more autonomous and a living experience that is full of constraints. At the economic level, some of the youth have, on the one hand, emphasized that there is still a kind of solidarity and that their families support them despite their difficult socio-economic conditions. On the other hand, other participants denounced the pressure exerted on them by their families in order to find a job. Parents have expectations from their children because they invest in their education. After graduation, they expect them to be financially independent and in some cases to “pay back” the parents (CERED 1995). A long-term unemployed participant expressed a very high degree of pressure from his family, friends and society. For him, unemployed graduates protesting in Rabat have a very bad image and are considered as lazy (*feignant*), a label that results in an emotional strain among this category. For this 35-year-old unemployed man: “The psychological suffering of the unemployed is very

¹⁴ See the work by Courbage and Todd (2007).

¹⁵ See the results of the national survey on networks of familial solidarity conducted by CERED (1995).

¹⁶ The national survey on values was conducted in 2004 in the framework of the report *50 ans de développement humain & perspectives 2025*. See Rachik (2006).

big; most of the unemployed in Rabat are between 25 and 35 years old, they are not married, they don't have a job, they don't have a penny."

Besides economic constraints, participants in the study highlight the fact that there are at times conflicting relationships between their willingness to engage in politics and their interest in pursuing professional careers. For one male participant, parents are often afraid when their kids get involved in politics. The complexity of the relationship with the family manifests itself further when it comes to norms and individual liberties. While some of the interviewees said that their parents ended up accepting their choices and views, generational differences remain present when it comes to youth engagement for causes such as homosexuality or not fasting during Ramadan. One male participant in an FG mentioned the clash he had with his father and entourage when he sustained a rupture of the fast during Ramadan. For him: "I fight for individual and collective freedoms and I have a vision on many things; I am not in agreement with my parents and with my environment."

Furthermore, the family does not provide a space for the young people to participate in different decision-making processes. This creates a situation in which many young people are excluded from their own families and circles of support. For one female participant who grew up in what she refers to as a "conservative family": "The child is considered as the property of the parents and more specifically the father. The father decides everything, when and where to spend vacations, and the child does not participate in any decisions."

The fact that the young people do not share much with their families and that there is a lack of communication was also stressed by FG participants coming from rural areas. For them, the parents do not know what the children are doing in terms of their studies and they know little about their political involvement. Most of the young people cope with the social realities in which they live and are strategists in their relationships with their families. For instance, a female participant does not inform her family about her activities because she knows that her family will object to her involvement in the association.

On the one hand, to have a voice within the family is an empowering reality for the younger generation. On the other hand, not being able to contradict the views of parents might also hamper societal participation and active citizenship. While a national survey on values in Morocco¹⁷ showed that children have more autonomy and that dialogue between them and their parents has emerged as part of new values, our study shows that vertical relationships within the family remain strong. In many instances, the parents continue to impose rules, especially on their daughters.

2.2 Youth and Society: "Social Malaise"

There is a general feeling of frustration among the majority of participants in this study. They are frustrated because they are subject to a lot of prohibitions and feel that there are still many taboos in the society. The young people believe that there is a gap between law and practice, between the discourse and the reality. According to them, the society is "schizophrenic" and youth cannot express their views freely. One participant described

¹⁷ See the synthesis of the national survey on values conducted in 2004 under the supervision of Bourqia (2006).

the relationship of youth with their society as “a relationship that is in decay (*mozrya*), a relationship that is *chadda*.” When young people think differently than the rest of society, it is interpreted as if they do not obey the dominant norms. This creates frictions (*hazazat*) or conflicting relations (*mouchadat*) with the rest of society. Some of the young participants feel that they have to act in a hypocritical way with their society. If they do not, they are excluded and are considered as non-Muslims and non-Moroccans.

Other participants noted discrepancies between the laws, values and social practices. For example, they point to the fact that some Moroccans can freely buy and consume wine, or dress in very sexy ways, while others practice prostitution without any constraints. However, the law hangs over individuals and at any moment can be instrumentalized against people on the basis that they are undermining “public morality” and thus may be prosecuted for illegal behaviour. This social situation was described by many participants as schizophrenic.

