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Public Action towards Youth in Neo-Liberal Morocco: Fostering and Controlling the Unequal Inclusion of the New Generation

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to analysing public action toward youth in Morocco since the 90s in the context of implementation of neo-liberal reform. After providing an historical overview of youth policy in the country, it analyses relevant youth policies in four interrelated domains of public action: employment, family, migration and spatial planning policies.

Keywords: Morocco | Youth | Domestic policy | Employment | Family | Migration

1. YOUTH POLICY IN MOROCCO: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The category of youth first appeared in Morocco in the 1930s when it was used by the young nationalists (*chaban watani*) to affirm their crucial role in the modernization of the country and in the fight for national independence (Bennani-Chraïbi 2007, Bono 2013). In the first decade after independence, youth - educated males - continued to represent the force of modernity and creativity (Bono 2013). The state policy of guaranteed employment for graduates and free education was an important tool for social mobility and formed part of a social contract between the authorities and the youth of the new urban middle class (Bogaert and Emperador 2011, Cohen 2004).

However, unlike other Arab countries such as Tunisia and Algeria, the Moroccan social welfare system remained highly unequal and weak, and the country opted very early for economic liberalization (Ennaji 2006, Catusse 2010). As employment problems and social discontent emerged in the mid-1960s, so did a new politicized generation of youth. The youth involved in protests were portrayed in the official discourse as victims of external instrumentalization, in a paternalistic tone. Growing youth politicization was seen as a threat to the country and was harshly repressed (Bono 2013, Desrues 2012).

With the adoption of a comprehensive macroeconomic stabilization and structural adjustment programme (SAP) under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) between 1982 and 1993, Moroccan authorities privileged the macroeconomic equilibrium at the expense of social policies and the welfare state, in the conviction that achieving high growth rates would automatically benefit the population and reduce poverty (Ennaji 2006, Catusse 2010).

It was at the end of the 1980s to the early 1990s, in the context of the implementation of neo-liberal reform, that a specific category of "youth", that of *educated unemployed males*, became a political priority on the public agenda (Bennani-Chraïbi 2007:137). Until 1980, college

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and university graduates were recruited mainly by the public sector, but the application of structural adjustment and diminishing public spending led to massive cutbacks in the public sector employment and wages were frozen between 1983 and 1987 (Morrisson 1991, Ben Ali 1997, El Aoufi and Bensaïd 2005).² As the Moroccan government abandoned the policy of offering a job to university graduates, urban unemployment among qualified youth went up, particularly among those with a baccalaureate/university degree.

In 1991, unemployed graduates started organizing by establishing the Moroccan National Association of Unemployed Graduates (*Association nationale des diplômés chômeurs du Maroc*, ANDCM) in Casablanca to demand jobs in the public sector, thus denouncing the breach of the social pact based on the promotion of a middle class (Bennani-Chraïbi 1994, Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag 2007, Emperador 2007). The ANDCM emerged as a politicized group since it questioned the structural adjustment policies adopted by the regime and explained unemployment in terms of "class policy" (Emperador 2013:198).

In response to the emergence of a new movement that risked threatening the social order, King Hassan II attempted to depoliticize the question of unemployment by publically acknowledging the problem of unemployed graduates (*diplômés chômeurs*). In 1991 he created the *Conseil national de la jeunesse et de l'avenir* (CNJA) and, while repressing student movements and other protests, allowed the ANDCM to enter the public arena (Bogaert and Emperador 2011, Bennani-Chraïbi 2007). The CNJA was charged with carrying out a number of studies and surveys on unemployment among graduates, and providing the government with recommendations and concrete measures to deal with this high level of unemployment. However, the CNJA had little impact on public policy in the 1990s, and all of the information on unemployed graduates that was collected by the institution went directly to the Interior Minister, where it was used as a tool to supervise and control the political activities of the surveyed group of unemployed graduates (Bono 2013).

In the context of an already fragile social welfare system, accompanied by a further reduction of public spending and the intensification of free market reforms (such as privatization and opening to foreign investment), the 1990s were marked by a dramatic deterioration of poverty and youth unemployment, as well as growing protests and mobilizations (Ennaji 2006). At the end of the 1990s, the social protection system (in Morocco) had a very limited coverage compared to other Arab countries, solely benefiting civil servants (only 15 percent of total population), while the existing social protection institutions (such as the *Promotion nationale* created in 1961 and *Entraide nationale* in 1957) were still in an embryonic state and scarcely funded (Catusse 2010).

A major turn in public policies came with the first "*gouvernement d'alternance*" of Youssoufi in 1998 and with the *young* King Mohammed VI's accession to the throne in 1999. In fact, public authorities were increasingly concerned with the security risks of rising social tensions and started placing the "social question" high on the agenda (see Catusse 2009).³ As a part of this

² To give an idea about the drastic cuts in public employment, the proportion of workers integrated in the civil service dropped from 65.4 percent in 1982 to 23.7 percent in 1993 (El Aoufi and Bensaïd 2005).

³ This led to the creation of several institutions including: the Agency for Social Development of 1999, the Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity of 2004 together with the Muhammad V Solidarity Foundation in

overall reorientation of public discourse and action, the “youth question” gained a renewed interest and centrality together with the “women’s question” (see, for example, the reform of the Family Code in 2003-04). In December 1999, Mohammed VI advised the new government to place the “integration of youth” (“*intégration de la jeunesse*”) as one of the major goals in the 1999-2004 development plan, together with women and marginalized regions.⁴ To signal the new direction, in 2000 the King announced the dissolution of the CNJA, transferring its function to the *Conseil économique et social*, which was charged with supervising any plan regarding the national economy and social and financial matters, “including education and training as well as problems concerning youth” (the latter, however, saw the light only in 2011). Public initiatives and programmes targeted to unemployed graduates intensified in the 2000s, particularly in the second half of the decade.

Public efforts were also concentrated on reforming the education and training system. In 1999, the National Education and Training Charter providing a road map for reform over the 2000-2010 decade was approved by the National Commission created by the King.

The need for accelerating poverty alleviation strategies and directing public action toward youth took on heightened urgency after May 16, 2003, when the country suffered multiple terrorist attacks in the city of Casablanca. The eight suicide bombers involved in the attack were youth living in the squalid conditions of Casablanca slums. After the Casablanca attacks, at the level of public authorities as well as in the media, youth engagement with Islamism was strictly correlated to extreme poverty and social misery (Catusse 2009:203). Alongside unemployed graduates, “youth living in poor marginalized areas” exposed to the risk of religious extremism, threatened the country’s security and became another category of public concern and a target of public action.

