

The Use of the Internet by Social Movements in Morocco: Implications for Collective
Action and Political Change

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A Thesis
In
The Department
Of
Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April, 2011

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**Concordia University
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ABSTRACT

The Use of the Internet by Social Movements in Morocco: Implications for Collective Action and Political Change

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Concordia University, 2007

The thesis examines the use of the Internet by social movements in Morocco and the extent to which it has empowered them in various struggles against political and social injustices. More specifically, it explores whether the Internet has transformed the collective action repertoire and enhanced social movements' capacity to challenge Morocco's semi-authoritarian government and erode the hegemonic social orders in the country. In so doing, the thesis addresses some key polemical issues and questions germane to the topic, mainly the dialectic between technological and social determinisms and agency, the role of technology in development, and collective action and democratic change in the context of Muslim-majority societies. The thesis uses a combination of methodological approaches to explore the structural, textual and contextual dimensions of the Internet's implications and impact.

Through feature analysis, and framing analysis, the research studies 18 websites, collective blogs and wikis belonging to eight key Moroccan social movements. It equally draws on rich data derived from 37 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with Moroccan social movement activists, journalists and international NGOs' officials. It offers insights into the embeddedness of the Internet as a technology and medium, and into the interplay between activists' and users' practices and their social environment and physical world. Moreover, using a multidisciplinary conceptual framework, namely social movement theory, the social study of technology, alternative media studies, radical democracy theory and community informatics, the thesis examines the complex and

multilayered interconnections between the Internet and the various social, economic and cultural processes shaping its appropriation and its potential for social change. It concludes that the Internet plays a significant role in enhancing Moroccan social movements' collective action capabilities by favouring various forms of mobilization, and facilitating linkages between dispersed constituencies and translocal public spheres. The thesis argues, however, that the medium does not impact in any radical way the dominant political and social orders inasmuch as its implications and potential remain considerably limited by the various digital divides, and are mediated through the power relations characterizing society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All texts are collective works even when they have single authors. This one is not an exception. Many people contributed to this work in various ways, and thanking them all may not be possible in this short note. I am indebted to many people in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University who shared ideas with me, provided comments on my research, or simply opened their heart to my “existential” worries.

I am equally indebted to all the people in Morocco and Montreal who generously accepted to sit for interviews and share part of their life, experience and insights. I especially thank Abderezzak Idrissi, Hassan Bara and Younes Ben Moussa, my brother, for facilitating contacts with Moroccan activists in Rabat and Casablanca.

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to my two supervisors, for their constant support, advice and kindness that allowed me to finish this project. To Dr. Leslie Shade, for her dedicated help, generous comments, and wonderful and encouraging spirit, I wish to say: Thank you. To Dr. William Buxton, for his generous support and guidance as a professor, PhD program director and co-supervisor from my first day in the program till the last draft of this thesis, I wish to say: Thank you.

My deepest gratitude and love go to my wife, Sanaa, who contributed enormously to this work through innumerable discussions, extensive advice, editing and proofreading, as well as through her encouragement and moral support.

DEDICATION

To my parents, who taught me that life is hope and hard work.

To Sanaa, my beautiful wife, life companion, and best friend, without whom this work would have never seen light.

To Rayan and Reem, whose smiles helped me bear the burden of this long journey.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Mapping the Field of Query

1. Collective Action Repertoire in the Internet Age

On June 7, 2008, Moroccan police forces brutally ended the protest held by local activists and residents of the fishery port of Sidi Ifni—a small town in the south of the country—who were demanding more transparent distribution of local resources and employment opportunities. Not content with dispersing the protestors, the police chased them through the town and into houses where they beat people and vandalized their homes. Many of those who were detained, including women, were sexually harassed or tortured. The Moroccan government denied that any serious human rights violations took place in what came to be called the “black Saturday”. However, in the following days, local citizens and militants posted dozens of video clips documenting the brutality of police forces on video-sharing platforms, mainly YouTube and Dailymotion, and on blogs and online newspapers, such as hespress.com, thus belying the government’s version of events and giving rise to a broad national and international solidarity campaign. The videos were widely redistributed by blogs and e-mail list serves, among other alternative media, and were also broadcast by mainstream regional and international TV channels, mainly Al-Jazeera and some European TV stations. The extensive media and public attention to the videos and the ensuing protests in Morocco and Europe against the police violence eventually forced the state to set up a parliamentary fact-finding committee to investigate and report on what happened.

A little over two years later, the Internet would again emerge as a powerful tool at the heart, this time, not of some limited protests leading to the set up of a fact-finding committee, but of big popular uprisings leading to the toppling of one despot after another, in the Arab world . Since December 2010, this region has been witnessing unprecedented popular upheavals against despotism and dictatorship, two of which have toppled Tunisia’s Ben Ali and Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, while the remaining are threatening the rule of other despots, including Libya’s Moammar Qaddafi, Yemen’s Ali Abdullah Saleh and, more recently, Syria’s Bashar Assad. Described as the beginning of “the Arab democratic spring”, and likened to the fall of the Arab “Berlin” wall, this wave of protests has galvanized the attention of the world not only because of its transformative political implications for the region, but also because of the central role of the Internet, specifically social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, in these historical events. In fact, Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings have been widely described as “Facebook”, “Twitter” and “Internet” revolutions. The use of social media tools in the two countries has inspired many young people throughout the Arab world to launch Facebook campaigns to rally support for protests against dictatorship, inequalities and various forms of injustice. In Morocco, for instance, a group of youth calling for more freedoms and for constitutional reforms, started a protest movement, the 20 February movement, from a Facebook page. Likewise, many Moroccan citizens living in Diaspora posted on YouTube videos scathingly critical of the regime.

Taking the example of Morocco, my thesis is an attempt to investigate the extent to which the Internet enhances the capabilities of oppositional social movements toward advancing and achieving their demands for democracy and social and cultural equality.

Underpinning such a query is the argument by social movement theorists that the development of collective action and claims are contingent on the repertoire of contention available for any group at a given historical moment. Tarrow (1998), for instance, explains that “people do not simply ‘act collectively.’ They petition, assemble, strike, march, occupy premises, obstruct traffic, set fires, and attack others with intent to bodily harm” (p. 20). More importantly, repertoires available for social movements are not static insofar as they “vary from place to place, time to time, and pair to pair. But on the whole, when people make collective claims, they innovate within limits set by the repertoire already established for their place, time, and pair” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 16). Not only does the development of media technologies, along with other collective action tactics such as sittings, strikes, and civil disobedience, transform how claims are made and communicated, but it also expands the limits of claims themselves and what they can achieve. While the dust has not yet settled down on the upheavals in the various Arab countries, the alleged centrality of the Internet and social media in the uprisings and continuing protests raises crucial questions about the role of the new communication technology in social and political change.

The thesis does not make the claim for a deterministic view of technology, nor does it promote a reifying view of it. On the contrary, this study makes a strong case for the social embeddedness of the Internet as a technology and social practice. So while the thesis appreciates the implications of the new technologies potential for social and political change, it does not view the Internet as an independent variable nor does it establish a mono-causal link between the technology and its social context. The Internet certainly has intrinsic aspects that are rooted in the hardware and software upon which it

is based; nevertheless, it is equally affected by legal regulations and protocols, economic and business institutions and structures, as well as social practices and uses. The Internet's potential is constantly mediated through these multiple hardware, social, economic, and political filters, which all shape the way it can affect the social world at the macro, meso and micro levels.

It is noteworthy, however, that while the thesis steers away from establishing a mono-causal link between the Internet and its social environment, studying the implications of technology for social change inescapably involves a degree of reification as a necessary analytical procedure. Chandler (1995), for instance, suggests that

reification is a difficult charge to avoid, since any use of linguistic categorization (including words such as “society” or “culture”) could be said to involve reification. Theorizing about technology and society is full of reification, quite apart from these two key terms. Reification is involved when we divide human experience into “spheres” variously tagged as “social,” “cultural,” “educational,” “political,” “ideological,” “philosophical,” “religious,” “legal,” “industrial,” “economic,” “scientific,” or “technological.” If such separation proceeds beyond analytical convenience it also involves what is called structural autonomy. (para. 4)

Thus, the current thesis will undertake the delicate task of treading carefully between the need to consider, for analysis, the Internet as a separate category, and the necessity to avoid falling into the trap of conceiving it as an autonomous structure. Such a task is carried out by drawing on a multidisciplinary theoretical approach that sheds light on the impact of the Internet as a technology of collective action, while, at the same time,

bringing out the multilevel embeddedness of the medium in various structures and practices.

2. Rationale

My research explores two highly contentious issues that present multiple practical challenges and intellectual concerns in politics and academia, alike. First, the research explores an issue that has wide political repercussions at the local and international levels—namely, democracy or, to be more precise, lack thereof in the Arab world—and the capacity of contentious collective action in the region to address this situation. In fact, while the winds of democratic change have swept many parts of the world, particularly Eastern Europe and Latin America, all Arab states have remained either autocratic or semi-autocratic. They are unswervingly resisting any genuine democratization, and many of them are even sinking into more despotic forms of rule. Lack of democracy in the region has significant international repercussions as it is often linked to instability in many countries, and to the rise of fundamentalism and transnational terrorism. Moreover, many studies have concluded that the democratic deficit in the region is negatively affecting its economic and social development, insofar as corrupt regimes have failed to deliver the basic necessities for their people.

While Orientalist discourses would have the region culturally disposed to accept despotism as a “natural” order, modern history shows that, in fact, Arab countries have gone through a long and hard quest for democracy and social and political equality. People in these countries have always engaged in various forms of collective action, from political parties to violent insurgency, in an effort to challenge dictatorships, even if many of these efforts have been largely unsuccessful (see Sadiki, 2004, for instance). The

last popular revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, and the continuing uprisings in many Arab countries further undermine the credibility of these discourses and demonstrate clearly that Arab peoples do support and strive for democracy and social justice.

The same holds true for Morocco, where collective action against various types of injustice is deeply rooted in the collective consciousness and culture as a religious duty and political necessity. This rootedness took various forms, from old Sufi orders leading armed insurgencies against unjust sultans, to new social movements struggling for identity recognition in the twenty-first century. Indeed, Morocco's history since its independence in 1956 is a telling example of the long and bitter struggle the region's peoples have fought for democracy and equality. For many decades, contentious groups representing the whole ideological spectrum, from the radical Left to ultra-fundamental Islamism, have opposed Morocco's central authorities. While these struggles have not ushered the country into democracy, they have, on many occasions, compelled the regime to open itself to wider participation in governance, or at least to incorporate oppositional discourses into mainstream politics in an attempt to regain threatened legitimacy. Nonetheless, Moroccan civil society's capacity to bring about democracy is hampered by numerous obstacles—chief among them, limited access to public media and public resources, vulnerability to state repression and manipulation of the judiciary, and dependence on foreign aid.

The second central issue explored by the thesis is the problematic role of technology in social change, and the extent to which the diffusion of new media, in general, and the appropriation of various online tools and software in collective action can transform the power balance in autocratic states. The notion that technology can play a central role in

economic, social, and political development is not limited to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). As argued by Alzouma (2005), at least “since the end of colonialism, nearly every decade has been marked by the celebration of a new technology as a means for overcoming the long-lasting problems faced by developing countries” (p. 340). In the last two decades, commentators have also highlighted the implications of satellite TV for political contestation and participation in the region, focusing on the significant impact of the Al Jazeera network in broadening the limits of free speech and the public sphere (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002; Miles, 2005; Lynch, 2006).

As ICTs take hold slowly but steadily throughout the world, they have come to be viewed as an unprecedented opportunity in history that can provide solutions to many problems facing humanity and the millions of populations in developing countries. This is clearly reflected in The ICT-for-development discourse (ICT4DEV) that has become in a relatively short time a foundational global narrative that shapes global and local development strategies, including in the political sphere. However, compared to large-scale research on satellite television channels and their implications on the development of the public sphere in the region, research on the implications of ICTs for politics and democracy has been scant, while existing studies have focused predominantly on Islamic-oriented groups and discourses to the detriment of more comprehensive perspectives on the implications of the new technologies for collective action in this part of the world (see Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of the subject).

The slow adoption of ICTs in Arab countries during the first few years of the twenty-first century is one factor behind this lacuna; however, the number of Internet users in the

region has significantly increased over the last few years, albeit with significant variations between countries, at one of the highest rates in the world. In Morocco, for instance, the number of Internet users has risen in the last decade at a staggering rate, from around 100,000 in 2000 to 10,442,500 in 2010, with 33% penetration of the country's population (Internet World Stats, Internet usage statistics for Africa, 2010). These figures do not provide much insight into the modalities and dynamics of Internet use in the country because they do not reflect important variables such as user demographics, the type of access users have (broadband versus dial-up, for instance), and the objectives of usage (entertainment versus information, for instance). However, these numbers do testify to the development of the Internet into a mass medium, which constitutes the first basis for its appropriation in the political sphere on a large scale.

While the penetration of the Internet is still well below the popular reach of satellite TV, the medium remains more important for collective action for several reasons. The significance of ICTs, and particularly the Internet, for collective action lies not so much in the impact of the medium on people and society as in what people can do with it, inasmuch as it offers a more flexible, non-hierarchical, and affordable form of communication at the grassroots level of usage and production. While it is true that other small media, such as the fax, tape cassettes, and CDs, have some of these attributes, the singularity of the Internet lies in its synergy between multiple media and technologies, which allows for more creativity and horizontal communication, and a greater capacity to bypass control and censorship, as the examples discussed above illustrate.

Notwithstanding existing statistics demonstrating the fast diffusion of the Internet in the country, and the importance of preliminary observations on the growing use of the

Internet in political contestation, these pieces of evidence do not constitute strong and sufficient proof of the impact of the medium on collective action and the political sphere in Morocco. Given the scarcity of research on the issue, these initial observations on the potential of the medium in the context of Morocco remain highly hypothetical, and need to be corroborated by systemic examination and analysis.

3. Research Statement and Questions

Mario Diani (2000b), a key social movement theorist, summarized the principal questions arising from the interplay between computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social movements (SMs) as follows:

- How do forms of individual participation change?
- How do social movement organizations modify their ways of operating?
- How do individuals and organizations connect to each other to exchange/pool resources and information?
- How do these actors develop identities and solidarities?
- How do the geographical boundaries of the network change, along with the underlying idea of public space? (p. 387)

Invoking Diani's list of questions as a general guide, the current thesis strives to examine the flowing primary question: *What are the implications of the Internet for social movements in Morocco, and for their ability to engage in contentious collective action against multiple forms of injustices?* This question compresses a number of other key ones covering the main issues the thesis is attempting to tackle:

1. How can the political role of the Internet and its appropriation by social movements be conceptualized?

2. To what extent is the Internet's potential as a medium appropriated by Moroccan social movements?
3. To what extent is the potential of the Internet for collective action mediated through and shaped by the socioeconomic, political, and cultural context of Morocco?
4. To what extent do differences and variations between social movements shape their appropriation of the Internet?
5. What are the main obstacles affecting the effective use of the Internet by social movements?
6. Finally, to what extent is the Internet contributing to social and political change in Morocco, and how can we best understand and assess this contribution?

This primary list of questions is not exhaustive since the research covers other important sub-issues, such as the implications of the Internet for gender equality, the interplay between online and offline networks and practices, and the role of online-based development projects in empowering Moroccan civil society.