During the FG, the idea of what an “intolerant behaviour” is was discussed. A number of participants pointed to the ambiguities that exist in the legal system, whereby individuals can be accused of sexual offenses at any time. They believe that the law is selective, and some even mentioned that it especially targets opponents of the political system. This is in fact a pattern that can be observed by looking at the different cases that have involved journalists, members of the Justice and Charity Movement and activists from the February 20 movement, who were accused of sexual abuse, adultery or molestation. In Moroccan society, everyone does what they can in order to cope with social constraints. The ambiguities are often used against activists and opponents because the law enforcement is arbitrary and selective. Some participants recognize that the repressive approach is not the solution in many cases. Others explain that the problem is related to the fact that power is concentrated and authorities use the “taboos and red lines” in their relationship with the population in order to impede political change.

Other participants explained the conflicting relationship with society by the fact that the young people have “different ways of thinking and mentalities.” For some of the youth who were active through informal modes of participation, exclusion comes mainly from “society,” a term used in the broadest sense to mean people, the legal system as well as the political system. The “society” does not accept difference. This was the case for a 19-year-old interviewee from the Student Union for Changing the Educational System (*Union des étudiants pour le changement du système éducatif*, UECSE) who stated:

I feel very much excluded. In our society, we do not accept difference and people who think differently. Since middle school, I liked rock and punk; I dressed differently and I had long hair. At home, they told me that I was not a good Muslim. In the street, I was insulted and accused of being satanic or a blood drinker. [...] I am just a different person who lives in his own world.

The experience of exclusion and oppression is profoundly gender differentiated. The patriarchal nature of Moroccan society was emphasized as female participants stressed that the authority of the father still weighs more on females than males. The participants in the study stated that men and women do not have the same rights within society and women's freedom is more restricted than that of men. For a female participant:

When I go out, my family constantly tries to know where I am by calling me all the time on my cell. For them, girls are weak and an easy target for men, so they do not trust their daughters. To be an independent girl is not something that is accepted by the family.

Societal pressure weighs more on women than men. For many participants, the public space opens different venues in which men are favoured to the detriment of women. Families are more demanding vis-à-vis women and want their daughters to be shy and to obey while they do not expect similar behaviour from their sons. Even when girls live within “liberal families,” they are subject to discrimination and problems in the public space. Male and female participants agree that in Moroccan society women should do more than men in order to “impose themselves.” They have to “fight on a daily basis for their rights.”

While debating the place of women within society, a male participant who grew up in a rural area stressed the fact that Moroccans should keep what he refers to as their *tamaghrabiyat* (“Moroccanness”), and that they “should not try to become like the other” (referring here to Europeans). When it comes to women, the same participant stated:

We need to keep hchouma (respect) within society, respect for the father of the family, respect for the woman [...] if we are better educated, there will be no sexual harassment in the streets [...] girls also should walk with their eyes looking down on the floor.

While most of the female participants cope, in one way or another, with the social realities in which they live, participants were frustrated living this kind of relationship with their families and within society. They aspire to having more freedom and more inclusion/participation in the decision-making processes. The majority consider that the public space is not open to women in the same way as it is for young men. The majority think that financial independence plays a role in women’s freedom within the family and within society.

2.3 Youth, Education and (un)Employment

All participants agreed that youth are confronted with a number of difficulties. The most highlighted problems were those of education and employment. Many of them spoke about suffering at school and/or due to their unemployment. Young people cannot get married, they cannot find a job easily and they do not have cultural spaces such as youth centres (*dar-achabab*). The majority of participants in the study described a daily life that is full of “difficulties/obstacles” and “oppression.” They deplored what they call the “authoritarianism” of professors in Moroccan educational institutions, and state policies in the field of youth employment.