In May 2005, two years after the attacks at Casablanca, the King launched the National Human Development Initiative (INDH), aimed at fighting poverty and providing social protection to vulnerable populations under the rhetoric of a transparent and participatory process involving local authorities, charity associations and international agencies. Within the INDH and other social programmes, numerous poverty-alleviating actions were specifically targeted to youth (e.g., young people without shelter, street children and so on).⁵

Despite the proliferation of programmes and initiatives tailored to youth in the 2000s, labour insecurity and precariousness, as well as socio-economic and spatial inequalities among youth themselves, continued to worsen. While reaffirming the centrality of the “social question”, the regime went ahead with the neo-liberal economic policies that were at the heart of the exacerbation of social and economic problems. The employment programmes

1999 and the Hassan II Fund for Economic and Social Development in 2000.

⁴ See the speech given by the King to the government: *Lettre de S.M. le Roi Mohammed VI au Premier ministre, M. Abderrahmane El Youssoufi, définissant le cadre et les orientations du plan quinquennal*, 16 December 1999, <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/lettre-de-sm-le-roi-mohammed-vi-au-premier-ministre-m-abderrahmane-el>.

⁵ See, for instance, the programme “*Villes sans bidonvilles*” launched in 2004; the programmes targeting youth under the *Entraide nationale* including *Centres d’éducation et de formation*, *Centres de formation par apprentissage*, *Maisons du citoyen*, and *Établissements de protection sociale*; and the programmes targeted to youth geared by l’*Agence de développement sociale* aimed at promoting the creation of small enterprises (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014:9-10).

targeted toward youth and the education reform launched by public authorities were themselves instrumental in extending the neo-liberal agenda. They were basically geared to improve the employability of youth in order to respond to market needs, while also discharging the state from the responsibility to provide jobs, university education, vocational training and social services by delegating it to hybrid/public-private forms of management (such as the Muhammad V Foundation and the Hassan II Fund) (see Catusse 2009), the private sector (business and non-profit actors) and youth themselves (through self-employment). Alongside a vast majority of unemployed and precarious youth, however, a minority of young people from elite families, consisting of small-scale entrepreneurs and corporate managers in multinationals or Moroccan firms, took large advantage from trade liberalization and privatization programmes (Cohen 2004).

While state intervention diminished by making increasing use of private actors, public control over youth did not. In the 2000s, the regime reconfigured its modalities of control over young people. As a part of the new rhetoric of "good governance" and participative development and pluralism, the King took a number of measures to favour the participation of youth in civic and political life in the early 2000s (Bono 2009 and 2013). Given the high electoral abstention of the young population the voting age was lowered to 18, while the 2002 amendments to the law of associations apparently allowed more space for the creation of youth organizations. However, regulation and supervision of youth associations remained under the Minister of Interior, while those with a political agenda were subject to heavy sanction or excluded from the distribution of resources (Berriane 2010, Desrues 2012). On their side, co-opted youth organizations were a tool to penetrate society where the state was unable to arrive in an attempt to exercise control over youth politicization under the banner of "youth risky behaviour" and "extremism", rather than favouring youth genuine participation.

Under the new King, the Moroccan regime also tried to devoid protest actions of the unemployed graduates of political content. Since 1998, based on a number of decrees promulgated by the Ministry of Public Administration which state that Masters and PhD degree holders can be recruited as civil servants directly (without passing a competitive entrance examination), public authorities started conducting regular consultations with a new unemployed group composed exclusively of unemployed postgraduates to negotiate jobs in the administration. At the same time, the most politicized group of the ANDCM was excluded from the bargaining table, leading to a progressive decline in its support (Emperador 2013). The King also enabled a plurality of groups of unemployed to emerge, but their action was weakened through the strategy of "*divide et impera*" (Cavatorta 2007). Regular negotiations with the groups of unemployed postgraduates also allowed public authorities to supervise the protesters' political position (Emperador 2013).

In an attempt to contain the influence of Islamist movements among youth - particularly after the Casablanca attacks - public authorities tolerated and encouraged other forms of youth dissent, such as those voiced by hip-hop culture rappers and Sufism, which was conceived as a moderate alternative to militant Islam (Bekkaoui and Larémont 2011, Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine 2013).

Following the Arab uprisings of 2011, in Morocco the category of youth was again revamped in public discourse, just as it was in other countries of the region.⁶ The February 20th movement was unanimously referred to as a “youth movement”, which served to negate the universal character of the protests and confine it to “youth demands” (Bono 2013), thus concealing broader and structural social conflicts. In the Moroccan context where the protests did not lead to a regime change, the official narrative on youth has been functional to preserve the existing power system and reinvigorate neo-liberal policies even more than in the countries where incumbent regimes were overthrown.

During the 2011 protest days, the Moroccan regime immediately appropriated the discourse of the February 20th movement by accepting some (but not all) of its demands, while discrediting the image of its members portrayed as unbelievers and unpatriotic (e.g., sympathetic to the Polisario Front) (Desrues 2013). On 9 March 2011, Mohammed VI announced a constitutional reform, albeit he made no mention of the movement and omitted its demand for the democratic election of a Constituent Assembly (Desrues 2013). At the same time, in an attempt to fragment the opposition the government promised to satisfy the demands of *some* youth - specifically the unemployed graduates - provided they did not align themselves to the movement (Desrues 2013, Emperador 2013). In early March, public authorities announced the creation of more than 1,000 jobs in the administration (Emperador 2013).

With the purpose of neutralizing social and ideological tensions that came to light during the 2011 protests, the post-uprising narrative and action by public authorities have focused on the importance of enhancing “youth participation in the economic, social, cultural and political development of the country” (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014:1), as shown by a proliferation of initiatives targeted to youth (Bono 2013). The amended Constitution adopted in 2011 contains two articles directly concerning youth participation (Articles 33 and 170).⁷ It claims that public institutions have to take appropriate measures to favour the participation of youth in the social, economic, cultural, political and associative life of the country, as well as to assist youth with the difficulties of scholarly, social or professional adaptation and to promote access to culture, science, technology, art, sports and leisure (Article 33). To provide consultation on the above issues, the creation of a Consultative Council on Youth and Associative Action (*Conseil consultatif de la jeunesse et de l'action associative*) with youth representatives is envisioned (Articles 33 and 170). However, three years after its creation was announced in the new Moroccan Constitution, the Youth Council has not yet been established. Also, the specific role that the Council is expected to play is described in very vague terms and it is not clear if and how this Council could effectively influence decision-making. Meanwhile, the official discourse of youth participation stands in stark contrast with the repressive strategy (from the use of force to intimidation practices) pursued by state authorities against the February 20th Movement activists.