The list establishes, nevertheless, tentative parameters with which to examine the core question in the thesis. One of these parameters is the choice to focus on “social movements” as a conceptual term and political and social phenomenon. Such a choice is motivated by a number of reasons. First, and according to a large number of theorists (Diani, 2000a; Melucci, 1989; Tarrow, 1998; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007; Touraine, 1981; 1985), one of the distinctive features of social movements is that they are a form of contentious and oppositional collective action aimed at social, political, and/or cultural change. Such a characteristic is of particular relevance to the current project, as one of its

main objectives is to assess the contributions of the Internet to changing, or at least affecting, power relations between the Moroccan state and civil society. Second, the definition of social movements encompasses both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of activism, which helps account for highly decentralized and horizontal modes of communication that distinguish many forms of online-based activism. Third, social movements are constellations of organizations, groups, and individuals that are loosely connected, but that share collective identity and objectives. Fourth, while social movements' (SMs) collective action repertoire includes a large number of tactics and strategies, including direct forms of action, social movements cannot be reduced to street protests and popular uprisings. Among the distinctive characteristics of social movements are their temporal longevity, and their fluctuation between short periods of visibility and long periods of latency (Melucci, 1989). Social upheavals, uprisings and revolutions are usually the tip of the iceberg; they are the culmination of long, painful and sometimes silent convulsions, underground resistance and slow transformations. Studying collective action, thus, from the perspective of social movement theory enables us to better understand the social and cultural rootedness of political uprisings that burst out "suddenly", as it is the case with the last Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, for instance. Finally, the concept of social movement allows us to go beyond technology-centred views that see in new social media the main and driving force behind social and political change.

4. Contribution to Communication Studies and Research

Despite the emergence of a massive body of literature dealing with the implications of the Internet for the political sphere and democracy, in general, research on the issue

within the context of developing countries has received little attention, so far. The bulk of studies, in fact, have either dealt with the role of the medium in fostering direct democracy in Western and established democracies, or with its use by transnational social movements in various struggles against neo-liberal global capitalism.

Furthermore, the existing literature on the developing world has predominantly focused, from the perspective of the ICT-for-development (ICT4DEV) discourse, on the role of ICTs in enhancing e-government and e-governance, giving short shrift to the bottom-up appropriation of these technologies by grassroots groups and social movements. As a result, apart from a few highly publicised cases, such as the role of the Internet in the Zapatistas' struggle against the Mexican government in the mid-1990s, scant evidence exists on the use of ICTs and the Internet by oppositional political groups in the developing world. Such a gap constitutes a significant obstacle to a better understanding of the role of the Internet in the social and political struggles in many regions of the developing world. By focusing on Morocco, this thesis contributes to addressing this lacuna and to paving the way for further research on the topic in the context of developing countries.

Studying the impact of the Internet on collective action in developing countries raises important questions on how to approach the issue, given the existence of a plethora of perspectives and debates within the literature on the topic. A major dispute within research on the political and democratic roles of the Internet is the one involving the “utopian” and “dystopian” stances on technology (Bentivegna, 2006; Dahlgren 2005; Dutton, Shepherd & de Gennaro, 2007; Saco, 2002). This polemic is underpinned by two major stances in the general field of media studies that emphasize either structure—

mainly from the perspective of the political economy of media—or agency, which is largely grounded in cultural studies (Fenton, 2007).

Such dichotomous theorization also marks the scholarly examination of the role of ICTs in development, as two development paradigms are currently dominating the literature: on the one hand, there is the “modernization development paradigm,” which maintains that ICTs are crucial for the development that is perceived to spread from the West to Southern countries (Zembylas, 2009, p.18). On the other hand, there is the “social injustice development paradigm”, according to which ICTs exacerbate existing inequalities, since they only benefit those who are “already dominant politically and economically” (p.19). Besides, as Walsham and Sahay (2006) observe, the dominant development paradigms are incapable of grasping the complexities surrounding such a complex topic as the implications of ICTs for social change in the developing world. Indeed, these “issues in developing countries are normally deeply intertwined with issues of power, politics, donor dependencies, institutional arrangements, and inequalities of all sorts,” which calls for critical perspectives that can “open up the ‘black box’ as an aid to deeper understanding, and a stimulus to appropriate action” (p. 19).

This thesis contributes to opening this “black box” by critically assessing the role of the Internet as a socially embedded medium, and, in doing so, it transcends existing dichotomizations in the field by using a multidimensional approach that recognizes the roles of structures, technology, agency, and the multifarious interconnections between them. Instead of promoting mono-causal explanations, the thesis is based on a holistic view that recognizes the role of the complex dynamics involving social actors and media practitioners, on the one hand, and technology and social and political structures, on the

other. It achieves this objective by combining in an original way several theoretical perspectives and research methods, with a view to unravelling the complicated relationship between the Internet and the social world of its context and users, namely social movement theory, the social study of technology (SST), alternative media, radical-democracy theories and community informatics.

As a consequence, this thesis also contributes to research efforts that strive to conceptualize the political role of the Internet through social movement theory. As will be discussed below in more detail, despite the existence of a vast literature on social movements' use of the Internet, very little of this research has attempted to benefit from social movement theory itself to analyse and understand this role (Carroll & Hackett, 2006; Stein, 2009). That is, while there are many studies focusing on the use of the Internet by and implications of the medium for social movements, they rarely draw on social movement theory itself to analyze, explain and interpret the multiple connections between the new communication technologies and these movements. Thus, in addition to drawing on social-movement theory to theorize the implications of the Internet for collective action in Morocco, one of the three research methods employed by this study—namely, framing analysis—is guided by and grounded in this theory. While framing analysis has been extensively employed in numerous disciplines, including communication studies, it has rarely been applied to the examination of the Internet, and existing studies that draw on it, do so rather superficially (see Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2004, for instance).

A major advantage of applying social movement theory is that it allows us to understand and appreciate how various technological aspects specific to the Internet, such

as interactivity and networking, contribute to different levels of mobilization while simultaneously highlighting the role of socio-economic and political structures in determining the outcome of collective action. Applying social movement theory helps us, for instance, interpret the process of collective identity construction as an act of mobilization and understand how the Internet contributes to it. It also helps us appreciate individual users' interaction with the Internet as acts of micro-mobilization.

Furthermore, my thesis strives to make a significant contribution to the literature on collective action and the political role of ICTs within the context of Islamic and Arab countries. Scholarly studies on the use of the Internet in the political sphere in Muslim-majority societies are extremely rare. The bulk of available literature emphasizes the use of the Internet by religion-oriented social movements and organizations at the national and global levels, to the exclusion of secular social movements and organizations. Moreover, such studies subscribe to the dominant discourse on collective action in Islamic countries that is strongly marked by a descriptive approach. As Wiktorowicz (2004) astutely remarks,

the study of Islamic activism has, for the most part, remained isolated from the plethora of theoretical and conceptual developments that have emerged from research on social movements contentious politics. Instead, most publications on Islamic activism are either descriptive analyses of the ideology, structure, and goals of various Islamic actors or histories of particular movements. (p. 3)

The use of multiple theoretical perspectives aims to address these limitations by demonstrating how collective action in Islamic countries can be better conceptualized and analyzed in the light of existing theoretical paradigms. Moreover, by focusing on the

situations of diverse Moroccan social movements that differ significantly in terms of ideological background, objectives, and organizational structure, the study sheds lights on the diversity and multiplicity characterizing the field of collective action in Muslim-majority society, and brings out, at the same time, the differentiations marking the implications of the Internet for various types of social movements.

The contributions of the current study go beyond the sphere of communication studies to include other disciplines, mainly political science, sociology, and cultural studies. Contrary to dominant representations in Western media and academia, whereby Muslim-majority societies are mostly portrayed as homogeneous and where the public sphere is perceived as monopolized by Islamic-oriented discourses and groups, the study provides valuable insight into the multiplicity and contradictions marking politics and the public sphere in Morocco. It especially underscores the differences and commonalities between secular and religion-oriented social movements, which contributes to establishing a more nuanced and balanced understanding of political life in the whole region.

5. Organization and Chapter Breakdown

This thesis is divided into eight chapters, three of which are dedicated to data analysis. The order of the chapters follows a movement from theory and back to practice and application. Rather than reflect a strictly deductive approach, this order allows a transition from the general to the specific in order to situate the discussion and analysis of the role of technology into wider historical, social, and political contexts. Thus, in addition to the present chapter, Chapter Two deals with the political economy of Morocco and the Internet in the country. The first part of the chapter provides a brief

discussion of the socio-economic structures and some key related facts summarizing the major challenges facing the country, such as social inequalities, insufficient economic development, and, above all, the low ranking of the country in human development indexes. It also presents a historical background of Moroccan polity and democratic process since the country's independence in 1956, and discusses the role of and interaction between the key players in this process—namely, the monarchy, political parties, and civil society. In addition, the chapter assesses the condition of basic freedoms in the country, especially freedom of expression. The second part of the chapter provides an overview of the development of information and communication technologies infrastructure and use, and focuses on the diffusion of the Internet. It also points out the main problems and challenges facing the diffusion of new technologies, especially those related to unequal access to the Internet. Moreover, the chapter discusses freedom of speech online and compares it to its manifestations in offline media (mainly, print newspapers).

Chapter Three presents a review of the literature, and covers some of the most important works and issues related to the topic of the research. The first part of the chapter addresses various interpretations of the concepts of “civil society” and “social movements,” their origins, and the major theoretical paradigms that have challenged them. Tracing their theoretical conception and development in Western settings, this chapter also discusses how the concepts were applied in non-Western contexts. The second part provides an overview of the main theories as well as the seminal scholarly works that addressed the political role and democratic potential of the Internet, either in established democracies or in the context of authoritarian and developing countries.

Chapter Four presents the theoretical framework and methodological approach used in the study. The first part presents the main theoretical models employed: social-movement and radical-democracy theories, alternative-media theory, the social study of technology (SST), and community informatics (CI) studies. The second part of the chapter explains the methodological approach, which was composed of three methods: feature analysis, framing analysis, and in-depth-interviewing. It is worth noting that Chapter Four presents only the general outlines of these three methods, since a detailed discussion of the methods is provided in the following three analytical chapters.

Chapter Five is dedicated to studying the general structural features and functions of the eighteen websites covered by the study, and which include collective blogs and wikis, and belong to seven distinct social movements: (1) the Islamic-oriented movement; (2) the alter globalization movement; (3) the human-rights movement; (4) the women's/feminist movement; (5) the Amazigh cultural movement; (6) the unemployed-graduates movement; and (7) the radical left movement. Drawing on a medium-specific approach to content analysis, the chapter examines the extent to which Moroccan social movements appropriate the potential of the medium for collective action by focusing on the following key Web functions: (a) providing updated information; (b) enhancing internal cohesion and collective identity within movements and social movement organizations (SMOs); (c) enhancing their capacity to link to other movements and organizations at the national, regional, and international levels; (d) maximizing their ability to mobilize actual and potential constituents; and (e) building participatory communication structures and interactions.

Using framing analysis, Chapter Six examines the textual content of the studied websites. It aims to complement the structural analysis used in the previous chapter by exploring the use of the websites to develop and deliver the ideas, symbols, and interpretations that play a central role in the processes and outcome of collective action. In doing so, the chapter assesses the extent to which the studied websites contribute to building agonistic public spheres, specifically through the communication of the three key collective action frames of injustice, identity, and agency. Moreover, focusing on the case of the Israeli attack on Gaza in the winter of 2009, the chapter examines how various social movements framed the war and the extent to which they drew on the Internet's potential to convey the three core tasks of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing.

Chapter Seven presents in-depth interview analysis, and discusses data generated from the interviews conducted with social movement activists, among others. Using in-depth interview analysis, the chapter examines various levels of interconnectedness between the technological and the social, and how the multilevel articulations between the two condition and shape the impact of the Internet on social movements. Corroborating as well as complementing many key findings in the previous chapters, this chapter underlines the many communication practices and forms through which the Internet is empowering Moroccan social movements. In doing so, it emphasizes the interrelatedness and complementariness of the Internet and diverse forms of communication, as well as the relation between professional and citizen journalism.

In addition, the chapter demonstrates however that the empowering role of the Internet is hampered by serious limitations resulting from multiple types of divides,

which significantly restrict the impact social-movement groups can have when using the medium to contest the dominant political and social orders. While the consequences of the divides regarding access, skill, and usage are highlighted, the chapter places more emphasis on gender and motivational divides as the most complex and enduring forms of divide hindering the political role of the Internet in the country. Finally, by comparing two distinct ICT4DEV projects targeting Moroccan civil society, the chapter sheds light on the limitations of the dominant discourse regarding the role of technology in development, particularly in terms of how to achieve sustainability, and points out possible ways in which such projects can learn from existing experiences in the field.

Finally, Chapter Eight presents a summary of the main findings and the conclusions of the study, and discusses how the main research questions of the study have been answered. The chapter also discusses the significance of the research findings and their contribution to communication studies and to the sub-field dealing with the political use and applications of ICTs, in particular. The chapter also points out the limitations of the study and how it can be built upon for future research.

Chapter Two: The Political Economy of a Country and a Medium

Sisyphus in the Digital Age

Introduction

Using Greek mythology as a metaphor to grasp the complex relationship between civil society and the monarchy in Morocco, Canadian sociologist Lise Garon (2003) explains:

This is already an old story, which alternates between periods of intense civil activity and strong-arm rule, between freedom and tyranny. This story is reminiscent of the legendary Sisyphus, the Greek hero condemned eternally to roll a heavy rock up a hill. He always stops halfway to rest, and hence, the rock rolls again to the bottom of the slope and he must start work all over again. It has been the destiny of Moroccan civil society to be like Sisyphus, whose endless efforts to counteract the pull of authoritarian temptation do not prevent the rock of freedom from returning to the bottom of the slope. (p. 6)

Garon also highlighted the pivotal role that media, especially opposition party newspapers, played in the standoff between the Moroccan Monarchy and its opposition during the Amaoui affair in 1992. The affair broke out when opposition parties, trade unions, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) defied King Hassan II's regime to demand the release of Noubir Amaoui, an outspoken trade union leader who was jailed for demanding the transfer of some of the king's powers to parliament. Garon demonstrated how competition over control of and within the public sphere can shape these struggles and their outcomes. But as the public sphere in Morocco is being

steadily, albeit slowly, transformed by the diffusion of various information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly mobile media and the Internet, can cyber-activism and online mobilization have any major impact on the Sisyphean efforts to push the “rock” of change over the steep hill of Morocco’s stagnant polity?

This chapter provides a historical background and socioeconomic context for the tumultuous and sometimes dubious relationships between the Monarchy and oppositional political parties and civil groups, and the implications of these relationships for democratic change in the country. It also discusses the infrastructure and development of ICTs, and the Internet, in particular. The chapter, thus, provides a wider socioeconomic and political context for the discussion in subsequent chapters, especially those dealing with data analysis. This is important because a key argument advanced in this thesis is that technology is a social phenomenon and, therefore, studying its impact cannot be performed satisfactorily without understanding its social embeddedness and the historicity of those appropriating it.

1. The Political Economy of Morocco

1.1 The economy and human development: Background.

Morocco has a strategic position in the Northwest of Africa. It has two coastlines, one on the Atlantic Ocean and the other on the Mediterranean Sea, and is the closest point in Africa to Europe (see figure 1). As such, it has always been at the crossroads of civilizations and in the middle of cultural flows. Yet, this strategic position has not translated into economic success. According to *The Human Development Report* issued annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Morocco’s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is estimated at \$4,108 (USD), which gave it a

ranking of 118 out of 177 countries (UNDP - Morocco, 2009). Whilst this rank positions Morocco among middle-income countries, the country's performance in human and social development is comparable to low-income ones since, in this regard, it ranks 130 out of 177 (UNDP - Morocco, 2009). Thus, although Morocco has always been a faithful disciple of development policies and agencies (Desrues & Moyano, 2001; Schlumberger, 2000; Dillman, 2001; Cohen & Jaidi, 2006), human development indices demonstrate that it has broadly failed to achieve adequate and sustained economic and social development.



Figure 1. Map of Morocco.

It is true that economic and human development indices do not reflect the relative progress that the country has made in many areas since its independence from France in 1956. For instance, “between 1980 and 2010, Morocco’s life expectancy at birth

increased by 14 years, mean years of schooling increased by about 3 years and expected years of schooling increased by 5 years” (UNDP, 2010, pp. 3-4). Moreover, in 2005, Morocco launched the National Initiative for Human Development, a two-billion-dollar social development plan to alleviate poverty and unemployment, and improve life conditions in the country's urban slums, thus marking “a turning point in Morocco’s economic and social policy since independence” (Martin, 2006, p. 433).