The educational system was regularly criticized by all participants. They all agree that the state should make the reform of the educational system one of its top priorities. The failure of the educational system negatively impacts youth. Young Moroccans do not acquire the necessary skills and critical thinking through their studies. The participants mention that there is a problem of language learning. They also refer to the fact that schools “don’t teach the students how to think” and how to be creative. For them, the majority lack critical thinking

skills. They pointed to the fact that the training offered is not in tune with the needs of the job market.

The poor quality of education influences the value system and attitudes of young people. For many participants, the educational system should normally help young people to acquire knowledge and develop cognitive skills; instead, it ends up producing exclusion. Indeed, recent statistics show that there are high drop-out rates while more and more students are addicted to drugs and violence is increasing in schools. Youth radicalization was also mentioned as one of the results of state failure to integrate youth through education.

Participants highlighted the fact that there are major disparities between rural and urban areas. Geographical exclusion was stressed by young people coming from rural areas. They spoke about their belonging to *al-Maghrib al-Mansi* (forgotten Morocco). For a 27-year-old man from Marrakech: "We tend to always forget about the child of the mountain, he doesn't have the means to study, he doesn't have a kindergarten, there are no roads, no hospitals, the child is missing basic things; he doesn't know what exists beyond the mountain."

Young participants who did their primary schooling in rural areas faced difficult practical problems during their studies. Schools were very far away from their homes, and some of their professors used violence against them. There was also no orientation in terms of helping them identify the field of study to choose once they were at middle or high school. The language issue was considered as one of the main problems they were confronted with. In Morocco, the linguistic situation is very complex. Students are confronted, in early childhood, with a multiplicity of different languages including the Arabic dialect (*Darija*), Tachelhit, Tarifit, the Hassani dialect and the languages of learning which are classical Arabic and French. This situation creates a major linguistic and pedagogical problem. For many of them, the failed school system is the main reason behind social disparities and all other problems that the youth are confronted with. The youths mentioned also the disparities that exist between private and public schooling and that students who come from public schools have more difficulties with language. For one male participant: "If you have money, you can get a better education." Young participants spoke also about discriminatory practices in public schools. Very often, teachers favour those students who take private lessons with them.

The majority of young people in this study think that reform of the educational system is not a priority of the state. There is some kind of disengagement of the state, to the detriment of the private sector and civil society actors/associations. For instance, participants in the Tangier focus group stressed the role played by associations such as Darna in helping young people who failed at school. This is an association which aims at supporting young people who are experiencing difficulties. While the majority pointed to the responsibility of the state, some participants stressed the idea that the youth themselves should take initiatives instead of relying on or blaming the state all the time.

While the majority stressed the failure of the school system, a few interviewees were satisfied with their education. These tended to be students who were either in private schools, or who did their studies abroad or in Moroccan schools with regulated access (such as the school of engineering). It is worth mentioning here that some of the interviewees who did their studies in public schools emphasized the role that certain teachers played in orienting them and

helping them with their studies. The views about the schooling system should therefore be nuanced.

Unemployment affects youth living conditions and reinforces their feeling of malaise especially within the family. Youth unemployment rates in North Africa are amongst the highest in the world. One in four young people is reported as jobless. A report prepared by the World Bank before the 2011 Arab uprisings notes that young people (aged 15-29) represent about 30 percent of Morocco's total population and 44 percent of the working-age population (15-65 years). The World Bank report states that this social category has been widely excluded from the economic growth that Morocco has experienced in the last decade. The average unemployment rate for young people was estimated at 22 percent, reaching 38 percent for women. Furthermore, in 2010, almost 90 percent of young women and 40 percent of young men were not in school; they were either in a situation of inactivity or unemployment and 80 percent of them have little or no education (World Bank 2012).