⁶ As an example, see the royal speech *Discours adressé par SM le Roi à la Nation à l'occasion du 59ème anniversaire de la Révolution du Roi et du peuple*, 20 August 2012, <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/texte-intégral-du-discours-adressé-par-sm-le-roi-à-la-nation-à-l'occasion-du-59ème>.

⁷ Full text of the 2011 Constitution (in French) available in the WIPO website: <http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/fr/details.jsp?id=13535>.

In the aftermath of the protests, the idea to elaborate a national unified strategy toward youth, proposed earlier in 2009, was also revamped. In August 2012, the King claimed that it is imperative for public authorities to elaborate a global strategy toward youth that puts to an end the dispersion of current measures.⁸ In 2014, a National Strategy of Youth (*Stratégie nationale intégrée de jeunesse*) was prepared and approved (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014). Its elaboration was presented as a “participative bottom-up process” involving 16 regional forums of young people from “different socio-demographic categories,” which entailed consultations with 4,000 young people as well as the *Assises nationales de la Jeunesse*, a space of debate and reflection leading to the final version of the strategy. At the time of writing however, the plan of action, which is required to operationalize the strategy, has still to be finalized.

Moreover, the national youth strategy document which was elaborated under the strict supervision of the World Bank and the *Centre pour l'intégration méditerranéen de Marseille* adopts the analytical and policy framework of the pre-uprising era to deal with youth-related problems as it fully embraces - and legitimizes - the neo-liberal discourse on youth. The document is embedded with human rights and gender equality language and incorporates terms such as youth exclusion/inclusion, which were previously not part of the Moroccan public authorities' rhetoric. The category of youth is expanded as to include not only teenagers and people in their twenties, but also the population in their thirties and beyond (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014:2-3). The “excluded youth” are not only the “unemployed graduate [males],” who are said to represent a small part of this group, but also those who have an informal job or are “inactive” (a category said to contain mainly “youth living in rural areas, low educated and young women”) (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014:17). Alongside this, the national strategy is clearly rooted in neo-liberal thinking. It proposes an instrumentalist/liberal view of youth, whose valorization - which in the document equates with improving their employability to respond to the market needs - appears “as the major factor [...] for an advantageous insertion in the world economy” (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014:23). To cope with the multiple youth employment problems, Morocco is called to push even further the free market reforms that have so far exacerbated youth insecurity and precariousness.

The following paragraphs are devoted to a more in-depth analysis of youth-relevant policies in four interrelated domains of public action with a focus on the period since the adoption of the SAPs: employment, family, migration and spatial planning policies. The first two domains more directly contribute to produce and define the category of youth, whereas the latter two interfere in a more subtle way in youth policies. However, all of them strongly affect “youth”, both in concrete terms and as a constructed category.

2. YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT

Following the implementation of neo-liberal reforms in the early 1980s, the labour market problems of Moroccan youth were mostly framed by national authorities and international agencies as being first and foremost a problem of unemployment among graduates. Informality, precariousness and insecurity of labour relations were seldom mentioned as problems in

⁸ Ibid.

relation to youth and the population at large,⁹ in spite of the fact that starting in the late eighties, Morocco began to experience a rapid expansion in these forms of employment, as is documented in many sources (Ben Ali 1997, Mejjati-Alami 2000, El Aoufi and Bensaïd 2005, Achy 2010). Public authorities and international agencies started stressing the positive role of the informal sector, which was seen as an important source of employment and income, particularly for unskilled labour and marginalized urban areas, glossing over the very bad working conditions.¹⁰

Since the mid-80s, the dominant narrative diffused by Moroccan authorities and international agencies - and which remains dominant - framed youth unemployment among those who were educated purely as an education problem; that is, Moroccan youth lack the right skills for jobs required in the labour market (the so-called education-employment nexus).¹¹ Within this narrative, young educated people were accused of continuing to queue in the public sector even though hiring was curtailed. Since 1998, Moroccan authorities have started negotiating with the groups of unemployed graduates by offering jobs in the administration. They have tried to continuously discourage graduates from public sector employment, stressing the limitations of civil service in fulfilling the potential of youth, while also portraying self-employment as the optimal solution for young people. The latter were exhorted to exploit creativity and spirit of initiative and look at the private sector.¹²

In the early 1990s with the creation of the CNJA, and even more with the new King in the 2000s, educated unemployed youth increasingly became a central category in official discourse and action. The 2000-2004 Plan put the promotion of employment among its priorities to reduce unemployment among graduates (see HCP 2000:9,175). In 2000, the *Agence nationale de promotion de l'emploi et des compétences* (ANAPEC) was created with the mission of seeking and gathering job offers from employers and matching them with the labour supply in the private sector. A plethora of employment schemes, mainly targeted at unemployed graduates, were launched at the end of the 1990s and intensified in the second

⁹ As examples of official discourse on this regard, see the King's speeches from 1999 to 2011 (available at <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-du-roi>) where "productive employment" is mentioned as a target of public policy and no reference to the quality of employment conditions is made. Also see the 2000-2004 Plan and the 2008-2012 Plan, which make no mention of informal employment (HCP 2000 and 2008). Official evaluations of existing employment policies provide numbers of job created but are silent on the quality of job or under which contract.

¹⁰ See, for example, World Bank (1994) and Ben Ali (1997), where the dynamism of Morocco's informal sector, particularly self-employment, was said to be a factor that helped soften the SAPs in the 1980s, ignoring the bad working conditions of workers, particularly young people with no professional experience. Similarly, in World Bank (2004), the expansion of low-paid wage jobs among females aged between 15 and 24 years in manufacturing for export in the 1980s-1990s was applauded as a positive tool to help raise their parents' household income and alleviate poverty during that period, completely concealing that this was at the cost of very exploitive working conditions and low wages.

¹¹ See the studies by the CNJA (1993 and 1996) and World Bank (2004). See also the royal speech *Discours de S.M. le Roi Mohammed VI lors de l'ouverture de la session d'automne de la troisième année législative*, 8 October 1999, <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/discours-de-sm-le-roi-mohammed-vi-lors-de-l-ouverture-de-la-session-d-automne-de-la>.

