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INTRODUCTION


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ABSTRACT

The overarching objective of this special issue is to gain a more in-depth understanding of the various forms of social and political participation of young people in the Maghreb – Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia – from the period after the wave of dissent of 2011 (termed ‘The Arab Spring’ in the media) dissipated up to the revolt that has been underway in Algeria since February 2019. More specifically, it aims to answer three main questions that, in turn, correspond to three levels of analysis of political activism. On a micro level, this special issue first interrogates how the participation of young people in the protest movements of 2011 was forged and what influence this experience has had on the construction of their individuality. Secondly, and focusing on collective action through the groups that lead it, the issues asks how these young people, socialised in an authoritarian environment, mobilised and formalised their activism. Finally, it asks what influence the various forms of managing pluralism, as well as social and political dissent, has had on the ways in which these young people expressed their dissatisfaction. This introduction, provides an overview of the various contributions to the dossier and situates them in the main sociological issues at hand.

KEYWORDS Youth; activism; protests; Tunisia; Algeria; Morocco

Introduction

There are many studies that have analysed the protest movements that arose over the course of 2011 in North Africa and the Middle East (Baamara 2012; Allal and Pierret 2013; Chouikha and Gobe 2015; Sadiki 2015; Roberts et al. 2016; Zoubir and White 2016; Volpi and Jasper 2018). Some have even focused on the role that young people played in the protests (Murphy 2012; Desrues 2012a; Honwana 2013; Desrues 2015; Ayyash and Hadji-Moussa 2017). Nevertheless, with the exception of a
number of general surveys of the youth population, little is known about political and social activism among young people since the protest cycle of the ‘Arab Spring’ finished, (Gertel and Hexel 2018; Korany and El-Sayyad 2017; Roberts, Kovacheva, and Kabaivanov 2017; Abbott, Teti and Sapsford 2018).

The overarching objective of this special issue, therefore, is to gain a more in-depth understanding of the various forms of socio-political activism of young people in the Maghreb: Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Socio-political activism is understood as participation in collective action, in which the main activities aim to influence – in some cases indiscriminately and in others in a differentiated manner – various aspects of life in certain sectors of society, collectives, communities, or territories; as well as the norms, decision-making processes, development, government, and monitoring of governmental public policy, at its various territorial and sectorial levels. This definition excludes so-called ‘conventional’ political participation in political parties and elections, given the disaffection shown by young people towards this type of participation (Laine et al. 2016; Albert and Hegasy 2018; Deau and Goeury 2019; Desrues and Garcia de Paredes 2019; Zerhouni 2019) and the differences in the objectives pursued by each type of participation (Norris 2009). On the basis of this definition, the contributions in this special issue focus on the types of participation that most attract young people (Sika and Werenfels 2018; Stolleis 2018) within the network of associations, social movements, and public protests that have arisen in the period starting after the wave of dissent of 2011 had dissipated and up to the revolt began in Algeria in February 2019. More specifically, this special issue aims to answer three main questions that, in turn, correspond to three levels of analysis of political and social activism. On a micro level, it first interrogates how the participation of young people in the protest movements of 2011 was forged and what influence this experience has had on the construction of their individuality as subjects. Secondly, focusing on collective action through the groups that lead it, the assembled articles asks how young people, socialised in an authoritarian environment, mobilised and formalised their activism after the ‘Arab Spring’. Finally, it asks what influence the various forms of managing pluralism, as well as social and political dissent, has had on the ways in which these young people expressed their dissatisfaction. Here, we are interested in the interconnections between the political context and the dynamics and modalities of collective action. In other words, it attempts to analyse: firstly, the processes that convert or transform the individual into an activist; secondly, the configuration and evolution of the various forms of collective action, as well as their scope and limitations when it comes to satisfying young people’s demands for political and social participation; and finally, the impact created by the various political contexts on the development of these collective action processes.
The articles in the special issue attempt to answer these three far-reaching questions by analysing various cases focused on activists, organisations, and movements. In each of the three countries, they take into consideration national specificities, the windows of opportunity that appear at different historical junctures – whether moments of political change or institutional paralysis – and the meaning that the actors themselves ascribe to their engagement. In this respect, we draw attention to the growth in the network of associations in Tunisia in the run-up to political regime change, the renewal of the forms of political activism as a result of the emergence of the ‘20th February Movement’ in Morocco, and the fragmentation and recurrence of street protests and riots in Algeria after the end of the decade of confrontation (1992–1999) between state security forces and armed Islamic groups.