Nonetheless, after almost five years since the project was launched, the country’s economic and human development indexes are still low. According to the 2009 UN Human Development Report, the adult literacy rate is estimated at 55.6% (ranking the country 132nd), while illiteracy among women is much higher, with a rate exceeding 60%. Moreover, Morocco ranks 96th in the Human Poverty Index (HPI). These indices situate the country in a lower position compared to other countries with similar economic potential, as well as to other countries in the region (see figure 2). In fact, the Moroccan economy has been described as one with “high potential and low performance,” due to various factors such as “population growth, weather conditions and mismanagement of economic policy” (Cherkaoui & Ben Ali, 2003, p. 3). Indeed, both the Moroccan economy and state are based on a clientelistic system, which is described as one where networks of contacts to decision makers determine access to and distribution of resources (Schlumberger, 2000). In these conditions, economic liberalization adopted by the country since the 1970s became a mere “instrument to legitimize political power by bestowing privileges and benefits upon its allies and employing large sectors of the middle class in the public administration” (Desrues & Moyano, 2001, pp. 32–33).

In fact, under the close, and sometimes direct, auspices of international financial agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the country adopted development policies that prioritized economic growth over social development, which was believed to be merely an outcome of the former. Thus, in the name of efficiency and economic competitiveness, the state sharply reduced its investment in social development and the welfare state, abandoning the largest segments of the population to poverty. These policies have only exacerbated the existing huge social inequalities between classes and regions, and resulted in the concentration of almost 40% of the country's wealth in 1% of the territory, while "more than 77% of territory contributes around 10% of value added to the economy," according to a 2003 government study (Cohen & Jaidi, 2006, p. 44).

In addition, the liberal orientation of the economy was in appearance only, insofar as economic liberalization was reduced to privatization and became "a perfect medium for the continuation of clientelistic practices within the state apparatus, benefiting a large sector of the elite with close ties to those in power" (Desrues & Moyano, 2001, p. 33). Thus, a few decades after the launching of Structural Adjustment Programs, as Maghraoui (2001) observes, Morocco's economy is still relying on the same resources since the 1960s, mainly loans, agriculture, phosphates, tourism, remittances from Moroccans expatriates, and light manufacturing (p. 76). More importantly, the country has found itself, at the turn of the twenty-first century, "heavily in debt and ill-prepared for the next development ideology-integration into the global market" (Cohen & Jaidi, 2006, p. 35).

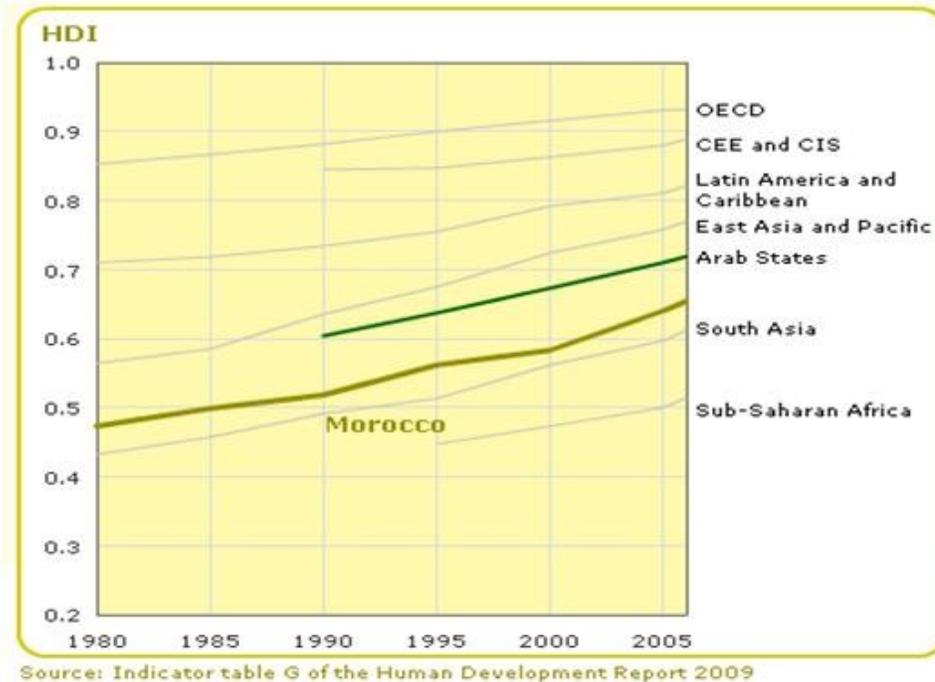


Figure 2. Human development index for Morocco.

1.2 The political system.

1.2.1 *The colonial era: The rise of the modern political system.*

Unlike the majority of Arab counties, Morocco was never subjugated to the mighty Ottoman Empire. It also repelled colonial powers for a long time and maintained its independence for a longer period, compared to its neighboring countries.¹ Cohen and Jaidi (2006) maintain that “the tribal structure, religious tradition of maraboutism (Islamic mysticism centered on saints and brotherhoods) and the sultanate contributed to the independence and integrity of the country and its capacity to contest foreign enemies, from the Turks to Spaniards” (p. xi). The key role played by the sultanate or central power in maintaining the independence of the country, and later in reclaiming it

¹ Neighboring Algeria, for instance, was colonized for 130 years between 1830 and 1961, while the French Protectorate in Morocco lasted only 44 years (from 1912 to 1956).

from the French Protectorate, is represented by the longevity of the current Alaouite dynasty, which came to power in 1660, and is “the longest continuous dynasty in recorded history” (Watson, 2006, p. 31). Although the modern Moroccan political system was established after the end of the period of French colonial rule in 1956, key players within this system had been active long before this date. The first organized political groups emerged during the 1930s with the creation of the Committee for Moroccan Action (CAM) that led to the establishment of the nationalist and largely secular Istiqlal (Independence) party (IP) in 1943. Along with the IP, which spearheaded resistance against French rule, two other political parties of lesser influence appeared in the same period, namely the Moroccan Communist Party (PCM) and the Democratic Independence Party (PDI).

1.2.2 The monarchy: Divine and secular powers.

Unlike in other countries in the region, the struggle for independence in Morocco was “centered around the capture, revival, and renewal of a traditional institution, the monarchy” (Watson, 2006, p. 34). This particularity has characterized modern Moroccan polity ever since. In fact, the monarchy, or the sultanate, played a crucial role in the success of the nationalist movement’s struggle to end the French Protectorate. As Glennie and Mephram (2007) point out,

[t]he sultan Mohammed V came under strong pressure from the colonial authorities to collaborate and reach a political deal short of independence, but he chose instead to publicly advocate the demand for full independence made by Istiqlal and other parties. He was forced into exile by the protectorate government in 1953, but this only served to increase his popularity and further strengthened

the nationalist opposition forces. Such was the pressure from the Moroccan public that the French were compelled to allow Mohammed V to return from exile, upon which he was greeted as a national hero by much of Moroccan society. (p. 6)

This may explain, at least in part, why a large number of Moroccans support the monarchy as a guarantor and symbol of stability and unity, despite its poor record in the domains of human rights and social justice for many years after independence. Indeed, the historical role played by the monarchy has consolidated its legitimacy beyond the persona of the king. As a consequence, although Moroccans “may consider the king personally unfair or unjust, they nonetheless identify with the monarchy as a symbol of national unity and a legitimate form of governance” (Maghraoui, 2001, p. 75).

After Independence, King Mohamed V sought to reinforce the monarchy’s legitimacy and influence by incorporating the elites into the newly established state apparatus, and allowing the national-movement parties to participate in a national-unity government. Following a short period of uneasy co-existence, this fragile unity broke down as the king appeared unwilling to substantially share power with political parties that called for the establishment of a real constitutional monarchy. Consequently, the king dismissed Abdullah Ibrahim’s² first left-wing government in 1960 and created his own after assuming the role of prime minister, thus proving that “the constitutional reforms were more cosmetic than real” (Glennie & Mephram, 2007, p. 7). This action ushered the country into a long period of absolute rule characterized by intense repression, interrupted by short periods of political openness, which characterized the Moroccan polity until the late 1990s.

² He is considered the first socialist politician to head a Moroccan government.

When Hassan II succeeded to the throne in 1961, the Monarchy was already an established institution with direct control over political life. The new king reinforced this role by both renewing and reinvigorating traditional practices and discourses, and through the extensive use of patronage and coercive force. Although historically the monarchy has never been the sole political power in the country, it has always had the advantage over its rivals in that it is an institution enjoying both religious and secular legitimacy. Therefore, after the country achieved independence in the mid-1950s, the monarchy “alone claimed to be something of an institution, and it alone combined the elements of religious legitimacy and the rudiments of an administrative and military apparatus requisite for the establishment of an effective state system” (Vinogradov & Waterbury, 1971, p. 38). The Moroccan king is considered to be a Sharif (i.e., a descendant of the Prophet), and assumed the title of “Amir-Al-Muminin” (Commander of the Faithful), which makes him the supreme religious authority in the country. Likewise, the monarch derives his authority and legitimacy “from collective will, through the annual oath of allegiance by representatives of the community in a ceremony known as “Bay’a”³ (Maghraoui, 2001, p. 75).

In addition, the king exerts power and influence through an effective system that combines traditional Makhzen networks, defined by Ottaway and Riley (2006) as an “elite of palace retainers, regional and provincial administrators, and military officers, connected to [the monarchy] by entrenched patronage networks,” and a modern

³ The bay’a is “a contract of allegiance between the king and the people (...) This contract is renewed every year by the ulamas [religious scholars], the members of the government, the members of Parliament, the higher officials in the administration of the public sector, the provinces, and the military corps. Within this contract, in return for the people’s obedience, the king insures public security and order” (Cherkaoui & Ben Ali, 2003, p. 6).

administrative apparatus that ensures loyalty and obedience (p. 4). Drawing on traditional and modern regimes and orders, the monarchy's power and legitimacy has been reinforced by the use of "repression, corruption, and cooptation" to either stifle opposition or appease it according to circumstances (Maghraoui, 2001, p. 13). The king's overwhelming religious and secular authority is reflected by and enshrined within the successive constitutions adopted since Independence⁴, which allows the Makhzen to use the judiciary system to silence opposition when repression is not an option.

1.2.3 The democratic process in Morocco: The eternal ascent of Sisyphus?

Morocco's political history and democratization process since independence has been marked by the complex and unsteady relationship between civil society and political parties on one hand, and the Makhzen, on the other. In over half a century, this relationship has gone through cyclical periods of uneasy coexistence, confrontation, cooperation, co-optation and suppression, during which the monarchy has often succeeded in emerging as the most powerful institution in the country, without being able to completely monopolize the political scene. Even during the bleak periods of the state's violent suppression of opposition parties and movements in the 1970s and 1980s, the king often sought to appease his opponents by inviting them to join the government and even soliciting their services, especially in regard to thorny issues like the conflict in the Western Sahara.

⁴ Article 19 of the constitution of Morocco states that "The King (...) shall be the Supreme Representative of the Nation and the Symbol of the unity thereof. He shall be the guarantor of the perpetuation and the continuity of the State. As Defender of the Faith, he shall ensure the respect for the Constitution. He shall be the Protector of the rights and liberties of the citizens, social groups, and organizations." (Smith & Loudiy, 2005, p. 1075).

In fact, Morocco's political history stands out in the region as one marked by serious, though hitherto unsuccessful, attempts to move towards real democratization (Bendourou, 1996; Desrues & Moyano, 2001; Cavatorta, 2005, 2006). Magraoui (2002) maintains that in the 1950s, "Morocco was one of the rare newly independent states to embark on a path of political pluralism and market economics" (p. 24). The pluralism that characterized the Moroccan polity over decades has had, despite its grave limitations, a considerable impact on the political culture of the people. Thus, according to a large survey⁵ that tested support for democratic institutions and norms in 32 Muslim countries, including Arab ones, Morocco topped all other Arab countries and was exceeded only by Turkey (Fattah, 2006). Morocco is also "considered to have gone farther than any other Arab state along the path of political emancipation" (UNDP - Arab World, 2009, p. 28). But despite this rich political culture and experience, democratic transition has hitherto failed to materialize and the process is stagnating, at best. Summarizing the contradictions that distinguish Moroccan politics, Leveau (1997) points out that Morocco is neither a democracy nor a dictatorship, as its political system is based on "authoritarian pluralism" (p. 95).

On the eve of independence from the French Protectorate in 1956, power relations were relatively balanced between the monarchy and the national movement formed by existing political parties and civil society groups (mainly trade unions). King Mohamed V convened a government of national unity that included the Istiqlal party and, later on, the National Union of Popular Forces party (Union Nationale des Forces Populaires, or

⁵ The survey was conducted as part of Fattah's research in *Democratic Values in the Muslim World* (2006). The survey "covers 31,380 literate Muslims in thirty-two Muslim countries across the Middle East, North Africa, and Central and Southeast Asia, as well as minority Muslim communities in the United States, Europe and India" (Fattah, 2006, p. 3).

UNFP), the left wing of Istiqlal that split off in 1959. The co-existence between the monarchy and the political parties reached its peak with the constitution of the left-wing government of Abdullah Ibrahim, which only lasted two years (between 1958 and 1960). With the death of Mohamed V in 1961 and his succession by King Hassan II, this uneasy co-existence came to a halt as the new king forcefully and swiftly led the country into an absolutist monarchy through repression, police terror, and extensive co-optation.

Between 1961 and 1998, “King Hassan II reigned over Morocco exactly as if he were running a medieval absolutist state” (Maghraoui, 2001, p. 13). But while civil society actors and institutions were severely curtailed and weakened by the state’s repressive machine, they were never completely destroyed, and several actors managed to survive independently and to challenge the king’s authority (Garon, 2003). During this period, the first parliament was elected in May 1963 only to be interrupted in 1965 by the proclamation of a state of emergency. In 1970, the one-chamber parliament was supplanted by a bicameral one, and a new assembly was elected that was close to the monarchy. This parliament was, in turn, soon interrupted by the two unsuccessful military coups of 1971 and 1972 that were followed by a reconstruction of politics and the drafting of a new constitution (Cherkaoui & Ben Ali, 2003). This bleak period in the history of the country was dubbed the “Years of Lead” to refer to state human-rights violations and repression of opposition groups and activists that would last till the end of the 1990s.

Nevertheless, the particularity of the Moroccan experience in the region stems from the fact that even during the darkest periods of repression, the Makhzen, paradoxically,

often had to appease opposition, integrating part of the elite class into the government, and bestowing legitimacy on its actions by constantly reviewing the constitution. As pointed out by Zerhouni (2004), “the rule of King Hassan was characterized by alternating phases of authoritarianism and liberalization” (p. 63). These phases of liberalization were usually measures undertaken to face political and economic crises, rather than genuine moves to change the political structure. After the Green March⁶ that allowed Morocco to annex the Western Sahara in 1975, King Hassan II needed to build a national consensus over the issue of “territorial integrity”. A period of political opening was thus initiated where the leftist USFP party “changed its strategy from criticism and boycott and agreed to operate as a ‘constructive opposition’ in the parliament” (p. 63). This period was again interrupted in the late 1980s by the imposition of restrictions on the opposition and its newspapers.

Due to domestic and international conjunctures, mainly the severe and prolonged economic crisis beginning in the 1980s, the social unrests of the 1990s, and the transformation of world politics in the post-Cold War era, the monarchy tried again to introduce initiatives to allow for more democratic reforms and economic liberalization. These initiatives included the constitutional revisions of 1992 and 1996, the creation of the Consultative Council on Human Rights in 1990, the general royal amnesty that was preceded by various partial pardons, and the improvement of the electoral consultations transparency (Human Development Report - Morocco, 2009, p. 13). The revision of the constitution in 1992 “led to a renewed interest in the electoral process” (Cherkaoui & Ben Ali, 2003, p. 746). As a consequence, five opposition parties presented a

⁶ The Green March was a mass demonstration organized by the Moroccan government in 1975 to force Spain to hand over Western Sahara to Morocco.

memorandum to the king demanding institutional reforms. the negotiations culminated in the appointment of the socialist leader, Abderhman Youssoufi, as a prime minister in 1998, after his party, the Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP), won in the country's first relatively transparent democratic elections in 1997. This political process, widely known as "alternance" (alternation), continued after Mohamed VI took power in 1999.