¹² See, for example, the royal speeches on 8 October 1999 (supra) and on 30 July 2001: *Discours à l'occasion du deuxième anniversaire de l'intronisation de Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI*, <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/discours-à-l-occasion-du-deuxième-anniversaire-de-lintronisation-de-sa-majesté-le-roi>.

half of the 2000s.¹³

Within the mainstream narrative described above, during the 1990s and 2000s Moroccan authorities responded to the problem of youth unemployment among graduates with measures essentially aimed at improving the employability of young people, such as training, internship programmes in private companies (which were provided with public incentives in the form of reduced taxation)¹⁴ and incentivizing youth enterprise creation through micro-credit schemes and other methods. These responses, however, failed to provide youth with long-term and good quality jobs, as they were instrumental in promoting the neo-liberal model of reform. Internship programmes offered young people very low wages and temporary contracts (*contract à durée déterminée*, CDD),¹⁵ as the companies were not obliged to recruit the trainees at the end of the programme and were interested in taking state subventions rather than inserting young people into long-term contracts. Similarly, income-generating programmes provided youth with unsustainable and low-profit activities (Mourji 2000, Al Amana 2004).

Neo-liberal policies have increased labour insecurity and precariousness as well as socio-economic and spatial inequalities among youth themselves. Morocco's integration into the global economy has been based on the demand for cheap, mostly unskilled labour, leading to the creation of spaces favourable to international and national business where labour laws are suspended. Since 1984, the increase in labour-intensive, export-oriented activities in the clothing/textile industry was made possible thanks to the employment of a large number of women - mostly youth and teenagers from poor and vulnerable households - in very bad working conditions and for low wages (Joekes 1986, Cairoli 1999, Bourqia 2002, Labari 2006). Young unmarried women with no professional experience who migrated from rural areas or lived in the bidonville close to the factory were preferred by foreign companies because they were always available to work, including during the night (as they were not absorbed by reproductive and family work), and were more easily submitted to male authority and available to accept low salaries. On the opposite side, export-oriented firms generally refuse to employ graduated young women as they are considered politically dangerous, bringing about trade union ideas and threatening social peace in the firms (Labari 2006).

After the mid-1990s, however, when the clothing industry entered a deep economic crisis owing to international competition leading to job losses, employment opportunities decreased and working conditions for young women further worsened. The spread of free zones such as the Tangiers Zone, the expansion of agro-export production (e.g., in the coastal area of Gharb and in tomato-producing regions such as the Souss-Massa region) and the off-shore regime in the service sector (particularly call centres), all based on cheap labour, both unskilled and skilled, have also been a source of exploitation of young labour, particularly among unmarried women.

¹³ For a review of these employment programmes, see Gouitaa (2005), Mejjati (2006), Ibourk (2012).

¹⁴ Major programmes have been *Aide à l'insertion*, which was launched in 1993, and *Taehil* and *Idmaj*, two additional programmes introduced in 2007 under the *Initiative gouvernementale de création d'emploi* (2005-2011).

¹⁵ Although there are no official data on CDD as declared by official institutions, there is some evidence that its share has increased significantly in Morocco compared to the *contract à durée indéterminée* (CDI). See Mountaj (2014).

Under the influence of international agencies, the reform of higher education since the late 1990s has also been tailored to adapt university education to job market needs and to favour private institutions, completely ignoring - and even reinforcing - key structural questions such as the gap between elite education in Morocco's *grandes écoles* and mass education in its public universities (Cohen 2004:83-84, Kohstall 2012, Ben Sedrine et al 2015). Closely connected to neo-liberal policies, the labour code was reformed in 2004 to create an environment favourable to investment by allowing greater flexibility in recruitment and dismissal (by introducing temporary labour contracts), in addition to imposing restrictions on the right to strike (Fargues and Martin 2010, Ibourk 2012). The expansion of private, international placement agencies in the country such as Manpower, Adecco, Crit and RMO Maroc has also favoured the spread of temporary and seasonal labour migration programs, thus feeding employment precarity and insecurity.

In the post-uprising period, public discourse on youth and employment has undergone some change. In 2012, Prime Minister Benkirane put an end to the policy of directly recruiting unemployed graduates. He refused to implement the previous government's agreement with the associations of unemployed graduates to recruit 4,000 graduates without holding competitions. He also claimed that recruitment into the civil service should be made on the basis of merit. Numerous documents produced by both national and international agencies - World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and others - and the media have put into question that unemployment among graduates is the main problem affecting young people. Other youth problems such as inactivity, poor quality jobs and precariousness for those who work have acquired public relevance.¹⁶ At the end of 2013, for example, the government announced the preparation of a law project to limit the use of CDD (El Aissi 2013).

However, although the category of "youth as a problem" has been extended and previous employment policies are criticized, public discourse and action remain firmly rooted in the neo-liberal framework. In the National Strategy on Youth (2015-2030), youth exclusion from the economic growth of the previous decade is explained with the fact that past employment programmes were only targeted to unemployed graduates and did not reach "disadvantaged youth" (*les jeunes défavorisés*) (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014:10,16,22,99). The high rates of unemployment among graduates continue to be solely justified as reflecting a mismatch between the labour market and the education system.¹⁷ As a result, Moroccan authorities have simply expanded existing training, internship and income-generating programmes so as to reach long-term unemployed, non-graduated youth, as well as youth in rural areas.¹⁸

The "renewed" narrative on "youth inclusion" seems in fact to be functioning to further the neo-liberal agenda. Post-uprising, the Islamist-led government has proposed entrepreneurship as the main solution to unemployment and has reinforced its action to extend self-employment

¹⁶ See El Aoufi and Hanchane (2011), Conseil économique et social (2012), World Bank 2012. See also the New Strategy of Employment 2015-2030 launched in 2014 (Ministère de l'Emploi 2014) and the National Strategy on Youth 2015-2030 (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014:10) as examples of this "new" discourse.

¹⁷ See, for example, statements by the Employment Minister quoted in Ministère de la Jeunesse (2014).

¹⁸ See, for example, the programmes Taater and Moukawalati and the programme *Promotion de l'emploi des jeunes en milieu rural* launched in Fez in early 2015.

among youth, both graduated and non-graduated. The financial budget law of 2012 launched two additional programmes with this goal, namely *Istiabe* and *Moubadara*. A new strategy, the *Stratégie nationale de promotion de la très petite entreprise 2013-2017*, has placed the promotion of micro-enterprises, including self-employment among youth, as a national priority on the public agenda.

3. YOUTH AND FAMILY

The worsening of labour market conditions for youth, together with the increasing cost of living, housing, marriage, protraction of education and spread of new social and cultural behaviours, have contributed to the delay in family formation. In Morocco just as elsewhere, many young people remain single for long periods of time while trying to save money to marry (Singerman 2007, Lagarde and Khrouz 2011). According to a 2010 national survey of the *Haut Commissariat au Plan* (HCP), men marry today between 30 and 34, while women marry between 24 and 29 (HCP 2010).¹⁹

However, while acknowledging this trend, Moroccan public authorities and political parties seem to gloss over the implications of postponing marriage, in terms of difficulties in the transition to adulthood. As many authors underline, the delay in marriage strongly affects the moment of transition from being young to being an adult (Singerman 1995, Joseph 1996, Dhillon et al 2009). Sons and daughters remain under the influence of their family until later ages, while the economic and social context reinforces their dependency. In the last few decades, family solidarity has become central - even in the public discourse - to fill the gaps of the public social support system (Bennani-Charaibi 2000:147).