Most of the articles frame their analysis in terms of two layers – namely, the historical roots of the realities observed and the imprint made on them by the territorial context. They thereby manage to capture the discontinuities that usually emerge from the peak moments of mobilisation, helping to resituate them within longer-term trajectories and enabling us to understand the complexity and scope of the reconfigurations that are underway. Highlights of the findings presented in the special issue therefore range from those centred on the subjectivisation of the young actors to those that illustrate the social selectivity of participation in associations, the nature of intergenerational relationships, and the distinct generational stances regarding official narratives about the nation and the construction of the state.

This dossier, entitled ‘Participation, association-building, and dissent in North Africa: The various dimensions of youth activism, from the fall of Ben Ali to the revolt against Bouteflika’, originated from the results of research project presented in a conference called ‘The social and political participation of young people: Public problems, representation, dissent’. The conference was organised by the Instituto de Estudios Sociales Avanzados del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Institute for Advanced Social Studies of the Spanish National Research Council, IESA-CSIC) and the Centre Jacques Berque (CJB) – part of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (French National Centre for Scientific Research, CNRS) and the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs. It was held in CJB’s office in Rabat in September 2017. It included contributions from other research projects that complement this special issue. The authors of the articles regularly spend time in the various Maghrebi territories and use a range of research techniques, chosen according to their research subjects and objectives. To be sure, ethnographic studies (Ratiba Hadj-Moussa and Giovanni Cordova) and qualitative methodologies such as life histories, in-depth interviews, and focus groups (Ben Mami & Gobe, Vacchiano & Afailal, Schwarz, and Thieux) are more prevalent in this special issue than quantitative methods such as surveys employing questionnaires (Desrues & Velasco Arranz 2015).
This special issue, coordinated by Thierry Desrues and Marta Garcia de Paredes (IESA-CSIC), seeks to contribute to the understanding of the situation of young people in the Maghreb and their individual and collective modalities of social and political expression – as well as the crisis of mediation and representation that has been felt across the Maghreb.

Manufacturing the subject and activism

In many respects, how the logic of ‘engagement’ varies at an individual level remains an enigma, despite the growing interest in this phenomenon approached from a range of perspectives (Sawicki and Siméant 2008; Fillieule and Pudal 2010; Ion 2012). This special issue demonstrates how within a context of concurrent protest movements that are perceived as ‘historic’ events many young people feel the need to position themselves as subjects (Flanagan 2008). As part of the construction of the subject, which accompanies young people’s processes of personal maturation and negotiation with their close environment, they are compelled to make a series of decisions that enable them to become participants in collective action. For young people in societies engulfed in an institutional crisis, it is not only a question of gaining recognition of their social conditions and future aspirations, but of ascribing meaning to their social participation, finding blueprints for transforming personal contingency into an individual end goal, and framing the latter in the social world that surrounds them (Lapeyronnie 2005). In this sense, the contributions of Francesco Vacchiano and Hafsa Afailal (University of Lisbon, Portugal) and of Christoph Schwarz (Philipps University of Marburg, Germany) focus on the process of individual subjectivisation through activism and its consequences for young people’s family environments and the paths they take afterwards. Both contributions analyse three significant aspects of participation in a protest movement. First, they trace how participation in the 20th February Movement – the Moroccan version of the 2011 protests (Desrues 2012b) – marked a turning point in the lives of the young people who became involved in this protest movement. Secondly, they describe how this experience has proved a significant step in the process of constructing their individual and collective subjectivity through their participation in society. Finally, they show how an unexpected and contingent event such as the ‘Arab Spring’ was harnessed by individuals to reconcile their individual and collective commitments.