Youth unemployment has been a major concern for decision-makers throughout the past two decades. Following the 2011 uprisings in the region, the problem of youth unemployment has become increasingly present in the discourse of state actors as well as the international community. To make their voice heard, unemployed youth organized themselves in an association called the National Association of Unemployed Graduates of Morocco (*Association nationale des diplômés chômeurs du Maroc*, 1991). One of the main objectives of the association is to exert pressure on the government to recruit more graduates in the public sector. To achieve their goals, they organize protests on a regular basis. In the face of rare opportunities to find a job in the public sector, some of the unemployed graduates devote all their time to protest actions.

The youth who were able to find a job were very critical of their working conditions. In general, they have precarious jobs. According to the World Bank, 88 percent of working youth do not have contracts and are subject to poor working conditions (World Bank 2012). For one participant:

I was unemployed less than a year. I did an internship and then I worked. [...] My working conditions did not correspond to what the law stipulates. The labour code speaks about a provisional contract for a maximum of two years but companies do not respect it. [...] This limits the potential of youth employment.

Other young participants in the study evoked the difficulty of finding part-time work even in call centres. Internships are also difficult to obtain. In this respect young people noted a paradoxical situation: the private sector requires that young people have some work experience, while at the same time, companies do not offer internships. For some participants, the few available internship opportunities are used by companies in order not to regularize the situation of their employees. In this context, the pursuit of education is sometimes used by youth as a means to avoid or postpone unemployment.

Participants from poor or modest social classes spoke about having "a hard life" and being forced to work very young to obtain additional income for the family and for furthering their studies. For one participant, working in the informal sector was the only thing that helped

him with his studies: "What helped me was the fact that I always worked." Being financially independent gave him the opportunity to get a diploma and the respect of his family and entourage.

Some of the young graduates were able to find a job without being confronted with many difficulties. The majority emphasized the importance of networks and clientelism to access the job market. For a young entrepreneur, to start up a project in Morocco, one should be *bien introduit* (well connected). He denounced practices of clientelism with which he is confronted in his daily life. He cited examples of funds that were allocated to what he calls "privileged" and well connect associations. Long-term unemployed youth seemed more affected and more frustrated about their situation than employed youth. Their priorities, concerns and perceptions were slightly different from the others. They speak of dependence, lack of dignity, poor living conditions and risk of depression, deviance and drug addiction.

Based on our study, being young in Morocco is very much related to a feeling of a "general malaise and discomfort." This feeling stems from unequal access to state services and spaces of participation. The majority stressed the unequal access to education, employment and the disparities between rural and urban areas. The young people denounced practices of clientelism and the closed nature of the political system. They consider the failed school system as the main reason behind youth exclusion and social disparities.

The concepts of *tahmish* (marginalization) and *alkamâ'* (oppression) were repeatedly used by the participants in the study to describe all the difficulties and pressures they are faced with. Oppression is felt within different societal institutions: the family, school and within the society at large. Its forms and degrees might vary from one participant to the other, but it is a shared feeling among participants whether they are male or female, employed or unemployed. Exclusion and oppression seem to be part of the daily lives of the majority of young Moroccans.

3. YOUTH PARTICIPATION: NAVIGATING THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL SPHERES OF POLITICS

Most of the youth in Morocco are no longer content with a closed and depoliticized political field. Different studies have demonstrated that the younger generations vote less, do not adhere to political parties in a massive way and do not trust their political institutions such as political parties, the parliament and the government. However, these kinds of attitudes and perceptions are only indicative of the disenchantment of the youth with some modes of political participation. They do not tell us much about the alternative modes of youth engagement.

Analysis of focus groups and interviews shows that the youth are interested in politics but there is abstention when it comes to electoral participation. For many participants, the elections remain manipulated and political parties are perceived as weak. They think that it is the parties that are responsible for youth disengagement from partisan politics. Indeed, most of the political parties lack internal democracy and do not communicate well with youth. For many participants, youth are largely discriminated against and their voice is not heard

even within the political parties to which they belong. The youth are called on by political parties to make up their electoral lists or to help with electoral campaigning. For one male participant: "Youth participation is called for especially during elections and periods of electoral campaigning."