This dependency, together with the condition of not being married, represents a barrier to adult life and to a full citizenship (Dhillon et al 2009:9). In Morocco, the social context imposes that in order to be fully accepted as adults, individuals have to form a family, which is founded on the legal union of marriage. There is no space for forms of families that occur outside of legal marriage.²⁰ Those who fall outside the dominant model of family (e.g., unmarried heterosexual couples, single mothers, LGBTQ individuals) are subject to different levels of sanctions. In the public discourse, the concept of family is shaped in a strict heteronormative framework: heterosexuality is the only sexual orientation accepted, and sexuality is only appropriate between people of opposite sex within the framework of legal marriage. In fact, Article 490 of the Penal Code states that extra-conjugal relations are punishable by imprisonment for one month to one year. Although after 2011, under the pressure of certain sectors of civil society, a debate to reform the Penal Code took place (Choukrallah 2015), the Justice and Development Party (*Parti de la Justice et du développement*, PJD) - the Islamist

¹⁹ The delay in family formation has contributed to the change in fertility rate. Nowadays, fertility rate is measured at 2.19 births per woman (1.84 in urban areas and 2.70 in rural areas), while in the 1960s the fertility rate was measured at 7.2 births per woman (HCP 2010). With an average birth rate of 2.19 children per woman, Morocco's fertility rate has reached a level nearly as low as that of some European countries, such as France. The falling growth rate has to be ascribed to several factors: a longer educational path, rural-urban migration, the cost of living, family planning policies started in the 60s and the above-mentioned delay of first marriage.

²⁰ Article 32 of the 2011 Constitution states: "The family, founded on the legal bonds of marriage, is the basic unit [cellule] of society."

party in government - has strongly rejected any proposal of reform, justifying this decision as the will of safeguarding the Islamic identity of the country (Etayea 2015).

However, nowadays one of the major problems for youth in postponing family formation has to do with sexuality, a very sensitive topic addressed with reluctance by public authorities, as the lack of sexual education programmes and national surveys on the topic testify. Postponing the age of first marriage and the spread of new social and cultural habits have led to an increase in pre-marriage relationships and contributed to spread of pornography, risky sexual behaviours, undesired pregnancies and abortions,²¹ all in a context in which the social and legal stigma for these practices is high (Carey 2010). For example, single mothers are criminalized in the public discourse with the sanction of the already mentioned Article 490 of the Penal Code, as their condition is the proof of extra-conjugal relationships. Mostly very young and coming from low classes, generally with no means to abort, single mothers and their children are subjected to social and legal discriminations (Kreutzberger 2009). In the absence of public policies, only a few NGOs, such as the associations *Solidarité féminine* and INSAF, are trying to help this growing category of young women (INSAF 2011).

While the official discourse is not concerned with youth sexuality or with late marriages and their consequences, it has devoted particular attention to the persistence of early marriage in the society since the beginning of the 2000s. More recently, the phenomenon has received attention in the National Strategy of Youth (2015-2030) which calls for activating measures to prevent early marriage among young women in compliance with the legal provisions of the country (Ministère de la Jeunesse 2014). Article 19 of the Family Code (*Mudawwana*) establishes the minimum legal age of marriage as 18 years for both girls and boys.²² The *Mudawwana*, reformed in 2003-04, represents the major legislative reform concerning family and women's rights since independence (Sadiqi and Ennaji 2006, Charrad 2012). Although it has not completely questioned the patriarchal structure of Moroccan society (e.g., persistence of polygamy, no full equality between men and women in the private sphere) for the first time the family is placed under the "joint responsibility of both spouses." While husbands are still legally required to support their wives financially, the 2004 reform specified that both spouses are equally responsible within the household in regard to economic management and their children's education. The *Mudawwana* abolished the traditional rule of "the obedience of the wife to her husband" and diminished the role of the *wali* (or matrimonial guardian), which became optional instead of required. Furthermore, it established the wife's right in asking for a divorce. The new *Mudawwana* gives women priority in custody rights, even upon remarriage or relocation, while the father remains the legal guardian of his children. Children of both sexes can choose a custodian at the age of 15 (previously, sons remained with the mother until puberty, whereas daughters remained until marriage) (Charrad 2012).

The reign of Muhammad VI has been characterized by a new commitment to the promotion of women's rights (also under the pressure of local NGOs and international agencies). After

²¹ In Morocco, abortion is illegal. However, Chafik Chraïbi, president of the *Association marocaine de lutte contre l'avortement clandestin* (AMLAC) estimates that between 600 and 800 abortions take place illegally every day. Recently, even the PJD has stated the necessity to discuss the law prohibiting abortion. See Hamma (2015).

²² An unofficial translation is available in the website of the Human Rights Education Associates (HREA): <http://www.hrea.org/?p=2094>.

reforming the *Mudawwana*, in 2007 the Moroccan government reformed the country's nationality code and now gives women the right to pass their nationality on to their children (Zvan Elliot 2009).

After 2011 there has been a renewed attention to family and women's issues. Specifically, Article 19 of the Constitution amended in 2011 states that "men and women have equal civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights and freedoms," and new strategies for gender equality are announced as the *Agenda gouvernemental pour l'égalité 2011-2015* and in the programme Ikram (2012-2016), which focuses on the problem of violence against women. Furthermore, in 2014 after the suicide of a young woman named Amina Filali, Article 475 of the Penal Code that allows a perpetrator of rape to escape prosecution by marrying his victim was repealed. This article mainly affected minors and young women, because it forced them to marry their rapist to save their "honour" and that of their family (Aït Akdim 2012). However, notwithstanding the emphasis on women's rights in public discourse, public action seems to be weak in pursuing equality, while the major public authorities continue to propose a conservative patriarchal model of family and relations between men and women. The refusal to discuss the current inheritance law, the rejection of a proposed law against sexual harassment, the silence on the topic of domestic violence and the 2014 statement of Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane (PJD) in which he compared women to "lanterns" and lamented that when women went to work the light went out of their homes are cases in point.²³

4. YOUTH AND MIGRATION

As a consequence of the difficulties in entering the labour market and obtaining a decent job, many young people - mostly men - turn to legal or illegal migration in search of job opportunities, higher wages and better levels of education (Bardak 2015). In 2005, nearly three out of four of the Moroccans residing abroad were less than 40 years old.²⁴ In the same year, the community of Moroccans living abroad was estimated at 3,300,000 people, or 10 percent of the total Moroccan population (Fondation Hassan II 2014). In 2012, the Moroccan community abroad continued to grow, reaching over 4,000,000 people in spite of the economic crisis in Europe. Between 2010 and 2013, this crisis caused the return of over 30,000 Moroccans, many of whom were young.²⁵ If, until recently, the phenomenon of migration return has involved mostly elders at the time of retirement (Cassarino 2007), as a consequence of the economic crisis in Europe, many Moroccan youth have been forced to reverse their migratory path.