The current king marked his first years of reign with a series of political reforms, such as the release of political prisoners and the rehabilitation and compensation for the victims of the Years of Lead, the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IRC), the organization of open and relatively fair bicameral elections in 2002 and 2007, the permission of more freedom of speech, and the adoption of the new Family Code in 2004. The latter measure was, in fact, described as "a landmark reform of the status of Moroccan women as it puts them on equal footing with men in regard to marriage and children" (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, 2009). Mohamed VI's first years in power have drawn much praise and generated great hopes for the democratization process in the country. Denoeux (2001), for instance, holds that

well ahead of the country's political class, King Mohammed VI has sought to chart a new course for the Kingdom. In the process he has displayed political audacity and courage. In tune with his people and their aspirations, he has proven to be a powerful catalyst for change. (p. 84)

Nonetheless, after over 10 years in power, Mohamed VI has not transformed the country into a democracy, nor has he alleviated in any significant way the social and economic disparities that plague the county. Assessing his first decade in power, a large

number of commentators have drawn a less optimistic and rosy picture of his reign than the image that many perceived when the king had just acceded the throne. While acknowledging the king's achievements, Turquoi (2009) advances that at the political level,

l'équilibre des pouvoirs entre le palais royal et les partis reste un vœu pieux. Le Maroc est toujours dirigé par le roi et ses proches. Le gouvernement compte peu. Le Parlement n'est qu'une chambre d'enregistrement. Les élections locales de juin témoignent de cette emprise du palais royal. Elles ont été marquées, sur fond d'abstention massive, par le triomphe du parti de "l'ami du roi," Fouad Ali El-Himma, parti créé il y a moins d'un an. (para. 8)

Zerhouni (2004) has explained that profound changes failed to materialize because the country's political system has not been able to produce a new political elite capable of translating intentions and laws into real changes. It is a situation where the monarchy plays a vital role by perpetuating "elite immobilisme" and reinforcing the "clientelist network in which economic self-interest became part of elite members' shared values" (p. 61). Many observers have commented that the monarchy's move towards more political openness is not driven by a genuine commitment to democracy, but rather by a need to engage traditional elites in government while building more consensus and legitimacy around the institution of the monarchy itself (Desrues & Moyano, 2001; Smith & Loudiy, 2005; Watson, 2006). This state of affairs was clearly reflected in the last legislative elections in September 2007, for which the rate of participation did not top 37% of the registered electorate. The low participation reveals how the majority of people "do not take these elections seriously because they know that 'the game is

fixed” (Maghraoui, 2001, p. 80). According to Desrues and Moyano (2001), the success of the democratic transition in the country depends on many conditions that have not all been realized, chief among them the development of a strong and independent civil society. For Smith and Louidy (2005), Morocco’s case is not a democracy in transition, but rather a semi-authoritarian regime that will never change unless it is challenged. The well-known journalist Aboubakr Jamaï (2009) argues that Mohamed VI failed to respect a tacit agreement between King Hassan II and civil society that led to the experience of “alternance” and provided the gradual opening of the political system into real participation and power sharing:

Le bilan de ces dix dernières années est tout simplement nul. Rien n'a été fait pour entamer une réforme constitutionnelle. Pis encore, aux yeux de la monarchie: évoquer la réforme de la Constitution confine au blasphème et expose ses promoteurs à la marginalisation politique et aux foudres des médias aux ordres. (*Le Monde*, para. 4)

The “War on Terror” launched after September 11, 2001 and the Casablanca terrorist attacks that shocked the country in 2003⁷ provided the state with more pretexts and an international cover and support for its repressive policies. In fact, immediately after these attacks, indiscriminate arrests of presumed Islamist militants were carried out, with the number of those arrested estimated to be between 10,000 and 20,000 people (Turquoi, 2009). Yet, “no widespread international condemnation of Morocco has been issued following the publication of Amnesty International’s 2004 report detailing the repressive practices of the regime” (Cavatorta, 2005, p. 563). These conclusions seem to sadly

⁷ On May 16, 2003, a series of suicide bombings hit several targets in Casablanca, the economic capital of the country, and resulted in the death of 45 people.

confirm Garon's image of Sisyphus: after ten years, the rock of democratization is falling down the long slope again. Is democratic change in Morocco doomed to an eternal, cyclical ascension and fall? Garon (2003), though not very optimistic, is not pessimistic either, affirming that what characterizes the Moroccan model of civil society, beyond its "dangerous alliances" with the Makhzen, is "its stable character, with neither progress nor setback of the spectacular type" (p. 81). Zerhouni (2004) adopts a more optimistic stance, affirming that despite its many shortcomings, the last phase of political liberalization has allowed a large part of the elite to participate in various forms of political arena, and since resources are limited, "increases in the number of the elite might make it more difficult to maintain the current clientelist system" (p. 62).

1.2.5 Media and freedom of speech.

Freedom of speech and the press have followed the same cycles of openness and restrictions that have characterized politics in the country since independence. After decades of direct and violent censorship, restrictions were eased in the late 1990s as a part of the deal between the late King Hassan II and opposition parties. Since then, freedom of speech and the press have developed considerably, especially since Mohamed VI took power. In the past few years, a large number of independent publications have appeared—overall, there are 600 newspapers and magazines in Arabic and French—while private radio and television stations were allowed to operate for the first time in 2006. So far, there are eleven radio stations and one private television station. A significant number of non-partisan, professional, and highly critical publications have appeared in this period; they are projects launched by a "new breed of journalists [that] has capitalized on the absence of a strategic and strong political

opposition to attract new readers and gain credibility in the cultural media landscape” (Douai, 2009, p. 8). Initially comprising mainly weekly magazines in French, such as *Le Journal*, this new generation of publications developed to include many Arabic titles, -. For more than a decade, these publications have played an influential role in expanding the horizon and quality of the public sphere, as they “have gradually broken taboos, turned political reporting and analysis into an everyday topic, and stolen readers from the now ailing political party organs” (Reporters Without Borders, 2003, para. 3).

However, like many other civil rights in the country, this freedom remains fragile and fluctuating, since the state still resorts, though not as systematically as before, to repression in order to silence criticism on certain taboo subjects, mainly the monarchy, religion, and the issue of the Western Sahara.⁸ Smith and Loudiy (2005) succinctly point out that the country “is animated by an opening of discourse opportunities unthinkable just a decade ago” (p. 1087). But they also note that, paradoxically, it is “still marked by fear, censorship, surveillance, detentions, [and] torture” (p. 1087). Indeed, the honeymoon between the independent press and the new monarch did not last long before severe restrictions and harassment were used again whenever the “red lines” were crossed, including criticism of the monarchy, the issue of the Western Sahara, and, in some instances, failure to “respect” the Islamic religion. The new state policy towards the independent press was clearly defined by King Mohamed VI himself in the following terms:

Of course I am in favour of [freedom of the press]. But I would like this freedom to be a responsible one ... Journalists aren't angels, after all. Personally, I

⁸ The conflict of the Western Sahara has opposed Morocco and the Polisario Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro), which has been backed by neighbouring Algeria since 1975 when Morocco annexed the province after seizing it from Spain.

appreciate the role of critic played by the Moroccan press and journalists in public debate. But let's avoid giving in to the temptation of the imported model.

Otherwise our own values will be undermined and individual freedoms will be jeopardised ... The law sets limits ... It must apply to everyone. When the press speaks of human rights, it sometimes forgets to respect those rights itself.

(Reporters without Borders, 2003, para. 3)

The desire to see the outspoken press be more “responsible” was manifested in new methods of curtailment. To avoid international publicity and embarrassment, the state has had recourse largely to a new strategy to silence the media, namely “economic ruin.” However, when hefty fines fail to do the job, imprisonment of journalists and closure of publications through “kangaroo trials” await those who cross the lines. This is facilitated by the fact that “the press laws and the law of Audiovisual Communication provide many loopholes through which the government can intimidate and prosecute writers, newspapers and channels” (Open Arab Net, 2009, para. 10). Thus, in the last decade, Morocco’s docile and state-controlled judiciary has given 25 years of prison to several journalists and almost \$3 million (USD) in fines. In 2008, the Arabic daily *AlMassae* alone was sentenced to pay fines of around \$750,000 (USD) (Wendell, 2009, p. 142). The years 2009 and 2010 were deemed the worst for freedom of the press, with a record number of journalists sentenced to prison; subsequently, the country’s world ranking in freedom of expression published annually by Reporters Without Borders (RWB) further slumped from 122nd to 127th in 2009 and to 135th in 2010 (RWB, Press Freedom Index, 2010).

2. ICTs and the Internet in Morocco: Towards an Information Society?

2.1 Official discourse and policy on ICTs.

Despite formidable economic and social challenges facing the country, Morocco has made considerable progress in the domain of ICTs. Gray (2002), from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), contends that “despite the fact that Morocco has the region’s lowest GDP per capita, its liberalized telecom environment has allowed it to take the region’s lead in the mobile sector” (para. 3). Within Moroccan official discourse, the liberalization of the communication sector is often described as a vital step towards wider societal adoption of new technologies that can accelerate economic and social development. This is why, and similarly to the rest of the developing world, “the information revolution is viewed as a highly political affair and not as a technical challenge” (Wilson, 2006, p. 6).

The development of ICTs in Morocco gained real momentum after 1997, when a landmark Post Office and Telecommunication Act (Law 24-96) was passed that provided for the liberalization of the telecommunication industry and set up an independent regulatory agency, Agence Nationale de Réglementation des Telecommunication (ANRT). Two years later, the government awarded the second mobile phone operator license to Médi Télécom (Méditel) through an international tender for \$1.1 billion (USD), “the most lucrative award for a GSM license ever in a developing nation” (Willis, 2006, pp. 39–40). In 1999, another telecommunication company, WANA Corporate (formerly Maroc Connect), was established and later marketed its Internet services under the brand Wanadoo. The company was initially a subsidiary of France Télécom, but is now controlled by the Moroccan conglomerate

Omnium Nord-Africain (ONA). In 2008, the company won the third mobile license and, through marketing its third-generation (3G) mobile system, it controls less than 2% of mobile market in Morocco (ANRT, 2008).

2.2 The rapid growth in the ICT sector: Network capitalism.

Since 1999, the number of mobile subscribers increased dramatically, going from just 250,000 in 1999 (Hajji, 2002) to 16 million in 2006, and almost 23 million in 2008, which represents 73.98% of the country's population (ANRT, 2008, p. 23). In comparison, fixed telephony has scarcely developed over the last few years, with a penetration rate of only 9.70% of the population (p. 23). In spite of the exponential growth in mobile phone use, prepaid subscriptions remains the dominant type of service, with 95.96% of total mobile subscriptions, a situation that can be attributed to the high cost of mobile communication and subscription compared to the income of the majority of people. The huge surge in the number of mobile users in the country, however, has been seen by exponents of the liberalization of telecommunication as a success story to be emulated in the developing world. In an enthusiastic article entitled "Morocco - leaving the others behind," Vanessa Gray (2002) suggests that "Morocco's impressive telecommunication breakthrough is an excellent example of today's worldwide liberalization and transformation process" (para. 1); similarly, Sutherland (2007) contends that the country is "one of the telecommunications successes of Africa" (p. 8). These highly positive assessments adhere, in fact, to a global discourse on technology whose ascension to prominence in the last few decades is intrinsically linked to a neo-liberal economic system. Fisher (2010) points out a number of aspects that distinguish

the articulation between what he calls the “narrative of the digital discourse” and the “network of capitalism”:

[t]he withdrawal of the state from the planning, management, and regulation of the economy and from its welfare obligations; the move from national protective economy to a globalized, deregulated, and unitary market; the privatization of work; the eradication of work and the working class as viable social categories.

(p.3)

The development of the telecommunication sector in Morocco, in fact, spearheaded a very aggressive economic liberalization policy, under the supervision of international monetary institutions, which saw the privatization of key state-owned companies and sectors. While these policies have led to the fast diffusion and adoption of ICTs such as the mobile phone and more recently the Internet, they have also, paradoxically, aggravated existing social and economic inequalities between regions, social classes, and gender.

2.3 The Internet’s infrastructure and use.

The Internet has developed exponentially over the last few years—so much so that the country has one of the highest numbers of users in Africa and Middle East. While the Internet in Morocco has been available since 1995, its usage on a wide scale did not kick off until a few years ago. Maroc Telecom (51% of which is owned by Vivendi, and the rest by the Moroccan government) is the largest Internet service provider (ISP) in the country, with an estimated market share of more than 95% (Open Net Initiative, 2009, p.2). In addition, the company offers wholesale services to other ISPs, the total number of which is estimated at 80. Whilst Morocco’s national domain name “.ma” was

handled before by Maroc Telecom, it has since become the responsibility of the ANRT, which declares it is now offering users the possibility of registering their domain names in Arabic under the national name of «المغرب» (Morocco) instead of “.ma” (ANRT, 2008).

According to the ITU, the number of Internet users in the country has jumped from 100,000 in 2000, to 10,442,500 million in 2010, representing almost 33% of the population (Internet World Stats, Internet Usage Stats for Africa, 2010). Though Internet penetration remains low—only 2.46% of the population—it is developing fast, as the country’s digital subscriber line (DSL) access is one the cheapest in Africa. Moreover, the rapid growth in Internet subscription in the last two years is linked to the entry into the market of 3G mobile Internet that now represents around 35.4% of total subscriptions.

However, since the “key variable throughout the world shaping Internet access is the telephone penetration rate” (Warf & Vincent, 2007, p. 86), the low level of fixed telephone penetration in the country means that most people still rely on public points for accessing the Internet. Thus, the main access points for the majority of users remain the cybercafés whose number is estimated to be between 2,000 to 3,000, and employing some 5,000 people, thus contributing to “reducing both poverty and illiteracy among the youth” (Open Arab Net, 2009, Morocco, Internet Café section). Wheeler (2009) contends that cybercafés in North African countries, including Morocco, are playing an important role in diffusing IT skills and Internet use, as well as in building civic culture and social networks:

In most cases, these café users have subsequently taught a friend, family, or community member to use the Internet, thus demonstrating a form of civic engagement whereby knowledge once attained is shared with others through informal networks. Moreover, many became Internet users to reduce the costs and increase the likelihood of staying in touch with friends and family members, especially when individuals in their kin and care networks are abroad. (p. 316)

The Open Arab Net (OAN) reports that there are “no official restrictions on Internet cafés” as the law allows any person to apply for an Internet café license, and that “the process is no more complex than the normal process for any other commercial activity” (OAN, 2009, Morocco, Internet café section). Moreover, the people using these cafés normally enjoy anonymity and no attempt is made to identify the websites they visit. However, in the wake of the suicide bombings that occurred in 2007 in Casablanca⁹, cybercafés came under the close surveillance of security forces and intelligence, and it is believed that the number of visitors at Internet cafés severely diminished during this period (OAN, 2009, Morocco). Moreover, compared to the fast growth in the number of cybercafés during the last decade, their rate of development significantly slowed down, which the ANRT attributes to the growth of Internet subscriptions through mobile (3G) technology and household connections (ANRT, 2008, p. 43).

Nonetheless, 15 years after the Internet was introduced into the country, Morocco is still far from catching up with the global information society to which King Mohamed VI aspired. The Moroccan Ministry of Industry, Trade and New Technologies stated in

⁹ The second suicide bombing that hit Casablanca, after those of 2003, took place in March 2007 inside a cybercafé located in a poor neighbourhood of the city. The explosion killed the bomber and injured his companion, along with three people in the café.