Participants who were members of political parties were very critical of the practices of bad governance within their organizations. They spoke about the pressure and oppression they are faced with. Oppression comes from the leading elites who consider them as "young children," and sometimes from the youth themselves. For one young male participant:

When I entered my party, the youth had different behaviours: First, those who changed their behaviour in order to cope with the system. Second, those who became disappointed and then disinterested in politics and left the party. Third, those who choose to fight back but are crushed by the party. Marginalized, they then joined the disgruntled group in the party.

Despite the difficult conditions that youth are confronted with, some of them declared their willingness to continue "fighting from within their own structures" in order to influence change in the country. Their exclusion pushes some of them to combine their activism within political parties with other modes of participation such as social media. For one female participant, a member of a mainstream political party who was always silenced during party meetings:

When you are on Facebook, you end up saying all the things that you don't dare to say in a meeting or a conference; there is no one who will tell you why you are saying this or that. On Facebook, you have the total freedom to say whatever you want, to say everything.

Social networks have become more and more popular among Moroccan youth. For the majority of the young participants, these networks constitute a great tool of communication and mobilization. They allow the dissemination of information and the development of different forms of solidarity. They provide youth with alternative means of political action. For one participant: "Social networks are a great opportunity for young people. They offer proximity, allow a better flow of information, they allow youth to express themselves, get to know other people; it is a good open space with a positive effect on freedom."

Activism through associations was also considered as a preferred way for youth participation in public life. Many young participants referred to civil society organizations as spaces that allow them to express themselves freely. These spaces provide them with the opportunity to carry out their projects, to advocate and lobby for youth issues. Engagement in associations allows them to step into action and get involved at the social and political levels (Akesbi 2012). For one female participant: "My association is the only space through which I can breathe and express myself freely; the other spaces are closed."

Some participants have, on the contrary, deplored the lack of volunteerism among the youth and their growing propensity to search for material interest. For some of them, there is a deficit in terms of "citizenship values" among the youth. Civic and cultural participation are weak and many of the young people have a tendency to seek their own personal and material

interests. In this respect, the youth were critical of the behaviour of young parliamentarians elected on the list which was reserved for youth following the 2011 constitution. They pointed to the fact that these young members of parliament are behaving like their elders; they are co-opted into the system and will “play by the rules of the game,” which means that ultimately they will not defend the interests of youth.

Protest was also mentioned as a means through which youth engage in politics. Those who were active in the February 20th movement in 2011 refer to their experience within the movement as “extraordinary.” The movement provided them with a space to exchange views and debate with members from different political currents. They seem to have enjoyed the swinging between the “virtual sphere” and the “streets.”

For those who engage through informal forms, they think that “occupying the street” is the best way to reach out to the people and to sensitize them. Networking with other groups and youth associations was also mentioned. For a blogger, youth could be mobilized through their passions and hobbies. Youth have a great potential and, if given the opportunity, they have the capacity to achieve exceptional things. The youth disengage from the formal sphere but try to find other spaces through which they can engage and be active. They try to go beyond a political system that is closed off. For one female participant: “I live my life without the government.”

Reference to state repression was evoked by young people who were involved in human rights organizations, student unions, or who were active in the February 20th movement. For many of them, there are no spaces where youth can be active without state control and repression. Student participants gave examples such as the state forbidding them to organize their activities on university campuses. In the same vein, students from Marrakech spoke about the repression they were confronted with when they complained about receiving their scholarships later than expected.

The majority of the youth in our sample diversify their modes of political participation and get involved through different initiatives. Many of them are members of different associations and are active through social media and cultural activities. They also undertake protest actions. While the some of the participants try to integrate existing spaces of participation or to create their own spaces, the majority believe that youth marginalization and exclusion from the political sphere is predominant. For many of them, political exclusion is in fact a common denominator among all Moroccans. For one participant: “The king concentrates all powers, the rest is marginal. [...] The centrality of the monarchical institution is stressed all the time by the current head of government, Abdelilah Benkirane, and the youth in Morocco are aware of this reality.”