Although young people make up the majority of the overall migrant population, and even though migration is mostly associated with youth in public discourse, of the main governmental institutions in charge of the migration issue the Ministry of Youth and Sport plays only a

²³ See Zaireg (2014). See also the video of Benkirane's speech in June 2014 in Hamada (2014).

²⁴ Specifically, 18 percent are between 10 and 19 years, 20.6 percent between 20 and 29 years, and 17.1 percent between 30 and 39 years (HCP 2007:26).

²⁵ See the speech by Abdellatif Maazouz, Minister of Moroccans Residing Abroad, on 18 August 2013: "30.000 MRE sont retournés définitivement au Maroc", in *Bladi.net*, <http://www.bladi.net/mre-retournes-definitivement-maroc.html>.

marginal role; public action tailored to youth does not take the migration problem as a priority. For example, neither the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) launched in 2005 to reduce poverty in Morocco, nor the National Strategy of Youth launched in 2014 directly address the problem of youth migration.

The phenomenon of youth migration is dealt with in the broader framework of migration policies, which mostly developed over the last two decades, although they have existed since the independence. However, until the end of the 80s, Morocco acted as a mere exporter of labour force in exchange for remittance, without a political strategy. A ministry for the Moroccan community residing abroad was indeed established only in 1993,²⁶ and the *Stratégie de mobilisation en faveur de la communauté marocaine résidant à l'étranger 2008-2012* was launched in the second half of the 2000s (Belguendouz 2009).²⁷

In 2011-14, an important turning point concerning emigration and immigration took place as a result of the already mentioned reforms following the 2011 protests. Particularly, within the renewed emphasis on human rights and on the enlargement of political participation characteristic of the post-uprising, Moroccans living abroad and their rights (including the right to vote) were mentioned for the first time in the 2011 Constitution (Article 16 and Article 17). Moreover, at the end of 2013, to deal with the phenomenon of immigration (concerning 0.2 percent of the population), the Moroccan government launched the first campaign to regularize the situation of illegal migrants residing on its territory (around 40,000), mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, together with a four-year programme dedicated to this issue (2014-18), as required by international agencies, local NGOs and the Conseil national des droits de l'homme (CNDH 2013).

As a consequence of recent policy changes, today there are three main axes of migration policies in Morocco affecting youth: i) the policies towards the community of Moroccans living abroad, which aim at fostering the cultural and religious links with Moroccans living outside the country as well as promoting investment and business partnerships together with initiatives related to remittances and other financial transfers; ii) the policies concerning border controls and against illegal migrations regulated by the law 02.03 on the entry and stay of foreigners in Morocco, irregular migration and immigration which were approved in 2003; and iii) the policies to cope with the growing number of migrants coming since the beginning of 2000s from Sub-Saharan countries, particularly from Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Nigeria and Ghana, who choose - also due to the difficulties of entering Europe - to settle in Morocco (Peraldi 2011).

Within these three axes of migration policies, young people do not appear as a homogeneous category in public action and discourse. Particularly, nowadays two different categories of youth emerge as the product of different migration policies: the young migrant as a

²⁶ See Decree No. 2-91-98 of 9 June 1993 concerning the attributions and the organization of the Ministry for the Moroccan community residing abroad. Full text (in French) available at: <http://adala.justice.gov.ma/production/html/Fr/liens/..%5C75286.htm>.

²⁷ See also the Green March Day royal speech on 6 November 2007: *Discours de SM le Roi à l'occasion du 32ème anniversaire de la Marche Verte*, <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/texte-integral-du-discours-de-sm-le-roi-a-l'occasion-du-32eme-anniversaire-de-la>.

development tool and the young migrant as a problem or threat. The first category includes those who migrate regularly, those who study abroad (education-driven migration), and those who are born or grow up abroad. According to official documents, Moroccan authorities intend to strengthen the links between the homeland and this first category of youth in order to involve them in the development of the country. The government's strategy to counter the brain drain and attract human resources living abroad is mainly based on promoting intra-university programmes with foreign universities and funding scholarships to study in Morocco, particularly the so-called "*université d'été*" (summer universities), for those born and growing up abroad.²⁸

The second category, the young migrant as a problem, concerns those who choose to migrate illegally, the so-called *harraga*, who are mostly unemployed and inactive youth with low skills and low levels of education. This category emerged in the mid-90s and is the result of the security policies imposed by the EU within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, which linked economic cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean to the commitment of third countries' governments to counter illegal migration (Pepicelli 2004). Since the 90s in fact, and more after 2000, Europe became increasingly concerned with its internal security and irregular migration has been considered a major threat to its stability (Alami M'chichi 2005:16-17). Migration has started to be associated with terrorism and criminality, while all forms of irregularity had to be countered through border controls, migration flow monitoring and readmission agreements. In this framework, besides security and repressive policies, a number of campaigns have been taking place fighting illegal migration and explicitly targeting youth, funded mostly by international organizations such as the IOM (see, for example, the Salemm programmes "Solidarity with the Children from the Maghreb and Mashreq" and "Sensibiliser et informer sur la migration irrégulière").

A gender perspective on migration has emerged in public discourse only in recent years,²⁹ even though female migration has grown in Morocco since the late 1970s (and especially since the 1990s), and today almost half of Moroccans residing abroad are women (HCP 2007). Despite the fact that women migrate mostly for family reunification, they also migrate autonomously for job reasons, both legally and illegally, fitting for the most part in specific sectors of the labour market, such as agriculture, textiles, domestic work and care (Khachani 2009). However, until today, there are no gender-oriented policies contrasting specific discriminations suffered by migrant women and the prejudices towards women's autonomous paths (Naciri and Aba 2010, Marchetti and Salih 2015). The stand towards individual women's migration is still characterized by antagonistic considerations, both ethical and economic. Women's mobility is therefore tolerated for economic reasons, but is also seen as a violation of morality and traditions (Aderghal and Berriane 2013:4). The violation of morality and tradition is considered even worse if the migrant woman is young and unmarried. For young women, individual migration projects are much more difficult than for their male peers.