April 2008 that “as few as 3.4% of the population had a computer, only 2,000 Moroccan schools were equipped with ICTs, and only 10 companies engaged in e-commerce” (OAN, 2009, Internet in Morocco section). Moreover, despite the rapid growth in the number of Internet users, e-government has not followed suit since the UN e-government 2010 survey ranked the country 126th in terms of e-government readiness, (UN e-government survey, 2010, p. 63). Additionally, while Morocco has the highest number of users per capita in North Africa, high illiteracy rates and low performance in human development prevent the country from benefiting from this numerical growth. Gray (2009) points out, for instance, that Morocco is in advance of other countries in the region in terms of ICT access and use; however, it trails these countries in ICT skills. These discrepancies explain, in part, the growing “digital divides” that characterize Internet adoption and use between big cities and peripheries, urban centers and rural areas, rich and poor, and gender and generations. As Watson (2006) rightly notes, the successes achieved through the liberalization of the telecommunication industry constitute “a one-time phenomena,” since revenues achieved from the technology sector in Morocco “continue to represent less than 4% of the annual GDP, making it a terrifically small component in the financial stability of the nation” (p. 42).

Equally important, Warf and Vincent (2007) identify a number of problems affecting the rapid diffusion and adoption of the Internet in the majority of Arab countries, including Morocco: a) a shortage of Arabic content and the Internet applications to support it; b) low literacy rates; c) the segregation of women, especially in terms of using public Internet access points such as cybercafés; d) the high cost of Internet service access; and finally, e) political restrictions on the use of the Internet (pp.

86–88). While some of these factors are shared by the majority of these countries, such as a shortage of Arabic content and gender inequalities, other factors weigh more in the case of particular countries than others. As far as Morocco is concerned, the high rate of illiteracy and the cost of access are major obstacles to the diffusion of the Internet. In its latest report on the country, the Initiative for an Open Arab Internet (2009) points out, for instance, that access to the Internet in Morocco is plagued by many problems such as the high cost of asymmetrical digital subscriber line (ADSL) services, and the sometimes poor quality of service provided by existing companies, which the report attributes to IT companies' interest in making quick profits. Poor quality of service, particularly traffic congestion, can also be attributed to the fact that the phenomenal growth in the number of users has not been accompanied by parallel development of local Internet hosts, which characterize Internet diffusion in the majority of developing countries (Balioune, 2003). While women constitute some 30%¹⁰ of the people using cybercafés, a situation that reflects a gradual narrowing of the gender gap in this sphere, at the same time, the road ahead to achieving equality between men and women is far from complete.

Despite formidable challenges, the Moroccan government continues to believe that investing in ICTs and the popularization of Internet use constitutes the right path towards economic development. In 2005, the Généralisation des TIC dans L'Enseignement (GENIE) project was launched to equip schools with IT materials, connect them to the Internet, and train teachers to use multimedia in their lessons. The second phase of the project, "Digital Morocco 2013" (Maroc numérique 2013), was launched in 2008 and accorded a budget of \$5.2 billion MAD (around \$700 million

¹⁰ The rate in other Arab countries is put at only 20% (Warf & Vincent, 2007).

USD). The program aims to assist and encourage small and medium business projects to use ICTs, to boost high speed Internet use, and develop e-government projects. The new project also aims to increase the ability of young people to have Internet access through the establishment of some 400 computer centres in low-income districts and remote regions (Touahri, 2009). Beyond the immediate objective of boosting the use of ICTs in education and business, the project aims to achieve four main goals: use the IT sector to enhance human development in the country; increase added value and productivity for other sectors; render the sector as a pillar of the economy; and position Morocco as a regional technological hub (Ministry of Industry, 2008, p. 18).

2.4 Freedom of speech online.

Compared to other media, access to and use of the Internet in Morocco has benefitted from a considerable margin of freedom, although in the last few years the state has tried to control access to particular websites. Many observers have, in fact, noted that Internet users enjoy a level of freedom that is relatively unmatched in most Arab countries. For instance, in its report on Morocco, the Initiative for an Open Arab Internet (2009) affirms that “though in Morocco the Internet is largely free of filtering, bloggers and forum participants generally avoid ‘red line’ topics such as the Western Sahara, defamation of the royal authority, and defamation of Islam. Still, bloggers in the kingdom state that they are free to discuss almost anything” (p. 3).

It is doubtful, however, that the country’s relative leniency towards online expression stems from a policy of free speech tolerance. Goldsmith and Wu (2006) argue that “governments can indeed control the Internet at three levels, the level of users or recipients, the level of websites, and the level of intermediaries or transmitters” (p.

49). The Moroccan state has tried repeatedly to place controls over the Internet by selectively blocking “undesirable” sites or IP addresses, but it has failed, since users can usually access the same content on other websites. Moreover, setting up a comprehensive and intelligent filtering system, as applied in other countries like China, requires many resources that the state cannot afford. As Sadiki (2004) notes about the potential for online free speech and the practice of Internet censorship in Arab countries, the capacity to monopolize loyalty [in these countries] is being enfeebled by the deluge of multipolar flow of information made possible by the new information and communication technologies, such as the [I]nternet, that either defy official censorship or cannot be surveilled without imposing an unaffordable burden on the public purse. (p. 75)

Instead of direct censorship, the Moroccan state has resorted recently to persecuting Internet users and bloggers deemed to have transgressed the “red lines,” in what seems to be a bid not to silence all criticism online, but to increase self-censorship. In September 2008, Moroccan blogger and journalist Mohamed Erraji was convicted of “disrespect for the king” in an article for Moroccan Arabic-language news website Hespress.com and was sentenced to serve two years in prison (Reporters Without Borders, 2008). Another blogger, El Bachir Hazzam, was sentenced to four months in prison after he was accused of posting “false” information online about human rights abuses in the country (Committee to Protect Bloggers, 2010). Though the persecution of Internet users remains rare, there is no guarantee that it will not augment quickly in the coming years as the use of the medium becomes more and more widespread, and as heavy repression of free speech in print media increases.

3. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter introduced the multiple structures (social-technological and socio economic) that will be debated in the coming chapters. The chapter also provided a summary of the economic and social challenges facing Morocco as a developing country, and a brief historical background and a detailed analysis of its political system. As it has emerged in the discussion above, the country's economic and social development indices are still low despite conforming to successive Structural Adjustment Programs, which have had dire social consequences for the most vulnerable segments of the country's population, particularly the poor and women. The country's political system has always been characterized by fundamental contradictions and inconsistencies that account for the various descriptions attached to it. Indeed, diverse commentators have described Morocco as a "democracy in transition,"¹¹ an "absolute monarchy," and an "authoritarian pluralism." The latter designation is perhaps the best description because it captures the internal contradictions of a system hinged between a multi-century "Makhzenian" regime, and a weak but resilient and ever-evolving civil society that vacillates between an ever-globalized economic and political environment and local deeply rooted conservative social and cultural orders and traditions.

The chapter has also provided a brief overview and background to the development of ICTs and, in particular, the Internet in the country. These new technologies have been developing rapidly in the last few years in tandem with sweeping economic liberalization policies that have boosted economic growth while greatly aggravated social inequalities between classes and regions. The fact that most of the

¹¹ According to the Arab Reform Initiative, for instance, Morocco scored second, after scoring first last year, in democratic transition reforms in the Arab World (Arab Reform Initiative, 2009).

telecommunication sector in the country is controlled now by multinational companies demonstrates how ICTs are serving global capitalism to achieve economic expansion. However, nobody can deny the positive impact of the new technologies as the mobile telephony has allowed millions of people in poor neighborhoods, distant villages, and towns in Morocco to benefit, albeit at a high cost, from instant connection and networking. Unlike the mobile phone, the Internet has been slow to develop, while its immediate social and economic effects have yet to be proved. ICTs have been identified as being tools of control and emancipation, and economic and social exploitation, and growth and development. Accordingly, to what extent can the Internet enhance the capacity of oppositional social movements in Morocco to challenge and affect hegemonous political and social structures in the country?

The thesis strives to use a holistic approach that foregrounds the roles of structural orders and systems, and human agency as well as the multiple interactions and articulations between them. In this manner, this chapter serves as more than mere background information; rather, it provides an environment for the analysis and discussion of data to follow. As will be highlighted in further chapters, a major variation in the study of social movement phenomena between developed and developing countries is that in the case of the latter, more emphasis should be placed on the role of the socio-political context within which collective action evolves. This chapter provided such a context, and to enrich it, additional information and details will be provided in subsequent chapters as well.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Social Movements and the Internet

Introduction

As with the previous chapter, the present one focuses on the two principal themes that inform the thesis, namely politics and technology. The chapter moves from the more general to the specific in order to situate these two issues in multiple settings as well as within Morocco's context as a North-African, Arab, Islamic developing country. This gradational organization of the chapter allows for the contextualization of the Internet as a socially embedded artifact at the global, regional, and national levels. Thus, the first part of the chapter addresses numerous interpretations of the concepts of "civil society" and "social movements", their origins, and the major theoretical paradigms related to them. Tracing their theoretical conception and development in Western settings, this chapter discusses how they were also applied to non-Western realities.

The second part provides an overview of the main theories and seminal scholarly works that have dealt with the political role and democratic potential of the Internet, either in established democracies or in the context of authoritarian and developing countries. In so doing, the study draws on various disciplines, particularly sociology, political science, media studies, and development studies to shed light on the political implications of the Internet for social movements from a variety of theoretical angles, which I believe is necessary in order to address the type of questions the thesis will raise throughout the subsequent chapters.

1. Civil Society and Social Movements

1.1 Civil society: Concept definition.

The concept of civil society has a “complex genealogy” of meanings that shift according to the historical context in which the term is used (Purdue, 2007, p. 1). The term “civil society” has its origins in ancient Greece and, until the eighteenth century, was synonymous with the state or “political society” (Kumar, 1993). Its modern use is usually traced back to such Enlightenment philosophers as John Locke, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith, who emphasized the role of free associations and markets and the need to curb the state’s control over the latter (Sardamov, 2005; Calabrese, 2004). In effect, “civil society was elaborated as a concept in the eighteenth-century debates about despotism and the means to counteract it” (Kumar, 1993, p. 377). Later on, Hegel would conceive of civil society as not in dichotomy with the state insofar as it “cannot remain ‘civil’ unless it is ordered politically, subjected to the ‘higher surveillance of the state’” (Hegel as cited in Bratton, 1994, p. 54). As for Marx, he viewed civil society as an arena of bourgeois domination where the human being “acts as a private individual, regards other men as means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes a plaything of alien powers” (Marx as cited in Foley & Edwards, 1998, p. 7).

It is, however, Gramsci’s reading of the concept that most influences the literature. Like Marx and Hegel, he was against a dichotomous view of civil society and the state. He defines civil society as “the sphere in which a social group exercises hegemony over the entire society, and embod[ies] the ‘ethical content’ of the state” (Bates, 1975, p. 357). For Gramsci, the state is composed of both political society and civil society. While the former is “the arena of coercion and domination,” civil society is the realm of

“consent and direction” (Kumar, 1993, p. 382). The relation between the two is what constitutes the hegemony of a ruling class. It is a definition that Gramsci summarized in his famous mathematical-like formula, “the state = political society + civil society” (Cox, 1999, p. 7). Gramsci believes it is through civil society that intellectuals “perform their key function of supplying legitimacy and creating consensus on behalf of the ruling groups” (Kumar, 1993, p. 382). Nevertheless, he describes civil society as a site of both domination and coercion, and of struggle and resistance. Because civil society is a “site of struggle for legitimate use of state power,” the proletariat has to wage a strategic “war of position” (in contrast with a “war of movement,” as in violent revolutions) necessary for the “conquest of civil society and for the transformation of civil society in an emancipatory direction” (Gramsci as cited in Cox, 1999, p. 8). The term “civil society”, however, fell into disuse throughout much of the twentieth century, until it was revived in the 1980s and 1990s during the political contestations and dissidence in Eastern Europe, and the democratic transitions in Latin America. Gramsci’s interpretation of the concept became influential during this period, as civil society acquired the connotations of resistance and radicalism (Calabrese, 2004).

From a more liberal perspective, “civil society” has been equated with voluntary associational life, a conception connected with the writings of Tocqueville on US society in the nineteenth century. This meaning was revived in the 1990s, particularly through the work of Robert Putnam who argues that the “social capital” of mutual trust and solidarity produced through associational life “is likely to have a spill-over effect, not only facilitating the development of democratic institutions but also oiling business relations and thus spurring economic growth” (Sardamov, 2005, p. 382). Currently, the

concept of civil society has become commonly defined as “the zone of voluntary associative life beyond family and clan affiliations but separate from the state and the market” (Hawthorne, 2004, p. 5).

A key notion within the liberal interpretation of civil society is “civility,” defined by Edwards Shils (1997) as “an appreciation of or attachment to the institutions which constitute civil society. It is an attitude of attachment to the whole society, to all its strata and sections. It is an attitude of concern for the good of the entire society” (p. 335). Political scientists have pointed out that the presence of “democratic” institutions and procedures, such as a parliament, a multi-party system, and elections, within a country does not automatically equate to democracy if the political culture in society fails to promote civility and civic notions like tolerance and basic freedoms of expression and thought. The perceived weakness or absence of such notions in newly emerged “democracies” in the post-Cold War era has earned these democracies such titles as “electoral, incomplete, illiberal, broken-back, or delegative democracies or the mixed or hybrid regimes of competitive authoritarianism, fleckless pluralism, or dominant power politics” (Doh Chull, 2006, p. 2).

Furthermore, in much of the literature, the concept of civil society has a strong normative dimension, as it is considered a precondition for democracy and democratization (Sardamov, 2005, p. 380). Many observers claim, however, that civil society has failed to live up to its expectations (Calhoun, 1997; Herbert, 2003; Sardamov, 2005). Empirical evidence has shown, for instance, that, contrary to widely held assumptions, the opposition movement and alliance against Communism in Poland between 1976 and 1986 “had little to do with the normative concept of civil society for

either containing or supporting public discussion” (Herbert, 2003, p. 62). It would seem, therefore, that the relationship between civil society and democracy is not self-evident. Downey and Fenton (2003) explain that civil society is usually composed of different organizations and groups that have diverse organizational structures and ideologies:

Some are traditional and paternalistic. Others are transparently democratic, controlled and operated by participants. Many voluntary organizations have close partnership relationships with the state, often depending on statutory funding for survival. Yet others challenge the state through vigorous social movements ... that some see as “a people’s” opposition. (p. 192)

But rather than abandoning the concept itself, commentators have stressed the need to re-conceptualize it in a way that salvages it from unfounded optimism in its democratizing potential (Esmail, 2002; Herbert, 2003; Cavatorta, 2005). Herbert (2003), for instance, calls for a critical theory of civil society that distinguishes between the empirical and normative dimensions of the concept, while simultaneously investigating the “conditions under which the first becomes the second, to use studies of the first to refine the second, and studies the second to critique the first” (p. 62).

1.2 Social Movements.

1.2.1 Concept definition.

The theorization of collective action as “social movements” started in the 1960s with the appearance of new forms of collective action and protest groups that were unaligned with traditional civil society organizations such as trade unions. In the beginning, social movements were mainly associated with feminist, civil rights, anti-war

groups, and student protest groups. In the decades that followed, other social movements emerged on the scene, including human rights groups, anti-racist groups, internationalist groups, gay and lesbian rights groups, among many others. A major shift in theorizing social movements took place when collective action changed from being viewed as “pathology of social system”, (Melucci, 1996, p. 22) or an irrational expression of social crisis, to “movement activities with concrete goals, articulated general values and interests, and rational calculations of strategies” (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009, p. 18).

Consensus over the definition of “social movement” has, however, yet to be reached within the existing literature. As De la Piscina (2007) maintains, “the wide-ranging typologies of social movements that currently exist complicates the ability to offer one definition that results in a consensus” (p. 65). Melucci (1996) argues that the notion of “social movement” is applied to various forms of collective action, which results in “a low and erratic degree of compatibility among various definitions” (p. 29).

Despite conceptual multiplicities, Snow, Soule, and Kriesi (2004) assert that it is possible to organize existing definitions of social movements around five main axes: (1) “collective or joint action”; (2) “change-oriented goals or claims”; (3) an “extra- or non-institutional collective action”; (4) a “degree of organization”; and (5) and a “degree of temporal continuity” (p. 6). These axes correspond, for instance, to Tarrow’s (1998) definition of social movements, which are, in his view, characterized by “four empirical properties: collective action, common purpose, social solidarity, and sustained interaction” (pp. 4–5). Della Porta and Diani (2006) largely concur, emphasizing

nonetheless, the major role of collective identity in the development of social movements and the constitution of their political agenda.