Specifically, Christoph Schwarz examines how young people reinterpreted hegemonic norms in their families and social environments, shining a spotlight on various types of intergenerational relationships, some of which are characterised by continuity, others by negotiation, and others still by disconnection. The family, as a site in which political socialisation occurs, is transformed into a space for negotiation between young people and adults – which is
differentiated according to the sex, social and residential background, and cultural capital of each of its members. This contribution confirms that intergenerational transmission is not a one-way process with predictable results, but one that is interpreted by young people according to their own experiences outside of the family context. It also underlines the fact that adults are led to engage in introspection by young people. Through this reflective process of reinterpreting the past, it is the relationships themselves between the generations that end up being restructured. Within this context, the young people that Schwarz studied reveal various shifts. Examples of these include that which occurs after rejecting the separation of the private and public space, or refusing to behave differently in different spaces. The paradigmatic aspect of this separation is the individual and social control of young people’s bodies that was observed. Another shift can be found in the end of the fear that characterised the political culture dominant before the start of the ‘Arab Spring’. A third concerns the intermediary role that other institutions of socialisation play – e.g. friends and teachers – which rival the institution of the family in activating social consciousness or transmitting causes. This tendency is particularly prevalent among activists who belong to families with low or non-existent levels of politicisation (Bennani-Chraibi 1994; Bennani-Chraibi and Farag 2007; Desrues and Kirhlani 2013). There are two growing trends among Maghrebi youth: first, the pursuit of secondary-level studies and, albeit to a lesser extent, higher education; and second, the sharing of their study and leisure time with friends. This means that the majority of socialisation time for young people increasingly occurs outside the family circle. In these spaces of socialisation, they gain different experiences and receive different input to that provided by their parents. For example, it has been observed that the relationships between young people tend to be more horizontal and deliberative, representing a shift away from the hierarchical relationships dominant within socialising institutions such as families, schools, or businesses.

Francesco Vacchiano and Hafsa Afailal are interested in the moments when young people stop tolerating and start to rebel (Thomassen 2012). To understand how these acts of rebellion influenced their future and, particularly, how they affected the choices made in their subsequent activism, the authors explore the process of individual transformation that occurs during the activist experience. They also trace the longer-term consequences of said participation, such as embarking on an activist career, or taking a different path towards political disengagement or the development of a career plan. In so doing, they remind us of the relevance of the various social time frames that delineate the different stages of youth – e.g. the ruptures that occur when leaving school or university and embarking upon a professional career. Their conclusions draw attention to the circumstantial nature of activist engagement. They insist that, in order for their young interviewees to make
the leap to committing themselves at a collective level through a shared project it was necessary for there to be a very specific combination of personal predispositions, historical circumstances, forms of collective identification, and organised thought.

**Participation in associations as collective articulation of young people’s aspirations**

Despite the rise of the Maghrebi associative sector, there are still very few studies of this phenomenon (Ben Nefissa 2002; Haddad and Al Hindy 2019), and analyses of young people’s participation in non-profit voluntary organisations or associations are even less common. Research usually insists that only a minority of the population is involved in the associational phenomenon; they often reproduce pre-existing networks of socialisation and sociability; their work is limited to supplementing public policies; and, last but not least, these associations depend on their relationships with the political and administrative staff of the political state for their development and consolidation. It is true that some regimes, such as the Moroccan state, have found associations to be useful as a substitute for (or supplement to) their public policies, or to externalise financing for these policies through the funds available from the many international development organisations that require local associations to participate in the projects they promote. A prime example of this approach is the National Human Development Initiative (INDH) set up in 2005 to tackle poverty, illiteracy, and social exclusion through a partnership between associations and local governments, under the supervision of the territorial authorities (Bergh 2012; Berriane 2013). In this way, the North African regimes have tried to control the growth of the associative sector. Depending on their interests they have either supported or obstructed it, aware that any association’s activities involve an implicit criticism of the state. Effectively, the mere existence of an association draws attention to a role that the state is failing to fulfil, thereby undermining the state’s drive for hegemony, while holding itself up as a source of social power with its own legitimacy. Unsurprisingly, state control is more insistent and heavy-handed then when it comes to political advocacy organisations, such as those that highlight attacks on public liberties and rights or malpractice by the administration and political staff.

Since the period in which these three countries secured national independence in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, the growth of associations has been determined by the legislation on associations, which in turn has been a good indicator of the nature of these regimes (Desrues, forthcoming). Since 2011, the legislative frameworks that regulate association law have been reformed in Tunisia (2011) and Algeria (2012). An Advisory Council on Youth and Associative Action was created in Morocco (2018), but its members have not yet been appointed. In Algeria and Morocco, the number of associations has
been increasing steadily for three decades. In Tunisia it was only with the 2011 ‘revolution’ that unprecedented growth began, with the number of organisations having doubled since then. In the case of Tunisia, many young people seem to have found a space for participation in the associative sector. This has been facilitated by the liberalisation of association law, the dynamics of social and political pluralism characteristic of periods of democratic transition, and the intervention of the numerous international development agencies that have chosen to support this process.