²⁸ See *Note Synthétique relative à la Stratégie de mobilisation en faveur de la Communauté marocaine résidant à l'étranger*, <http://www.carim.org/index.php?callContent=72&text=996>. Also, the Hassan II Foundation organizes annual cultural exchanges for descendants of Moroccans between the ages of 9 and 14 residing in Europe to introduce them to their parents' country of origin and foster national identity. The same foundation organizes Arabic courses in countries of destination, targeting mostly youth.

²⁹ See royal speech of 19 December 2008 (<http://www.bladi.net/rencontre-des-marocaines-du-monde.html>) and the strategy 2008-2012, which integrates a gender perspective.

This is the case, for example, for Moroccan women, mostly young, who work in the tourism and entertainment industries of Saudi Arabia. But besides ethics-based discriminations, young women, mostly when not married, are also facing legal discrimination on the terrain of migration. The circular female migration between Spain and Morocco in the strawberry industry is a case in point (FIDH 2012). To gain the permit to work in Spain, women (the work is feminized by contract) have to be married and with children, so as to ensure their return back home. By relying on maternal love and social practices prohibiting Moroccan women to leave the family, the Spanish government ensures that after the established work period female workers will not remain in Europe, enforcing the patriarchal system in Morocco.

5. YOUTH AND SPATIAL PLANNING

The major shift in the economic organization of the country with the adoption of SAPs since the 1980s has also led to important changes in spatial planning policies. Recent transformations are particularly visible in urban contexts, as cities have been elected since the end of the 90s as the prominent site for the promotion of economic development and capital accumulation (Bogaert 2011). To pursue this objective, Morocco has promoted several infrastructural works to upgrade its urban areas and prepare them to “globalize”. However, neo-liberal urban policies have further exacerbated urban disparities and have increasingly turned cities into “spaces of extremes” (Bayat and Biekart 2009).

Different categories of youth are implicitly involved in the public discourse and action when looking at both ends of the urban extremes. On one side, we have large-scale urban development projects, or mega-projects, many of which were launched during the first decade of the Muhammad VI reign that reflect and defend (global) market requirements and connect local business networks with the outside world (Zemni and Bogaert 2011). The priorities of these urban mega-projects are real estate development, international trade and investments, offshore activities and tourism, and they are placed under the authority of newly established governmental institutions with the effect of pulling them out of the realm of control of the national and local elected government bodies (Zemni and Bogaert 2011, Catusse 2008:128-141). Today the cityscapes of Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, Fez and Marrakech are being reshaped by several large urban development projects that include business centres, high-standard offices, commercial malls, luxury hotels, apartments, villas and upper-class leisure facilities. These places reflect the new globalized and “successful” Morocco, and also the expectations and life-style of the young and dynamic Moroccan entrepreneurs, the new elite generation.

Side by side with this global “urban revolution”, all main Moroccan cities have developed, or are preparing to develop, industrial free and offshore zones as islets in the Moroccan national territory where specific laws and regulations apply. For example, the already mentioned Tangier Free Zone,³⁰ one of the biggest in the country, was established in 1999 and developed together with a new international seaport (Tanger Med I and Tangier Med II) aimed at becoming a nodal point between African, European and Asian markets, and a new business district (the Tangier City Center).³¹ Free zones require cheap and docile labour

³⁰ Website: <http://www.tangerfreezone.com>.

³¹ Website: <http://www.tangercitycenter.com>.

such as unskilled youth from lower-class backgrounds. The coastal cities in the triangle of Casablanca, Fez and Tangier have the biggest concentration of urban slums (World Bank 2006), which provide an important reservoir of such cheap and mostly young labour. Those are the “marginalized” urban youth who need to be “included” in the market, although under conditions of exploitation as already detailed in the employment section of this paper.

Indeed, it is precisely around the necessity of controlling and “including” the urban poor in the market economy, and especially the young among them, that another important line of public discourse and action was developed during the last decade. The urban setting, in fact, it is not only the privileged site to attract investments and for capital accumulation, but also the actual and potential site of social conflicts, riots and violence.³² Moroccan cities, as other Arab cities, have been hit several times by suicide attacks and bombings.³³ As the young people responsible for the attacks came from the slums around the city of Casablanca, slums or bidonvilles were increasingly stigmatized as breeding grounds for extremism and young men as the most “vulnerable” category (Bayat 2007). As a result, the official discourse on slums changed significantly and the authorities started to implement new strategies for development so that the “root causes of terrorism” - identified as poverty and socio-economic exclusion - could be overcome.

Until the 80s and 90s, issues of urban planning and urban intervention were considered to be mere technical and physical affairs and the solutions for the problems of the urban poor were reduced to their need for appropriate housing (Navez-Bouchanine 2002). Slums were mostly tolerated as a way to preserve social peace as long as they maintained the character of temporary and transitory settlements. As argued by Lamia Zaki (2007), it was precisely their “precarious” existence or their pseudo-illegality that permitted the authorities to manage them with the threat of ending their tolerating attitude at any time. Slums inhabitants were never recognized as formal city-residents, despite the fact that they did obtain some rights such as voting.

Nevertheless, the government approach changed radically in the framework of the general reorientation of social development policies of the 2000s, and the issue of slums was thus incorporated in a larger vision to combat poverty (Navez-Bouchanine 2002 and 2008, Zaki 2007).

In 2001, the Moroccan government launched the *Programme national d'action pour la résorption de l'habitat insalubre* (PARHI). This programme concentrated, above all, on the restructuring of the informal neighbourhoods³⁴ and their integration in the urban fabric (e.g.,

³² A first shift in public urban planning policies happened after the violent riots of 1981 that triggered the creation of several governmental agencies and new urban planning instruments to enhance control over the urban territory and its process of urbanization. In 1984, the *Agence nationale de lutte contre l'habitat insalubre* (ANHI) was established under the supervision of the Interior Ministry and charged with the eradication and re-integration of the slums and the informal neighborhoods.

³³ The main attacks are the 16 May 2003 bombings in Casablanca, three suicide bomber incidents in 2007 and the 2011 Marrakech bombing.