Another useful way to sort out existing definitions is by distinguishing between the various theoretical perspectives upon which they are premised. Van de Donk and Foederer (2001), for instance, distinguish between five approaches: (1) “the classical (collective behaviour) approach”; (2) “the resource mobilization approach”; (3) “the political opportunity approach”; (4) “the approach on the ideologically structured action”; and (5) “the discourse, ‘framing’ or social construction approach” (p. 158). As for Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2009), they differentiate between two categories of approaches, namely the classical approaches based on collective behaviour perspectives, and contemporary theories that include structural and social constructivist approaches. Diani (2000a), on the other hand, distinguishes between four major ones:

- (1) the collective behaviour perspective;
- (2) resource mobilization theory (RMT);
- (3) the “political process” perspective; and
- (4) “new social movement” theory. (p. 157)

Diani’s typology is the most commonly used in the literature. Therefore, it is the one the present study will draw on to discuss variations and developments in the conceptualization of social movements.

1.2.2 Major theoretical models.

The “collective behaviour” perspective, which prevailed in the mid-1950s, viewed social movements as a form of collective behaviour that emerges during a time of crisis “when significant social and cultural breakdowns” happen (Morris, 2000, p. 445).

Though important variations exist within the “collective behaviour” perspective, social movements were generally considered “spontaneous, unorganized, and unstructured phenomena that were discontinuous with institutional and organizational behaviour” (p. 445). Movements were conceived of as a form of collective behaviour situated “outside the normal institutions of society,” and the notion was applied to different social empirical phenomena “ranging from fads and rumours, to collective enthusiasms, riots, movements and revolutions” (Tarrow, 1998, p. 14). Turner and Killian (1987), two key figures in this theoretical paradigm, define a social movement as “a group with indefinite and shifting membership and with leadership whose position is determined more by informal response of adherents than by formal procedures for legitimising authority” (p. 223).

Della Porta and Diani (2006) argue that Despite its shortcomings, social-movement theory owes much to collective behaviour perspectives, such as defining collective action as “meaningful acts, driving often necessary and beneficial social change” (p. 13). However, the limitations of this paradigm, particularly its inability to account for social movements that emerged in the 1960s, led to the rise of a new paradigm, namely resource mobilization theory (RMT).

Compared to collective behaviour theory, RMT paid greater attention to institutional and organizational factors within collective action. RMT views social movements as “normal, rational, institutionally rooted, political challenges by [an] aggrieved group” (Buechler, 1993, p. 218). More importantly, RMT theorists consider grievances as one condition among others, as they moved to place more emphasis on the conditions under

which grievances are translated into action, and the resources that are needed to sustain such action. As McCarthy and Zald (2003) suggest,

the resource mobilization approach examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements. (p. 16)

RMT theorists claim that the existence of particular injustices and grievances is not enough to explain the development of social movements; in fact, “control over actual and potential resources is a more important determinant of the emergence as well as the likely success of collective action” (Buechler, 1993, p. 221). McCarthy and Zald (1973) have even claimed that “the definition of grievances will expand to meet the funds and support personnel available” (p. 13). The resources that social movements need in order to develop and act are not limited to material ones, such as funds; they also include access to media and “institutional centers, preexisting networks, and occupational structure and growth” (McCarthy & Zald, 2003, p. 20).

Moreover, RMT theorists make an important distinction between a social movement (SM) and a social movement organization (SMO). On one hand, a social movement is “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population representing preferences for changing some elements of the social structure or reward distribution, or both” (McCarthy & Zald, 2003 p. 20) and is characterized by multiple SMOs. An SMO, on the other hand, is “a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals” (p. 20).

Although it remains the most influential social movement theory in the last few decades, RMT has been criticized for numerous shortcomings, mainly for downplaying the role of grievances and ideology in the constitution of social movements and collective action and mobilization. It has been noted that RMT could not account for identity-based movements like feminism that emerged from existing movements like abolitionism, the civil rights movement, and radical-left movements. In fact, Buechler (1993) observes that “the women's liberation sector of the contemporary women's movement did appear to formulate its grievances largely in the context of women's participation in parent movements which treated them unequally” (p. 221). Moreover, within RMT, ideology was often equated with grievances, and was subsequently dismissed with the grievances as “constant background factors with little explanatory relevance” (p. 222). Tarrow (1998) contends that the major problem with RMT is that its proponents over-use the language of economics, including the terms of movement such as entrepreneurs, industries, and sectors, while ignoring the role of commitment, values, and ideology in prompting so many activists to fight against various forms of injustice.

The 1970s witnessed the development of the other structural approaches, namely the “political process” model. The term “political process” has been derived from Rule and Tilly’s (1975) article “Political Process in Revolutionary France, 1830-1832” (as discussed in McAdam, 2008, p. 175). This model is also known as the political opportunity structure (POS) theory. It is an approach that can be viewed as “both an alternative and an integration” of RMT (Ruggiero & Montagna, 2008, p. 138). However, while RMT foregrounds the organizational aspects internal to movements, the

political process model deals with external variables such as the political and institutional environment in which movements develop and operate (Ruggiero & Montagna, 2008, p.139). The concept of “political process” designates “the degree of openness or closure of a political system in a way that might facilitate or discourage the rise of social movements” (p. 139). Instead of focusing on the role of organizational resources in generating collective action, the political process model stresses the historical context and political environment that can either empower social movements to or hinder them from “getting access to established polity” (Diani, 2000a, p. 158). From this perspective, social movements can be defined as a “sustained series of interactions between power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation” (Tilly, 1984, p. 303). By so doing, the political process model has contributed to shifting the conception of social movements from being marginal and anti-institutional towards a more interactive relationship between “less conventional forms of action and institutionalized systems of interest representation” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 16).

Like RMT, the political process has also been criticized for putting too much emphasis on structural factors and paying less attention to cognitive and cultural variables, and to the role of agency. Although a number of theorists have attempted to incorporate these last variables, they “tend to wash the meaning and fluidity out of strategy, agency, and culture so that they look like structures” (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999, p. 29).

Unlike the two previous theoretical models that are strongly structure-oriented, the new social movement (NSM) theory belongs to the social constructivist paradigm that

emphasizes the role of culture, identity, and lifestyle. Its development is associated with the emergence of collective action movements that are less concerned with class struggle and distribution of wealth than with collective identity issues, as is the case with the feminist movement. Accordingly, the theory attempts to address some of the major shortcomings within structural approaches by foregrounding the role of identity and ideology over organizational and material resources. NSM theorists believe, in fact, that the social construction of collective identity comes logically “prior to other social processes which the RM framework regards as central to collective action” (Buechler, 1993, p. 229). It is, therefore, associated with post-industrial society, in which conflicts arise “over how to control the production of symbols and redefine roles in society” (Shigetomi, 2009, p. 4). Moreover, compared with the other models, NSM theory attempts to link social movements to “large-scale structural and cultural changes” instead of “immediate historical environment and institutional politics” (Diani, 2000a, p. 159).

One of the main theorists of this model is Habermas (2008), who contends that new social movements intervene in the public sphere to challenge dominant discourses on issues of identity and lifestyle, while simultaneously questioning the legitimacy of governments and elites who represent and defend those discourses. For Habermas (2008), the new conflicts are no longer an outcome of a struggle over material resources and reproduction. Instead, they

arise in areas of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. They are manifested in sub-institutional, extra-parliamentary forms of protests. ... In

short, the new conflicts are not sparked by problems of distribution, but concern the grammar of forms of life. (p. 221)

The “grammar of forms life” concerns grievances and conflict over issues of identity, and the production of symbolic meanings that bridge the private and the public. New social movements try to politicize these issues and eventually democratize everyday life. This leads to the transformation of the field of social struggle and the resources necessary to engage in action, as the potential for the production of action becomes increasingly contingent on “the ability to produce information” (Melucci, 2008, p. 219). According to Melucci (1994), conflicts now “tend to arise in those areas of the system that are most directly involved in the production of information and communicative resources but at the same time subjected to intense pressure of integration” (p. 101). Furthermore, it has been noted that structural perspectives fail to account for the role of agency or the decisions and actions of individual actors. For instance, people living under similar structural conditions may not all engage in collective action. By stressing the role of identification and emotions in mobilizing people into action, NSM has contributed to bridging “the gap between behaviour and meaning, between ‘objective’ conditions and ‘subjective’ motives and orientation, between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’” (Melucci, 1996, p. 69).

Finally, in addition to NSM, another theoretical model attempting to go beyond the limitations of structural approaches is associated with Mario Diani’s work (Diani, 2000b, 2000c, 2004; Diani & McAdam, 2003; Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Drawing on network theory-related perspectives, Diani’s model tries to bridge the gap between “structure” and “agency” and the “subjective” and “objective” to explain the emergence

of collective action and the development of social movements. Diani and McAdam (2003) argue that interest in connecting network theory with social movement analysis is grounded on “at least three different intellectual contexts”, namely a “renewed interest in the meso-level of social analysis and the relation between structure and agency”; a resurgence of interest in “social mechanisms” that are important to the growth of social movement action such as “recruitment, framing, tactical adaptation of action repertoires, and of course networking”; and, finally “the consolidation of social network analysis as a distinct field in social science” (p. 4).

The bulk of the network analysis literature focuses on structural aspects of networks (Breiger, 2004). Inspired mainly by the work of White (1992), however, an alternative body of research has resulted in the rethinking of network theory by emphasizing the role of culture and cognition (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Breiger, 2004). White (1992) argues that networks are “phenomenological realities as well as measurement constructs,” since they can be understood as “networks of meanings” (p. 65). This latter interpretation has paved the way for

a reflection on the relationship between the social networks and the cognitive maps through which actors make sense of and categorize their social environment and locate themselves within broader webs of ties and interactions. (Diani & McAdam, 2003, p. 5)

Two broad types of functions that networks perform in collective action have been identified. One type involves the networks that link individuals to collectives, as is the case with organizational links, and social and cultural ties and their density, which play a crucial role in recruitment and mobilization. The second type concerns the nature of

social movements themselves as “complex social systems” (Diani, 2004, p. 351).

According to the latter view, social movements can be defined as “networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals and organizations, who share a distinctive collective identity, and mobilize resources on conflictual issues” (Diani, 2000b, p. 387).

1.3 Social movement theory in the context of developing countries.

One common feature shared by the social movement theories is that they have been articulated mostly to analyze forms of collective action that emerged in industrial and postmodern societies. Shigetomi (2009) holds that “few researchers take the context of developing countries seriously in an attempt to identify the salient features of and approach to social movements” (p. 6). More important, modern theories on social movements are founded on “a subjectivist perspective” that emphasizes “the manipulative capability of movement actors” and the “purposive” nature of their action, whereby social phenomena are explained through “the choices made by actors who have their own goals” (p. 5). New social movement theory, for instance, highlights collective identity as an explanation of collective action by assuming actors are “independent as individuals, rather than people whose consciousness is guided by structural elements such as formal political positions and socio-economic divisions in society” (p. 4). The “subjectivist perspective” becomes problematic, however, when applied to the context of developing countries where the actors’ choices are severely curtailed by limited resources and hostile political environments (p. 6).

In the same vein, Ellis and Kessel (2009) point out several aspects distinguishing social movements and their environments within developing countries, particularly in

Africa, compared to those in developed ones. The dependence of many social movements on foreign aid, the important role of diaspora in sustaining collective action in their countries of origin, and the weak status of central governments in many countries are some of these distinct dimensions of African social movements and their contexts. This assessment lends credence to Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2009), who argue that studying collective action phenomena in developing countries should take into account specific national political and social contexts, as well as the supra-national institutions and structures that are increasingly shaping social movements in these countries.

1.4 Social movement in Muslim/Arab countries.

Similar to the rest of the developing world, the number of research studies linking civil society and social movements to development within Muslim and Arab countries in particular has proliferated since the late 1990s. Until the mid-1990s, studies on civil society and public society in the region were rare, while existing literature on public opinion and the public sphere in the region often talked in terms of an “Arab street,” an epithet that connotes “passivity, unruliness, or propensity to easy manipulation” (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003, p. 62). But the last few years have witnessed a growing academic interest in the issue of democratic development and, more specifically, civil society and the public sphere in the Arab world. According to Sadiki (2004), “the study of Arab democracy has recently come into vogue, moving from near occultation to prominence” (p. 3). Belying the “Arab exceptionalism” model, large-scale comparative studies have concluded that “Arabs place a high value on democratic governance” and have even demonstrated that Arabs

topped the list of those supporting the statement that “democracy may have problems but it’s better than any other form of government” and expressed the highest level of rejection of authoritarian rule. (Browsers, 2006, p. 4)

Moreover, a number of commentators have argued that, contrary to essentialist views of Muslim-majority countries, public dialogues and pluralism have always characterized these societies. Norton (1999) asserts that

although some leading scholars argue that Muslim society has historically been bereft of civil society – a shibboleth of Orientalism – it is nonetheless noteworthy that medieval Muslim society was remarkably mobile and autonomous, and a ready option of “exit” served to effectively check the capricious exercise of power by the ruler. (p. 5)

Likewise, Eickelman (1999) contends that “public dialogues have long held a special place in the Muslim world” (p. 2). A number of “civil” bodies existed, indeed, in the pre-modern era, including schools of law, the Waqf–Islamic endowment institution– and Sufi orders (Eisenstadt, 2002, p. 147). In the modern era, civil society in the region, while much less autonomous and efficient than in the West, “has sometimes been courageously assertive in challenging narrowly-based, unstable regimes” (Norton, 2001, p. 7). Still, some commentators argue that the preponderant role played by religion-oriented groups within civil society in the region constitutes an obstacle to the development of democracy. According to this perspective, “democracy was not occurring in the region precisely because civil society was too vibrant and had an authoritarian nature, due in large part to the fact that much of the activism seemed to originate from Islamist movements” (Cavatorta, 2005, p. 204).

This viewpoint has, however, been called into question. Many commentators argue that religion and religious movements can indeed contribute to the establishment of democracy inasmuch as they play an important part in the formation of modernity and liberal thought itself, a part they still play in so-called secular societies (Haklai, 2009; Herbert, 2003; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Parekh, 2000; Van der Veer, 2004). Van der Veer (2004), for instance, contends that a non-ideological and more serious engagement with the issue reveals that religious institutions and movements “take part in the production of the modern self and continue to play a public, political role in most societies even in the so-called secular ones” (pp. 13–14). Sadiki (2004) concurs, pointing out that, while freedom and the rule of law are prerequisites for democracy, “other democratic Western standard categories, such as secularism, must be rethought in societies where pervasive religiosity contradicts with the privatization of religion as in the West” (p. 54). Drawing on a large-scale empirical study that compared many Muslim countries, Fattah (2006) concludes that Islamic groups rejecting democracy are but a minority, while modernist Islamists—along with secularists—constitute the majority. Affirming that in most of the studied countries, “the absolute majority of respondents supported an active role for Islam in politics,” Fattah concludes that “[w]here democracy does emerge in the Muslim world, it is likely to have a strong religious component” (pp. 126–7).

Despite the exponential growth in the literature dealing with collective action in majority Muslim societies, the bulk of the analyses have remained remarkably descriptive, as only a small set of studies have used social movement theories to analyze this social phenomenon. As Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004) remarks,

the study of Islamic activism has, for the most part, remained isolated from the plethora of theoretical and conceptual developments that have emerged from research on social movements contentious politics. Instead, most publications on Islamic activism are either descriptive analyses of the ideology, structure, and goals of various Islamic actors or histories of particular movements. (p. 3)

One goal of the present project is to contribute to addressing this serious theoretical lacuna in the field by drawing on social movement theory to conceptualize the impact of the Internet on collective action in Morocco and also to analyze data.

1.5 Civil society and social movements in Morocco.

As in the rest of the Arab World, civil institutions in Morocco, such as Waqf¹² and Sufi orders, date back many centuries. In the modern era, trade unions, which appeared during the French Protectorate, participated in the struggle for independence and since then have continued to play a vital role in politics, either through direct collective action or through political parties with which they are allied. During the Years of Lead under King Hassan II, the associative sector in the country remained very restricted and limited. With the political opening of the late 1980s, the sector expanded rapidly and the number of registered (legal) associations is currently estimated to be between 30,000 and 80,000, “making the country the regional leader in quantitative terms” (Kausch, 2008, p. 3).