Most of the youth noted that inclusion is very much related to their capacity of influencing decisions, having an impact within their organization, be it an association, a political party or a union. For those who were active within political parties, “membership” does not mean “inclusion.” The participants in the FG felt excluded from decision-making processes within their own political parties. The same feeling was expressed by some of the youth who were active within associations and student unions. Indeed, exclusion is reproduced within different circles and the youth also reproduce the same system of exclusion vis-à-vis each other. The

best example that the youth referred to was that of the conflicts among different factions of the National Union of Moroccan Students (*Union nationale des étudiants du Maroc*, UNEM).

4. YOUTH AGENCY AND TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT ON SOCIAL CHANGE

Most of the participants in the study believe in their own agency, despite the divergences in their means/ways for improving their situation or influencing social change in their country. None of them is taking a passive stand. Change is perceived as being possible both from inside and outside the system even though the views and arguments about achieving this change vary from one participant to the other. All participants believe that change is part of a gradual process and that all actors have a responsibility in the success or failure of this process. The state is responsible but political parties and the youth themselves share the responsibility.

Many of the young participants do not think of themselves as victims of the state. They believe in their agency and undertake different actions in order to influence social change. The young people differ in their tactics and means of action. For some of them, each individual can be an actor of change by being involved in his/her own community and by influencing his/her close environment. For example, involvement through associations was emphasized by different participants as the most efficient means to lobby, advocate and exert influence on the state and policies. While pointing to the fact that the state has to play a role and that associations cannot play the role of the state, they think that there could be a partnership between the state and the associations.

For other participants, associations alone do not have the necessary power to exert pressure on public policies. They highlight the importance of creating networks and reinforcing the capacities of civil society organizations. The participants were aware of the importance of organizing themselves and the necessity for different associations to come together and unite in order to become a force to reckon with. For one participant: "I'm optimistic; young people have a role to play and we must unite our voice, develop the role of civil society."

The importance of engagement through party politics was also highlighted by the youth in our study. For many of them, in order to effect social change, it is necessary to join a political party. However, some participants do not think that they can achieve much through engagement in these structures as they exist. Most of the political parties remain largely discredited. This is why many young participants join protest movements. The youth are involved in the informal sphere of politics and take different initiatives to sensitize Moroccans and increase their awareness about the problems they are confronted with and the potential for solutions.

Despite the fact that the M20 has been weakened, most of the youth continue to be active in the public sphere. They take initiatives aimed at sensitizing Moroccans and more specifically the younger generation about Morocco's problems. Most of the youth prefer to participate less through organized forms of participation and more through individual initiatives in the social and cultural fields. They diversify and multiply initiatives and develop alternative modes of participation. Some of them try to influence change mainly through cultural activities.

At the current juncture, we are taking initiatives such as "*falsafa fi zanka*" (philosophy in the street), "*café citoyen*" (citizen coffee shop); we are in the process of creating a cultural and intellectual association because we are more and more aware that the main problem in Morocco is that of awareness [...] there is a problem when it comes to awareness, culture and thought; we want to create this association to make our voice heard and to influence mentalities and the youth.

Most of the youth are aware of the limits of their impact on decision-making processes and policies. They agree that the influence of youth on these policies remains limited. For one participant: "To influence, you should hold power. In Morocco, the parliament doesn't have power. [...] When the youth express their views, they are a mere force for giving suggestions."

CONCLUSION

Based on our study, being young in Morocco is very much related to a feeling of a "social malaise." This feeling stems from unequal access to state services and spaces of participation. Youth do not have equal access to education or employment, and there are major disparities between rural and urban areas. The youth denounce practices of clientelism and the closed nature of the political system. They consider the failed school system in addition as the main reason behind youth exclusion and social disparities.