In this special issue, various articles explore different types of associations, as well as the scope and limits of the impact of their activities on the participation and expectations of young people; the satisfaction of social demands; the construction of political problems; and the liberalisation and pluralisation of the political regimes.

Following the path laid out by Diamond (1994), Thierry Desrues (IESA-CSIC, Córdoba, Spain) and Ana Velasco Arranz (ETSIAAB-UPM, Madrid, Spain) consider Tunisia to be, in some respects, a ‘laboratory’ in which to explore civic participation in contexts of democratic transition and how the associative sector might influence the consolidation of new democratic institutions. On the basis of two surveys carried out with young activists involved in associations in 2015 and 2016, they reach three main conclusions. First, youth participation in the associative sector is not representative of the heterogeneity of Tunisian youth. Second, the number of causes championed and reasons for joining associations substantiates the contribution they make to increasing the plurality of public space. And finally, there is a positive correlation between participation in voluntary associations and electoral processes. These three conclusions are of great interest in the context of the electoral disaffection of young people and the growing polarisation between those nostalgic for Bourguibism and the supporters of the Islamic faction that threaten the consolidation of the process of democratic institutionalisation. However, they also provide evidence of significant social selectivity in how associations recruit young actors – namely a preference for people who have high levels of educational and cultural capital, possess advanced professional training, and are from families belonging to the middle and upper-middle classes. Therefore, while the assertion that young actors in associations contribute to Tunisia’s democratic consolidation is substantiated, the contribution is partial and limited.

The article by Amine Ben Mami (CHERPA/IEP, Aix-en-Provence, France) and Eric Gobe (IREMAM, Aix-en-Provence, France) supports the conclusions of Desrues and Velasco. The authors study various fledgling associations that are characterised by their functions of ‘surveillance, recording, and denunciation’ (Rosanvallon 2006). These associations aim to monitor public authorities and to evaluate the institutions created to facilitate the Tunisian political transition after 2011 in terms of how democratic their actions are.
The authors demonstrate that these associations usually take in young graduates from higher education institutions, who generally had little involvement in activist and political networks prior to the revolution. The young people are a manifestation of the distrust that is felt in Tunisian society towards politicians in this phase of political transition. Their critical stance towards party politics and even, in some cases, towards representative democracy, contrasts with the exaltation of ‘civil society’ identified with secular associations, whose primary mission would be to pressure those politicians who subvert the principles by which participatory democracy operates. These collectives draw together capabilities in evaluation, counter-expertise, and questioning that require professional activist knowledge and skill. The entry of these young people into associations that monitor democracy results from their commitment to certain political values, the desire to maintain a social connection, and the need to join the employment market.

In her study of the Algerian case, Laurence Thieux (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain) focuses on the associational sector that promotes and defends human rights in general, and, in particular, rights related to women and civic participation. This sector was able to take advantage of the window of opportunity presented by the political liberalisation that occurred between 1989 and 1991 in order to promote their activities. However, the ‘civil war’ of the following years, and the need to position themselves with regard to the strategies and attitudes of the various factions (radical Islamists, groups seeking a clean break with the old regime, and those seeking reconciliation), led these organisations to be pigeonholed, thereby reducing their capacity for action. Today, these organisations face the challenge of securing generational succession and of providing answers to the youth who were born during or after the conflict and, therefore, have not lived through the same experiences. Young people who have only known the presidency of Bouteflika (1999–2019) do not seem to identify with the ideological divisions inherited from the 1990s. They demand pragmatic and immediate solutions to their precarious situation and to uncertainty about the future, as well as to the problems in their local communities. Young people are faced with the strategies of state institutions controlled by a gerontocracy that does not want to hand over power, the neutralisation of social and political organisations that express critical views, and the lack of an adequate response to their demands. In response to this, many young people either find refuge in other spaces of sociability that attempt to escape the social control of the state, or they mobilise and confront the authorities.