The term “civil society” only gained currency, however, as a conceptual and analytical tool and as a referent to non-governmental associations and organizations in

¹² In Morocco, the term “Habus” is used instead of “Waqf”.

the late 1980s and early 1990s. As the “associative phenomenon”¹³ was taking root in the country, a number of commentators attempted to explore some of the problematic issues it raised, and the validity of applying the concept of “civil society” to the Arab and Moroccan context (El-Aoufi, 1992; Ghazali, 1989; Saaf, 1992). In an article titled “The Hypothesis of Civil Society in Morocco,” Saaf (1992), for instance, questions the possibility of using the concept to describe the associative sphere in the country, because he believes that the particularity of Moroccan society

seems to rebel against the currents of emancipation and hinders the constitution of spaces of freedom in its place. In effect, non-movement and immutability are the main features of this social political universe in Morocco. (as cited in Sater, 2007, p. 20)

Denoeux and Gateau (1995) lend credence to this statement, arguing that the associative culture needed for the development of a civil society is absent in the country. A large number of analysts disagree with this view, however, since it is inconsistent with the presence of a large number of associations and NGOs outside the control of the state. Sater (2007) argues that Saaf, along with some other early commentators, used the term “civil society” normatively to designate a society that is successfully resisting an authoritative state, and since this is not the case with Morocco, the idea of the existence of a viable “civil society” in the country is dismissed. Sater criticizes these positions as lacking a sound theoretical grounding, noting in particular that because they were published at an early phase in the development of Moroccan civil society, they were “unable to focus on those groups, which had just started to become active, and

¹³ It is the term used by Ahmed Ghazali (1989), who wrote one of the earliest texts on Moroccan civil society, “Contribution a l’analyse du phénomène associatif au Maroc.”

whose existence needed explanation” (p. 21). Similarly, Gandolfi (2003) thinks that the associative culture is deeply rooted in local culture, especially in rural areas, despite the constant efforts of the Moroccan state or Makhzen to domesticate the emerging “civil society”. The normative dimension of the concept remains, however, central to its use and understanding within Moroccan context, as it is often “related to political contestation and to the legitimate expression of the Moroccan people in the absence of real democratic representation” (Sater, 2002, p. 103).

Sater (2002) also identifies three characteristics of Moroccan civil society: its vulnerability, its relationship with political parties, and its relationship with the Moroccan state. Indeed, “one of the most striking features of Morocco's civil society is the state's capacity to participate in its construction” (Sater, 2002, p. 212). As mentioned before in Chapter Two, the political sphere in the country, including the civil society sector, has always been shaped by a powerful monarchy and patrimonial system, as well as by an uneasy and sometimes tragic tendency on the part of political actors to appease, and even ally with the Makhzen (Garon, 2003). Moreover, the growth of Moroccan civil society is inextricably linked to that of the political parties from the pre-independence era onwards. A number of feminist and human rights NGOs, for instance, have been created by militants who were members in leftist parties, and who succeeded in consolidating the independence of these organizations from party politics (Sater, 2007). Others, however, mainly trade unions, have remained closely connected to the parties with which they are affiliated.

Kausch’s (2008) interviews with local NGO activists enabled her to identify four sets of barriers facing free association in Morocco, namely (1) difficulties related to

association registration; (2) access to the public sphere and public media; (3) infringement upon liberties and rights, especially after the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks; and, finally, (4) the lack of an independent judiciary system capable of guaranteeing fundamental liberties. Kausch contends that there is a huge gap between the legal framework in the country that guarantees, at least in theory, associative life and its application in reality. On one hand, the country has a “flourishing and relatively free civil society [that] is a great achievement compared to other countries in the region” (p. 3). The right of association has been guaranteed by the constitution since 1962, and the country is one of a few in the region that has adopted the principle of declaration on associations (3). On the other hand, the absence of an independent judiciary and efficient law enforcement makes this formal legality and freedom of association unobtainable in practice (pp. 2–3).

In fact, Moroccan associations have to follow a complex and lengthy bureaucratic mechanism and can only become legal when they receive a receipt from the Ministry of the Interior. Legality is not always guaranteed, as many groups, mainly Islamic-oriented associations, radical left organizations, and Berber and Sahrawi groups, can be outlawed for their “refusal to recognise the spiritual authority and political legitimacy of the King, or in the specific case of the Sahrawis, for challenging the territorial integrity of the Moroccan monarchy” (Dimitrova, 2009, pp. 4–5). Moreover, the law stipulates that public funding to associations be channelled through the Ministry of Social Development and Solidarity; however, most of those who receive funding are NGOs that are close to the government and the Makhzan network (Dimitrova, 2009, p. 7). Although associations and NGOs can receive foreign funding, any subsidy for a single

project equal to or more than 50,000 dirhams is subjected to state monitoring and supervision (Kausch, 2008).

Whereas most commentators highlight the quantitative development of Moroccan civil society, its dynamism and rootedness in recent and old history, many of them, nonetheless, raise questions about its ability to be a counterweight against a dominant state and the Makhzenian apparatus, and to contribute to democratic transition in the country. The overwhelming majority of civil society NGOs specializes in the development sector covering the fields of health, the promotion of women's social and economic situations, education, and general development projects in rural areas, in addition to a large number of trade unions (Kausch, 2008). Only a limited number of these NGOs are active in direct contentious politics, such as human rights NGOs. As far as development associations and NGOs in Morocco are concerned, Dimitrova (2009) distinguishes between two types. First, there are those set up by Islamic social movement organizations to provide services and help within areas abandoned by the state. The others are close to the state and were set up to compete for influence with Islamic ones. Ferrier (2004) suggests that Moroccan civil society's ability to become more politically engaged and effective is contingent on the political opening initiated by the state rather than on NGOs themselves. Dimitrova (2009), in contrast, contends that the extensive structures of clientelism and neo-patrimonialism "impede the development of an active and strong civil society" in the country (p. 5).

Similarly to the literature analyzing collective action in Muslim countries, the use of social movement theory in the studies focusing on Morocco has remained a marginal concern. Various experts use the term "movement" to describe Islamic SMOs in the

country, namely major ones such as Al-Adl Wal Ihsane (Justice and Spirituality) (Cavatorta, 2005, 2006; ; Kausch, 2008; Munson, 1986). However, the term is rarely grounded on social movement theory and remains predominantly a descriptive term. Munson (1986), one of the first to study Moroccan Islamic movements, talks of the social base of Islamic movements in Morocco, but does not use social movement theory to address the issue. In the same vein, Naciri (1998) explores the emergence of the Moroccan feminist movement within a male-dominated public sphere, and its redefinition of the political space in that country. Whilst she defines the feminist movement as comprising a number of organizations and associations, she uses exclusively public sphere theory and fails to draw on social movement theory.

Only a handful of studies have, so far, attempted to examine Moroccan civil society through the lens of social movement theory. Chenynis (2008) addresses the development of the Moroccan “altermondialist” (alter-globalization) movement, and its participation in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002. However, this study is limited in scope, as it concentrates on a few organizations and does not engage seriously enough with the theoretical perspective it uses. Sidi Hida’s (2007) doctoral thesis,¹⁴ *Social Movement and the Logic of Actors - Development NGOs Facing Globalization and the Moroccan State: Moroccan Alter-Globalization*, remains one of the rare detailed studies in the field to draw on social movement theory. In it, Sidi Hida examines various Moroccan civil society NGOs that are active “under the label of alter-globalization within social forums,” and part of “a transnational civil society” struggling against neoliberal global political and economic agendas (p. 7). Drawing on new social

¹⁴ Mouvements sociaux et logique d’acteurs. Les ONGs se développent face à la mondialisation et à l’état au Maroc. L’altermondialisme marocain.

movement theory (NSM), specifically Touraine's work, Sidi Hida argues that one of the main objectives of the study is to try to understand alter-globalization in its national and local dimensions (p. 8). Moreover, she contends that using social movement theory enables the researcher to understand and analyze the object of study in terms of the social links between actors, and to bring together "a plurality of actors with diverse objectives who are connected through diverse and different links"[my translation] (p. 8). Zakia Salime's (2005) dissertation on the Moroccan feminist social movement is another pioneering work that draws extensively on social movement theory to study the articulations between Islamist and secular women's movements through their framing of the issues of gender, religion, and politics. These last two studies show that scholars have started to challenge dominant discourses that have hitherto failed to apply available social movement theories to the analysis of collective action in Muslim societies. However, these studies remain limited in number and, for the most part, are unpublished dissertations, which calls for further efforts in this important sub-field.

2. The Political Role of the Internet and Implications for Social Movements

2.1 Conceptualizing the political role and potential of the Internet.

The political role and potential of the Internet is integrated within its origins as a US Cold War project, called the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), launched in the 1950s. As Internet technology became a mass and global medium by the mid-1990s, its political potential has been recognized as one of its strongest and most important characteristics. This potential has since been exploited by diverse political and social actors, from governments and political institutions to individual hackers and terrorist networks. There are many features intrinsic to the

technology explaining why the Internet has come to be viewed as a political medium par excellence. Based on networked hardware and software technologies, the Internet allows the production, storage, dissemination, and retrieval of theoretically unlimited information at a low cost and a high speed unmatched by any other media. The decentralized architecture of the Internet has oftentimes been viewed as the defining feature of the technology that sets it apart from other media, allowing forms of communication that transcend geographic boundaries and defy diverse types of institutional and societal control. Reviewing the major implications of the Internet to communication, Gibson and Ward (2000) summarize them in five main points:

1. Volume—far larger quantities of information can be sent compared with previous modes of media communication.
2. Speed—compression of data and more space for communication decrease the amount of time it takes to send a message.
3. Format—the style of the message sent is changed as the combination of print and electronic communication allows information to be sent in audio, video, and text form.
4. Direction—the possibilities for two-way and truly interactive or synchronous communication are greatly expanded on the Web, given the greater space and speed for information transmission. In addition, horizontal or lateral communication between groups and individuals is also dramatically enhanced due to the immediacy of hypertext linkage between sites.

5. Individual control—given the opening up of control over the direction in the sending and receiving of messages, power is decentralized to the individual consumer who has the choice of what to view, and also perhaps more significantly, what to publish. (p. 204)

Commentators have suggested that existing literature on the democratic role of ICTs is marked by a sharp polarization (Bentivegna, 2006; Dahlgren, 2005; Katz & Rice, 2002; Saco, 2002). Saco (2002), for instance, maintains that scholars are divided between what she calls the “technological utopian position” and the “technological dystopian position” (p. xv). The first and more optimistic one puts greater hopes on the ability of the technology to bolster a faltering democratic system in the West marked by decreasing public interest and participation. The second position claims that the Internet, at best, cannot make a difference within existing political spheres, and, at worst, further reinforces existing power relations. Galston (2004) holds that online communities and groups can “fulfill important emotional and utilitarian needs, but they must not be taken as solutions for our current civic ills, let alone as comprehensive models of a better future” (p. 75), while Norris (2001a) suggests that the Internet tends to exacerbate rather than reduce offline inequalities, since “the rise of the virtual political system seems most likely to facilitate further knowledge, interest, and activism of those who are already predisposed toward civic engagement, reinforcing patterns of political participation” (p. 228). This literature seems to address the key issue of “whether these communication practices merely reduce the costs or increase the efficiencies of political action, or whether they change the political game itself” (Bennett, 2003, p. 144).

Equally important, Vedel (2003) identifies four major political functions characterizing ICTs and the Internet in the literature, namely that these technologies can “enhance the information of citizens;” promote “the strategies of communications by political factors;” “facilitate the process of political mobilization;” and “improve communication within political organizations” (pp. 42–44). Mapping these functions on existing political usages of the Internet, Chadwick (2006) identifies four major categories, namely e-democracy, e-mobilization, e-campaigning, and e-government. E-democracy refers to a variety of Internet uses that might be “enhancing community cohesion, political deliberation, and participation” (Chadwick, p. 83). E-mobilization refers to the use of the Internet “by interest groups and social movements for political recruitment, organization, and campaigning” (p. 114). As for e-campaigning, it refers to “the impact of the Internet on parties and election campaigning” (p. 114). Finally, e-government is defined as the “service delivery, constituency, participation and governance” through “technology, the Internet, and new media” (Gartner Consulting, as cited in Chadwick, 2006, p. 179).

Dahlberg and Siapera (2007) identify three models of democracy informing current theorizations of the political role of the Internet, namely the “liberal e-democracy,” “agonistic radical democracy,” and “autonomist models” (pp. 2–5). The liberal e-democracy model is the most commonly used in the literature and rests on a deliberative model of the public sphere. By enabling dispersed people to form and join “virtual” communities at a low cost, the Internet is believed to support offline associations and community life, and foster the social capital that is necessary for the functioning of civil society and democracy. As a medium that supports various forms of communication

(many-to-many, one-to-many), the Internet can also promote public deliberation and discussion over political issues (Budge, 1996; Coleman, Taylor, & Van de Donk, 1999; Grossman, 1995; Negroponte, 1995). Moreover, Dahlgren (2000) posits that the political role of the Internet can be better understood by paying attention to its effect on enhancing the quality of participation in the public sphere, namely through the promotion of civic culture.

In the same vein, Dahlgren (2005) distinguishes between five domains of Internet-based public spheres: the various versions of e-government, the advocacy or activist domain, the civic forums, the pre-political or para-political domain that deals with social and cultural topics linked to common interests and/or the collective identities, and the journalism domain which “includes everything from major news organizations that have gone online” to alternative news organizations and blogs (p. 153). Dahlgren’s interpretation of the public sphere makes it possible to bridge the gap between formal and informal types of politics. It is a model that deals specifically with the Internet as a mediating and communication space, and provides practical analytical tools that accommodate both the definition of political functions of the Internet highlighted above, and the multidisciplinary approach framing the present research.

2.2 The democratic potential of ICTs in developing countries.

Research on ICT-for-Development (ICT4DEV) is marked by a sharp polarization too. Zembylas (2009), for instance, identifies two dominant “development paradigm[s]” linked to ICTs (pp. 18–19). On one hand, there is the “modernization development paradigm,” maintaining that ICTs are important in development perceived to spread from the West to Southern countries. On the other, according to the “social injustice

development paradigm,” ICTs exacerbate existing inequalities, since they benefit those who are “already dominant politically and economically” (pp. 18–19). A vast literature has, in fact, highlighted a wide range of possibilities related to the application of ICTs in social and economic development projects. Various commentators, however, have questioned the capacity of technology to have a significant effect on realities in many parts of the world, pointing out the multiple-level gaps characterizing the global diffusion and adoption of technology, particularly the Internet, separating developed and developing countries, but also poor and rich and genders in the same country (DiMaggio, Hagittai, & Neuman, 2001; Norris, 2001a; Shade, 2002b; Van Dijk, 2006; Wilson, 2004). Criticizing euphoric discourse on network society, Mitter and Ng (2005) maintain that the majority of people in Southern countries are “affected by exclusion rather than inclusion” (p. 9).

Equally important, research on the political role of the Internet has been dominated by considerations pertaining to the Western historical experience, particularly the search for a way to strengthen deliberative and participatory democracy. From the perspective of comparative politics, some commentators have criticized the application of similar paradigms to understand the implications of ICTs to politics in the South. Norris (2001a), for instance, points out that the emphasis on the deliberative function of online communication is “an unduly limited, and thereby misleading normative yardstick” (p. 103). For Norris (2001a), as far as developing countries and emerging democracies are concerned,

the key issue when evaluating the role of digital technologies for democracy is how much governments and civil society learn to use the opportunities provided

by the new channels of information and communication to promote and strengthen the core representative institutions connecting citizens and the state. (p. 104)

As an alternative, Norris (2001a) proposes a model in which the emphasis is not so much on how the Internet can allow direct and mass participation of citizens in politics, as on the way the Internet can strengthen pluralistic competition among political parties, consolidate civil and political liberties and civil society institutions, and promote transparency and decision-making processes.