The story of youth exclusion, as perceived and experienced by Moroccan youth, illustrates the extent to which their voices are muted. The study shows that youth exclusion has multiple layers. Marginalization and oppression are felt within different societal institutions such as the family, school and within the society at large. Its forms and degrees might vary from one participant to the other, but it is a shared feeling among participants whether they are male or female, employed or unemployed. Exclusion from formal politics is also a predominant perception among youth. Young people can simultaneously meet processes of inclusion and exclusion. A young person could be a member of a political party but at the same time be excluded from decision-making processes within his/her own party. To have a voice within the family, at school, in the political party or the association to which the young people belong is an empowering experience.

The predominant feeling of exclusion among youth is not intertwined with political apathy or passivity. All participants in the study continue to be active at the political or civic levels. Youth get involved through both formal and informal modes of participation. They take different initiatives through their activism within associations, social media and or cultural activities. They also undertake protest actions and at times adhere to a political party or vote.

They search for opportunities to influence social change and policies. For most of the youth, inclusion is very much related to their capacity to influence decisions, to have an impact within their organization, be it an association, a political party or a union. For those who were active within political parties, "membership" does not mean "inclusion." Very often, the youth have limited impact on decision-making processes within the institutions in which they are active. At times, exclusion is reproduced within different circles and the youth, themselves, reproduce the same system of exclusion vis-à-vis each other.

The youth have different positions concerning the means through which they can influence social change. However, youth are aware about their limited impact on state policies. Their involvement in formal institutional politics is weak and they do not have the means to influence decision-makers. Influencing change requires joint efforts, large numbers and an organizational structure. The way forward concerning youth participation and influence will depend on the capacity of the youth to “give long life” to their initiatives, their capacity to mobilize and attract more youth around their issues, and the extent of openness on the part of the regime. During the coming years, spaces for political expression might be subject to more restrictions under the excuse of security concerns.

Annex 1 | Focus group participants (structures)

FG1: Rabat	FG2: Rabat	FG3: Casablanca	FG4: Tangier	FG5: Marrakech
Unified Socialist Party (PSU)	Party of Justice and Development (PJD)	National Union of Unemployed Graduates (ANDC)	Cultural Centre DARNA	Sports Association Annouar
Blog Moroccan Traveler	Local Council of Youth in Kénitra and Popular Movement Party (MP)	Justice and Charity Movement (<i>Al-Adl wa-l-Ihssan</i>)	Association Sigma for Education and Culture	Association pour la taxation des transactions en aide aux citoyens au Maroc (ATTAC Maroc)
February 20th Movement	Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP)	Association nationale des diplômés chômeurs (ANDC)	Association Visa without Frontiers	Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH)
National Union of Unemployed Graduates (ANDC)	Parallel Government of Youth	Mouvement Anfass démocratique	Moroccan Association for Family Planification	Association Ennakhil for Women and Children
Democratic Association of Women in Morocco (ADFM)	Association We Play for Arts (<i>Nous jouons pour les arts</i>)	Youth leaders entrepreneurs	Moroccan Hassania Association of Scouting	National Institute for Social Action (INAS)
Justice and Charity Movement (<i>Al-Adl wa-l-Ihssan</i>)	Moroccan Democratic Youth Circle (<i>Cercle des jeunes démocrates marocains</i>)		Association 100% Maman	Youth Association for Culture and Development
Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH)	Student Union for Changing the Educational System (UECSE)			National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM)
				Moroccan Association Fanar

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POWER2YOUTH is a research project aimed at offering a critical understanding of youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region through a comprehensive interdisciplinary, multi-level and gender sensitive approach. By combining the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres and a macro (policy/institutional), meso (organizational) and micro (individual) level analysis, POWER2YOUTH explores the root causes and complex dynamics of the processes of youth exclusion and inclusion in the labour market and civic/political life, while investigating the potentially transformative effect of youth collective and individual agency. The project has a cross-national comparative design with the case studies of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey. POWER2YOUTH's participants are 13 research and academic institutions based in the EU member states, Norway, Switzerland and South East Mediterranean (SEM) countries. The project is mainly funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme.

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