**Other spaces and other forms of collective action: young people in peripheral territories**

As the preceding contributions have suggested, while participation in associations is a very significant feature of the processes of change underway in the
three Maghrebi countries, institutionalised and uninterrupted activism con-
tinues to be in the minority. This type of activism is more likely to recruit
young people from the middle and upper-middle classes with a range of
resources and skills that are usually gained through higher education.
Young people from these backgrounds and the associational action that
they promote are generally given a certain degree of legitimacy by the
public authorities and international development organisations, but this high-
lights our lack of knowledge about the extent to which such action reaches
and attracts other, less-educated young people from the working classes.
To locate this more numerous group of young people and their forms of
socio-political participation, it is necessary to look to other spaces of socialisa-
tion, such as the street or the neighbourhood, and other types of collective
action (Bayat 2010; Khatib 2013; Lamloum and Ali Ben Zina 2015; Antonas-
kis-Nashif 2016; Onodera et al. 2018). For example, Bayat (2010) insists that
‘non collective actors’ engage in practices of everyday resistance, which are
understood as an expression of opposition to the dominant modalities of
social governance. While this is an interesting approach, it still does not
clarify how such attitudes as non-conformism and individual disobedience
evolve to the point where they are transformed into (or become part of) social movements (Volpi and Jasper 2018). One way to try to understand
the shift from practices of everyday resistance to collective protest or social
movements involves creating an account of the trajectories of individual
and collective actors and – beyond focusing on the discontinuous nature of
the public manifestations of struggles – of demonstrating the long-standing
history and embeddedness of the causes and their claims, the role of actors
who have activist experience but are in a latent position, and the intergenera-
tional aspects of such protests (Hmed 2012).

From this perspective, Ratiba Hadj-Moussa (York University, Toronto, Canada) roots her observations in various geographical locations in Algeria – the north (the capital, Algiers), the south (the M’zab) and the more-distant south (the wilayah, or province, of Ouargla) – in order to provide information on various types of collective action, protesters’ varied histories of involve-
ment, and the diverse configurations of relationships with the authorities.
She thereby combines the experiences of individuals with the analysis of the various types of collective action led by young people in order to demon-
strate the cross-cutting nature of the ‘injustice frame’ that most young Alger-
ians share (Gamson 1992). This puts the Algerian political regime’s capacity to reinvent itself to the test. Due to an internal logic that is vertical, oligarchical,
clientelistic and corporatist, distancing and isolating the regime from the
demands of the population, the regime’s authoritarian resilience is put
under extreme, recurrent strain; it tends to enter into crisis when the question
of the head of state’s succession arises. This is what happened when Houari
Boumediene died in 1978, and the issue has now come up again, due to
the serious health problems that the President of the Republic, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, has been suffering since 2013 (Serres 2019). In the first case, the change of the country’s leader occurred without great public displays of popular opposition, whereas in the second case, there has been mass mobilisation of the population to demand the cancellation of the electoral process, the resignation of the President of the Republic, and a change of regime. If we follow Hadj-Moussa’s analysis, which approaches the actors in her study in both synchronic and diachronic terms, it clearly shows that the question of intergenerational relations has posed a problem in recent years – not only regarding the renewal of bodies for mediation but also the reformulation of the social contract with the state. In this sense, at the same time as these young people are transforming the state into an entity that is accountable to society, there is an underlying call for recognition by new interlocutors, expressing a demand for pluralism and political, economic, and social rights.

She therefore puts forward a reading of intergenerational conflict in the M’zab region that goes beyond explanations based on ethnic affiliations that pit so-called ‘Arabs’ against ‘Mozabites’. Similarly, the violence of young Mozabites is shown to be symptomatic of the lack of a legitimate structure for mediation, resulting from the difficulties encountered by associations and the new political parties recently established in the region, and from young people’s rejection of ‘traditional’ political representation. Faced with this vacuum, the regime has tried to restore calm by increasing the presence of the armed forces, persecuting all forms of protest, jailing opposition members, and thereby activating the vicious cycle of successive waves of protest and repression.