³⁴ Informal neighbourhoods are different from bidonvilles. The former are permanent forms of housing made of bricks and cement. Households normally own their house/land, although informally, and lobby for the provision of public services.

through the provision of water and electricity, the installation of a sewer system, etc.). PARHI aimed at preventing the proliferation of informal housing by strengthening the government's engagement to provide more social housing, although with no significant improvement with respect to previous poorly targeted social housing projects generally benefitting households at the median level of income. However, the Casablanca attacks in 2003 pushed aside most of the objectives of the PARHI and its focus on informal neighbourhoods. The subsequent government efforts privileged the intervention on the bidonvilles. In 2004, the ambitious *Villes sans bidonvilles* programme (VSBP) was launched, which initially aimed to eradicate urban slums in 67 towns for a total of 201,550 households over the 2003-08 period and reflected the principles of the UN Habitat-endorsed "Cities Without Slums". The prestigious VSBP was also to be coordinated with the other development programmes and most of all with the INDH (Le Tellier 2009).

With the new VSBP, preference was given to the resettlement of the slum population instead of upgrading the slums themselves. Several reasons can be given in explanation. First of all, there were obvious security concerns. The suicide bombers came from the slums and slums were difficult to control. The state had little grip on those who lived within these dense spaces. The bombings had raised awareness about this problematic aspect and pictured the slum space as an "ungovernable space". The relocation of the population to new estates (less dense, with wider roads, better planned, etc.) facilitated the management and control of the slum population.

Secondly, slum upgrading - in contrast to resettlement - was less interesting for private companies. Also, the high density of the slums made upgrading very costly. On top of that, land had become very expensive in the inner-city, and thus unaffordable for the inhabitants. Even with significant state-subsidies and guarantees, there was no way that many of the urban poor could afford living in the city-centre in a formal and legalized manner. Finally, there were also macro-economic interests that explained the preference given to the resettlement of slum populations to new estates often located in the peripheries of the bigger cities.

Like the INDH, the VSBP has also incorporated a "participatory approach" to development. The involvement of citizen participation and civil society organizations at the local level, as well as the integration of public, private, social and economic agents in social programmes, is in fact the central methodological tool for Moroccan local development. Yet, both the INDH and the VSBP are organized vertically with important functions given to the provincial governors (*walis*) who are not elected but appointed by the King. Also, the Interior Ministry (which supervises the *walis*) remains the central locus of authority, pointing to the security and political rationale behind the programmes (Zemni and Bogaert 2011).

Since its launch, the VSBP can boast some impressive results in terms of figures (UN Habitat 2011). Despite quantitative results, however, the outcome in social terms has been much more mixed. While the growth of new informal housing and bidonvilles does not stop, the inhabitants of new formal settlements, and the youth among them, face a number of problems such as not being able to afford the costs of living in the new assigned homes (e.g., electricity and water bills, transportation costs, etc.), rupture of solidarity networks and physical isolation of some residential areas, lack of social and community facilities and lack of appropriate public services. Meanwhile, emptied spaces in the city centres are occupied by new urban projects

mostly for upper social classes and business.

CONCLUSION

Following this overview of public action and discourse on youth in Morocco in the four selected interrelated domains (i.e., employment, family, migration and spatial planning policies), a number of general considerations can be stated.

First of all, in Morocco, as elsewhere in the region (and beyond), the social category of youth has always been double-sided, encompassing both negative and positive stereotypes. On one side we have youth as the best part of society, the force of modernity and a valuable source of dynamism and creativity. On the other, youth could also be troublemakers posing a threat to the public order, either as easy prey for foreign plots to destabilize the country or as easy targets for extremist propaganda (Communist or Islamist).

Reflecting this intrinsic bipolarity, different categories of youth - or indeed the invocation at particular times of the youth label in the first place - have been mobilized by public authorities, reflecting their changing political priorities and projects and, in general, the evolving social and economic context. So, for instance, the category of "educated youth" could be associated with the best hopes for the future of the nation in the post-independence period, reflecting the monarchy's reliance on the urban middle class, whereas politicized youth in the 1960s represented a threat to national unity and stability. In the context of neo-liberal structural adjustment after the 80s, the category of "educated unemployed youth" allowed construction of the narrative of the education-employment nexus and reduction of labour market problems to a matter of youth skills, thus concealing broader structural explanations and potential opposition to the neo-liberal model of development.

In the 2000s, when Morocco embarked on a new set of social programmes and reforms to mitigate and control the effects of liberalization in terms of socio-economic inequalities and growing social conflict, different categories of youth became the targets of public action and discourse reflecting a strong class and gender bias. On the positive side are the categories of the young entrepreneurs, legal migrants, and also the young post-graduate unemployed who need to be placed in the position of benefitting their country with their intrinsic dynamism and energy and who represent Morocco's globalized future. On the negative side, there are young (men) living in marginalized areas or in slums, young (male) illegal migrants, inactive low-skilled youth and so on, who are presented as victims of social and economic exclusion and, as such, at risk of deviant behaviour (e.g., drugs, criminality, religious extremism). These youth, of course, need to be controlled, supervised and "included" in the system. In general, the renewed emphasis on the youth label in itself became in the 2000s - and even more after 2011 - a tool to divert attention from broader social conflicts and marginalization.

In Morocco, as in other countries, the issue of control and security is the absolute priority when dealing with marginalized lower class young men and with youth expressing political dissent. However, Moroccan authorities were sophisticated enough to parallel pure coercion with a new kind of social policies enshrined in the neo-liberal framework (and inspired by international agencies) that aimed (and at least partially succeeded) at integrating the

disadvantaged in the system, without of course questioning, and at times even reinforcing, the unequal system itself. The uprising of 2011 was more limited in Morocco compared to other countries, and some observers argued that at least part of the explanation is to be found precisely in the successful (neo-liberal) social policies Morocco carried out since the 2000s, such as the INDH or the VSBP. Is Morocco therefore a case of relatively successful *unequal* inclusion of the new generation?

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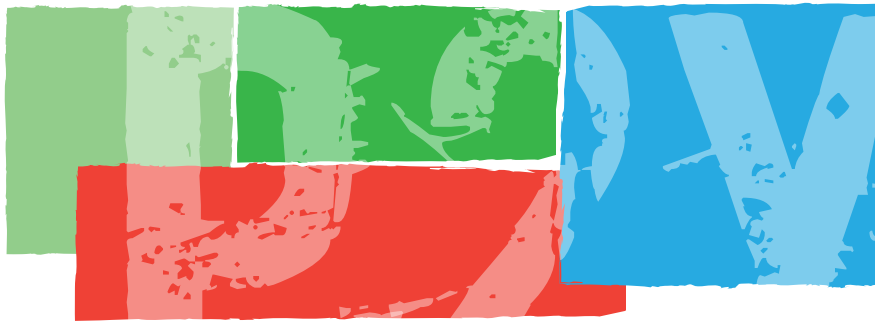
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POWER2YOUTH is a research project aimed at offering a critical understanding of youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region through a comprehensive interdisciplinary, multi-level and gender sensitive approach. By combining the economic, political 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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