This rejection of traditional forms of mediation and the sense of their region of origin’s marginalisation is also seen in the struggle of the young people of the Comité National pour la Défense des Droits des Chômeurs (CNDDC) (National Committee to Defend the Rights of the Unemployed) in the wilayah of Ouargla. The strength and persistence of this movement’s struggle has been a surprise, especially in a region where over one hundred companies linked to the hydrocarbon sector have invested. This local expression of a national phenomenon – the unemployed youth – has therefore resulted in the movement’s demands becoming a highly politicised matter. The author also shows how networks of social solidarity were constructed through attending job centres, which added to existing local and family-based solidarity. The success of these young people’s struggle against the dispossession of local resources was translated into the appropriation of public space, the end of fear of the security forces, and the inclusion of this cause in a history of protest that dates back to the region’s contribution to national independence.

In contrast to these barely formalised protest movements with no legal recognition that have arisen in the country’s periphery, Hadj-Moussa also
addresses the associational sector through a case study of Rassemblement Action Jeunesse (RAJ) (Youth Action Movement). Throughout the tumultuous period known as the ‘black decade’ (1992–1999), this association’s activities provided a kind of refuge for an educated and ‘progressive’ sector of the young population (Cavatorta and Elananza 2008). However, these young people from the capital currently feel the need to adapt and reinvigorate their movement to connect with a new Algerian generation that does not have memories of that conflictual past – and who were born and socialised in the era of the internet and social networks. These new generations of young people find the internet to be a means to escape from the closure of the traditional public and political space. This rise of internet activism, or cyberactivism, by bloggers and YouTubers differs from associational activism due to the individualistic, even solitary, nature of its acts of protest, as well as the use of a humorous tone to mock institutionalised powers. Nevertheless, as the author notes, the regime’s repression reflects the political elite’s fear of these new forms of solo activism, which are characterised by participants’ mistrust of institutions and the desire to break away from the official narratives transmitted by the state media.

Hadj-Moussa’s text therefore joins the other contributions in helping us understand the social, economic, and political resources of those who decide to take action and move from tolerance to rebellion, irrespective of the forms of action chosen and their institutionalisation. While doing so, she counterpoises apathy, social movements, and riots, and questions where the boundaries between them lie, while reminding us that tolerance in authoritarian contexts may have a high price (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2003). Additionally, she rejects the unequivocal representation of the Maghrebi youth as inactive and disconnected from political life and civil society.

If there is a sector of the young population that is associated with this image of apathy and indifference, it is that of young people from the working classes of the neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the big cities. They are the focus of Giovanni Cordova’s study (Sapienza University of Rome, Italy). The author examines the everyday practices and discourses of working-class and middle-class young people who live in peripheral neighbourhoods in the city of Tunis. He thereby provides a vision of the incubation among certain young Tunisians of political and social models offering alternatives to the dominant neoliberal norms disseminated by the state. While some of these young people are members of local associations, the vast majority do not seem to pay much attention to the transformations underway in Tunisia’s post-revolutionary politics and society. Despite this attitude, as part of their daily lives, these young people have to take a position on the state, embodied primarily by the education system, official religious figures, and the security forces. They establish this positioning through community-based practices and ways of thinking, mediated through a horizontal culture of solidarity.
and support between peer groups. According to the author, these young people are thereby constructing a moral economy that offers an alternative to the neoliberal norms characterised by individual responsibility and self-regulation.

The place of religion in the post-revolutionary state seems to have dominated the attention of the media and civil society in the last few years, to such an extent that the economic and social demands at the roots of the protest movement that led to the fall of Ben Ali have been relegated to a secondary position. Cordova’s study reveals that young Tunisians demand for social justice is associated with the intense sociability forged between young people in the everyday life of their neighbourhood of residence. This sense of local belonging, already noted by Lamloum and Ali Ben Zina (2015) in a previous survey in Tunisia or Hadj-Moussa in her Algerian study, is not impervious to the transnational context. This is demonstrated by young people’s internet searches for sources of religious knowledge located in Persian Gulf states, and the experiences of emigration to Europe that are either direct or that reach them indirectly, through the narratives of acquaintances.

These references reveal the ongoing process of deinstitutionalisation caused by the large-scale transformations of the last few decades, as well as the massification of higher education, the flow of emigration, and the growth of the media. All of these factors mean that individuals are able to interpret or accept authority with greater freedom than in the past, to a point at which the roles and figures that the authorities represent are no longer beyond questioning.

This little-noticed phenomenon brings together various categories of young people from the peripheral neighbourhoods of Tunis who have lived alongside the growing Salafi movements, when they have not joined their ranks. When the Salafi movements have been stigmatised or even banned in response to the terrorist threat, many young people from the working classes in these neighbourhoods have suffered symbolic and physical violence from the law enforcement agencies (Marks 2013; Volpi 2018). (Ansar al-Sharia is a movement that seemed to come out of nowhere; it was declared a terrorist organisation by the government in 2013.) This has contributed to increasing the traditional, widespread feeling of humiliation, with law enforcement agencies having become guardians of a moral order that symbolises and embodies the injustice suffered by these young people. In contrast to their relationship of conflict with state representatives, living alongside the young Salafists does not seem to cause great difficulties for the young people in the neighbourhood that the author visits. In a context of unemployment and a devaluation of qualifications, in which young people are trying to give meaning to their lives and create coherent identities, religion has an important place endorsing other recent studies (Melliti 2015). Cordova
therefore observes that following one of the strands of Salafism does not necessarily lead to disconnection from one’s network of friends in the neighbourhood, meaning that the reintegration of those who have given up this affiliation seems to occur naturally. This confirms the strength of relationships of mutual support and solidarity between peers who grew up together in the same neighbourhood. These relationships add a certain benevolence and even mutual respect to how young people with different attitudes to religious practice live in the same space. Upon reading the article, one gets the impression that conversion to Salafism may be temporary, almost a banal experience belonging to a youth counter-culture. Within that culture, it seems that using the language of Islam provides meaning and identity that transcend the local and national framework and challenge the ‘secular’ sectors associated with the most affluent levels of society. The phenomenon of illegal emigration plays a similar role. This symbolises a certain challenge to state control, as well as a search for social recognition. In this sense, emigration helps to delegitimise the work of the state and its role as producer of the norms that define what is good and bad.

**Conclusions**

This special issue calls attention to the heterogeneity of the young population and their participation in collective action, and it highlights the reasons that motivate certain individuals to promote or take part in it. It also highlights the diversity of national and local collectives. Nevertheless, it outlines a distinctive characteristic that they share: a generational consciousness that breaks away from the inherited, hierarchical practices of the generations that occupy the positions of power. It therefore confirms that, more than being disinterested in public affairs, politics, or the society around them, young North Africans reject the way that society acts towards them, how public policies are produced and decided upon, and how political figures are chosen. Rather than apathy, young people show themselves to be interested in helping to improve things and in getting involved in public affairs.

That being said, young people’s desire to participate is conditioned by the opportunities available to them. Associations, when able to get past the reluctance of the authorities, involve a silent social selection process that is biased by a certain elitism, explaining their limited potential for mobilisation. Nor have they become a setting that acts as a substitute for political participation, given that a larger proportion of associational activists tend to vote than non-activists, and because the associational framework has become a route by which to make the leap into political representation. In contrast, they may be symptomatic of a high level of democratic demands and responsibility. There is a debate among young people between the demand for democratic participation and a sense of mistrust towards institutions. Beyond the type of
political regime, we have observed that these tensions between a desire for participation and mistrust have their roots in the persistence of a crisis of intergenerational transmission, which varies in intensity, depending on the country.

Young people alternate between adopting ‘voice’ or ‘exit’ strategies (Hirschman 1970) – between complete engagement or one that is distant and intermittent. The choices they end up making will be determined by the opportunities that arise; their prior experiences of socialisation in activism, mobilisation, and repression; the social resources they possess; the benefits they expect their participation to bring; the strength of conviction of the official narratives of political figures; and the attitudes of their peer group. All of this means that there is a contingent element to participation and the modalities it takes. Therefore, the moral clash created by the collapse of the rules and norms that represent the social contract between governors and governed, political leaders or administrators and people in the street, could lead to mobilisation or an escape to internal or external exile.

Understanding the specific problems and realities of these young people in terms of the diversity of their individual and collective expressions, formalisations, and locations was and still is a relevant question. This is evidenced by the continuing relevance of the socio-economic protests in Tunisia (Thieux and Hernando de Larramendi 2018) and Morocco (Wolf 2018) of the last few years, or the massive demonstrations calling for regime change in Algeria since February 2019. This timeliness, as well as a whole range of themes that have not been covered in this special issue, such as the question of the participation of women or online collective action, means that the thought-provoking material the reader will find within it should be compared with and complemented by other studies.

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