The bulk of research on the political and democratic potential of ICTs in the context of the South has been conceptualized, however, through development theory. The ICT4DEV discourse establishes a direct link between the diffusion and use of ICTs and the achievement of economic and social progress in the developing world. For major international political and economic institutions, such as the World Bank and the United Nations (UN), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and governments around the world, ICTs offer unprecedented possibilities for improving the lives of people in developing countries, and can even permit developing countries to “leapfrog stages of technological and industrial development” (Norris, 2001a, p. 7). Moreover, within this discourse, social and economic development is often framed as being closely tied and even contingent upon the achievement of progress in the area of governance. While development has always been linked to the notion of governance and the level of efficiency of governments in implementing developmental programs, the discourses on development, governance, and democracy have never before been more intertwined.

Thus, in ICT4DEV discourse, new media technologies are viewed as tools for the establishment of e-government, e-governance, and e-democracy projects. The ultimate

objective of e-governance is to promote a more effective and transparent interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business (G2B), and inter-agency relationships (G2G) (Norris, 2001a). While the objective of e-government projects is to effectively deliver and facilitate access to government services, e-governance involves a much broader process, since it seeks “to realize processes and structures for harnessing the potentialities of information and communication technologies ... for the purpose of enhancing Good Governance” (Okto-Uma, as cited in Ciborra & Navarra, 2005, p. 144).

The framing of the political role of ICTs through the issues of e-government and e-governance places technology at the center of projects aiming at establishing synergy between governance and business and citizens who are perceived as customers. More important, while this discourse conceives of governance and democracy development as projects to be planned and implemented by governments, it pays little attention to how the diffusion and appropriation of ICTs are shaped from below, that is at the level of ordinary citizens and grassroots civil society actors. But recent years have seen more calls for the implementation of a participatory and inclusive type of e-government in which citizens and civil society actors can influence decision making (The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat [UNDESA], 2007); yet, participation in these initiatives is interpreted more often than not as a top-down process shaped and conditioned by the parameters set up within e-government projects, which largely ignores bottom-up forms of participation that involve citizens and civil society actors appropriating the technology in completely new and even subversive ways.

2.3 Who controls the Internet? Regimes of governance.

2.3.1 Global governance.

As Katz and Rice (2002) observe, any discussion of the political or democratic role of the Internet remains simplistic if it does not address how the “Internet itself interacts considerably with political, governmental, regulatory, and economic institutions” (p.

113). Drissel (2006) defines Internet governance as a concept that refers

not only to the regulatory power of states over online transactions, but also to the mosaic of numerous non-governmental and intergovernmental actors involved in coordinating the norms, policies, protocols, decision-making, procedures, and technical infrastructure of cyberspace. (p. 106)

As was the case with many media and communication technologies in the past, the early development of the Internet was accompanied by a euphoric belief that it was intrinsically built to resist any hierarchic form of control over it, and, therefore, that it allowed the generation of horizontal, equal, and democratic relationships between users. This perception is partly justified. Indeed, the Internet was initially conceived as a peer-to-peer network based on a universal language for computer networks or what is generally known as the TCP/IP protocol (Transmission Control Protocol/ Internet Protocol). Subsequent development of the technology has proved, however, that despite the open, minimalist, and neutral aspects of the technology, these very features have increasingly become fields of power over which battles of control and appropriation are fought by governmental, corporate, and community bodies and agencies.

2.3.2 Local regimes of control.

Although the Internet was conceived of originally as an open network that transcends geographical borders and government control, this notion proved problematic with growing legal, linguistic, and cultural barriers that divide the Internet into regional and local communities of users. Goldsmith and Wu (2006) maintain that “geographical borders first emerged on the Internet not as a result of fiat by national governments, but rather organically, from below, because Internet users around the globe demanded different Internet experiences that corresponded to geography” (p. 49). But the most important factor barricading the Internet remains government censorship and filtration measures. Governments can indeed control the Internet at three levels: the level of users or recipients, the level of websites, and the level of intermediaries or transmitters (p. 49). However, because governments have authority only over those websites based within their territories, most governments exercise control at the levels of users and intermediaries, namely through Internet service providers (ISPs).

Faris and Villeneuve (2008) argue that “notwithstanding the wide range of topics filtered around the world, there are essentially three motives or rationales for Internet filtering: politics and power, social norms and morals, and security concerns” (p. 9). In some states, filtering is implemented by private ISPs on behalf of the state that provides them with authorizing licenses. In many other countries, including Saudi Arabia and China, filtering is a centralized process (Zittrain & Palfrey, 2008). A case in point is Saudi Arabia, which allowed the Internet to develop only when the state became certain it had the necessary software to filter all traffic within the country’s borders, ensuring that “all Internet traffic to and from Saudi citizens had to pass through a single gateway

to the outside world” (Zittrain & Palfrey, 2008, p. 32). Saudi Arabia is not the only state in the region to censor the Internet, since the “Middle East and North Africa [is] one of the most repressive web environments in the world” (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski & Zittrain, 2008, p. 208). China’s “Great Firewall,” the extensive filtering system the Chinese government uses to censor the Internet, is another example of the capacity of states to “harness” the emancipating potential of the technology. These examples provide ample evidence that the Internet is capable of being used not as a tool of freedom and emancipation only, but also as one of control, surveillance, and state propaganda.

2.4 Conceptualizing the political role of the Internet through social movement theory.

Despite the vast literature on the implications of the Internet for politics, research addressing the issue of social movement theory remains limited. As Stein (2009) argues, “[though] communication scholars have studied some aspects of social movement Internet use, social movement scholars have all but ignored this area of study” (p. 751). Moreover, existing literature either has concentrated on case studies, like the Zapatista movement, or explored how the Internet has shaped transnational social movement activism; as a result, this literature “does not investigate how the majority of SMOs utilizes this communication resource or employ methods that produce generalizable results” (Stein, 2009, pp. 750–1).

The “revolutionary” transformative implications of ICTs, and the Internet in particular, on social movements are stressed by Van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht (2004), who argue that

internal as well as external communication of social movements was facilitated—but certainly not revolutionized—by telephones, copy machines, and fax machines. With the most recent information and communication technologies... (particularly portable computers, now morphing with mobile phones to give easy access information), and their links via the World Wide Web (Internet), citizen groups and social movements, like many other organizations and institutions, are likely to reach a new level in the ways in which they mobilize, build coalitions, inform, lobby, communicate, and campaign. (p. 1)

The case of Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), or the Zapatista movement's strategic use of the Internet beginning in 1994, and its success in mobilizing global support for its cause, has become one of the most discussed success stories of "online" activism and counter-hegemonic objectives. Castells (2004) describes the Zapatista movement as "the first informational guerrilla movement" (p. 82). Moreover, the global movement against international capitalism and neo-liberalism is one of the most prominent examples of the impact of the Internet on social movements. Since the Seattle protests in 1999, commentators have highlighted a large number of examples in which the Internet played a key role in building transnational networks of movements that have been able to coordinate their actions and widely distribute counter-hegemonic discourses (Castells, 2001; 2007; Dahlgren, 2007; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Downing, 2001; Kahn & Kellner, 2004). As Castells (2001) points out, "the anti-globalization movement is not simply a network, it is an electronic network, it is an Internet-based movement. And because the Internet is its home it cannot be disorganized or captured. It swims like fish in the net" (pp. 141–2). The

global collective action spun around the Internet gained momentum after September 11, 2001, as the new medium became “the base and the basis for an unparalleled worldwide anti-war/pro-peace and social justice movement during a time of terrorism, war, and intense political struggle” (Kahn & Kellner, 2004, p. 88).

Garrett (2006) provides the most detailed existing review of the literature on the issue. Using the factors of “mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes” as a framework of analysis, she identifies within the literature three types of “mechanisms” linking the technology to social movements, namely “reduction of participation costs, promotion of collective identity, and creation of community” (Garrett, 2006, p. 204). In their discussion of how various social movement theories view communication, and particularly the implication of ICTs for social movements, Van de Donk et al., (2004) point out that resource mobilization theory (RMT), for instance, recognizes the organizational and low-cost significance of the new communication technologies within collective action, but ends up reducing communication to an instrumental function. This view fails to consider that

an instrumental attitude in general and the use of particular techniques of mobilization are not neutral approaches but have consequences for the internal structure of an SMO and its relationships with adherents, allies, and bystanders (p. 9).

The political opportunity structure (POS) and political process perspectives, Van de Donk et al. (2004) further explain, are not more helpful either since, despite their emphasis on interaction, they have paid little attention to “the content means and channels of communication of the groups involved” (p. 10).

Though not dealing specifically with the articulation between the Internet and social movements, Carroll's and Hackett's (2006) discussion of media activism provides important insight into the issue. They argue that RMT provides some useful grounds for understanding the implication of alternative media for collective action, as it emphasizes the role of resources (costs) in facilitating or hindering mobilization (pp. 90–92). They point out that new communication technologies like the Internet have certainly, in that sense, benefitted progressive movements, such as the Independent Media Center (Indymedia) and other media projects testify (p. 91). Instead of the instrumental view of RMT, Carroll and Hackett (2006) propose to analyze media activism through the lens of new social movement theory (NSM), arguing that democratic media activism (DMA) shares with NSM a number of features, since it “contests not only the ‘codes’ of communication but the entire complex of social relations and practices through which the codes are produced and disseminated” (p. 95), and that consequently, DMA can itself be portrayed as “an archetypically new social movement: a reflexive form of activism that treats communication as simultaneously means and end of struggle” (p. 96). Fuentes, Straubhaar, & Spence (2003) lend credence to this statement by arguing that “Internet activism can be perceived as a subcategory of contemporary social movements in general” (p. 2).

Nevertheless, many commentators are sceptical about the Internet's capacity to deeply transform collective action politics and social movements. A key issue addressed in the literature is “whether these communication practices merely reduce the costs or increase the efficiencies of political action, or whether they change the political game itself” (Bennett, 2003, p. 144). One major criticism levelled at those who believe

in the potential of the Internet for collective action is that bonds, alliances, and communities are not “thick” enough to support the “development of stable, long lasting movements in the future” (Van Aelst & Wolgrave, 2002, p. 466). The Internet has greatly facilitated mobilization and networking between actors and movements, but the ease with which members join or leave online networks means that it has become difficult for movements “to control campaigns or to achieve coherent collective identity frames” (Bennett, 2003, p. 145). Furthermore, Koch (2005) argues that the use of the Internet in politics, in general, dilutes “commitment to real political space” (p. 160), and worsens the quality of public discussion because users can easily filter communication to interact only with websites with which they share similar views and ideological backgrounds (p. 88).

2.5 The Internet and social movements in Arab/Muslim countries.

A significant body of research has developed in the last decade on the diffusion and applications of ICTs, particularly the Internet, in Arab and Muslim-majority societies. A few of these studies focused on the implications of blogs and blogosphere for the enhancement of freedom of expression, the dissemination of alternative content and the strengthening of the public sphere in these societies (Douai, 2009; Khiabany & Sreberny, 2007; Glaser, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Seib, 2007; Siapera, 2009). Others mapped the geographic ecology of the Arab Internet (Warf & Vincent, 2007; Hofheinz, 2007), as well as the political economy and infrastructure of the technology and issues of digital divides (Allagui, 2009; Allagui & Martin, 2007). Still few others tackled the use of the Internet in political advocacy and democratic transformation in general (Abdulla,

2007; Faris, 2008; Howard, 2011; Gonzales-Quijano, 2004; Oweidat et al., 2008; Rahimi, 2003).

The bulk of this literature, however, addresses the use of the Internet by religious groups and for religion-oriented discourse (Anderson, 1999, 2003; Borgman, Van Erp, & Haker, 2005; Bunt, 2003, 2004, 2005; 2009; Burkhart & Older, 2003; Conway, 2006; Echaibi, 2011; El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009; Hoff, 2005; Kort, 2006; Mandaville, 2002; 2003; McElwain, 2004; Sands, 2010; Varisco, 2010). In this literature, commentators have explored the role of the Internet in reimagining and reinventing individual and collective “Muslim” identities and discourse, as well as in staging struggles over religious legitimacy and authority. Anderson (1999; 2003), for instance, contends that one of the major implications of the Internet for Muslim societies is that it has generated a large number of new interpreters who are challenging official and dominant discourses on religion, thus leading to the “reshaping of the public sphere of Islam” (1999, p. 56). Likewise, Kort (2005) argues that the Internet has become “the most important tool for true Islamic reformation, because people can so easily access and share information, challenging the religious status quo of thought and practice” (p. 380). Along the same lines, Bunt (2009) uses the term “cyber-Islamic environment” to analyze how the use of the Internet by Muslims challenges “traditional ‘top-down’ authority models” in favour of “collaborative, horizontal knowledge economy, [which is] reliant on peer-to-peer networking” (p.2). In the same vein, Seib highlights the implications of the Internet for reimagining a global Muslim identity since the medium “may be bringing a degree of virtual cohesion to the ummah, giving members of the world-wide Islamic population

some easily accessible common ground despite the many differences within this global community” (2007, p. 12).

There is no doubt that Islamic-oriented movements and their political discourse in Arab/Muslim countries have gained momentum in the last two decades as the main source of dissent and oppositional force challenging authoritarian regimes and advancing alternative societal projects founded on ‘real’ Islamic ethics and values. Nevertheless, these groups and discourses do not dominate all spheres of civil life and expression in these societies, since diverse voices representing all shades of the Right-Left ideological spectrum have existed and marked polity in these societies for a long time. This also applies to the use of the Internet in these countries. Hofheinz (2007), for instance, points out that “out of the 100 most frequently visited Arabic [websites], *eight* have a decidedly religious and specifically Islamic character” (p. 75). While Hofheinz notes that the above percentage is the highest within the UN official languages (i.e. Arabic, Chinese, French, English, Russian and Spanish), he claims that other languages have higher percentages of religious content online, in general (p. 75). Moreover, even if 8% reflects a relatively high figure, it does not explain why research would ignore 92% of Arabic websites. Indeed, predominant attention to religion and Islamic groups in Arab countries is hardly surprising, as it responds to hegemonic discourses in the West on Islamic/Arab countries, where religion is widely viewed as regulating every sphere of life and obscuring all other domains in society (Said, 1979; 1997). By focusing on Islamic-oriented uses and content, communication and political science scholars contribute to the reinforcement of this perception. What is more, they also deprive secular oppositional groups much needed attention that can help shed light on

their double struggles against both repressive regimes and conservative and regressive cultural and social orders.

Second, this literature is characterized by theoretical limitations since the majority of studies remain either descriptive or draw almost exclusively on Habermas's interpretation of the public sphere. While it remains a central theoretical perspective in communication studies, as it does in other disciplines, the Habermasian interpretation of the public sphere has been contested by a number of commentators who demonstrated that refusing to imagine the public sphere as a communicative space built on premises other than those of rational dialogue and deliberation tend to ignore key issues of power imbalances and exclusion in society (Fraser, 1992; Mouffe, 1999). These concerns become even more problematic when using the concept of the public sphere in the context of authoritarian states where basic freedoms and civil liberties are routinely trampled by arbitrary rule and police violence, as is the case with the majority of Muslim and Arab countries. A rare exception to this trend is Khiabany and Sreberny's (2007) use of the concept of agonistic public sphere to theorize the implications of blogs for Iranian public sphere and politics. Finally, apart from a few exploratory and isolated case studies, such as Faris' (2008) use of network theory to analyze the use of the Internet by youth protest movement in Egypt, the research remains overwhelmingly descriptive. In fact, it generally provides limited reflective insights into the methodological approaches adopted to analyze online communication and web content, and concentrates instead on the discursive and ideational aspects of web content at the expense of exploring how the Internet as a technology and medium are appropriated in

the context of Muslim-majority societies (for a recent example of this trend, see Sands, 2010).

2.6 The implications of the Internet for collective action in Morocco.

Scholarly studies on the use and appropriation of ICTs in Morocco remain very limited, and their number is even smaller when it comes to understanding the use of these technologies in the political sphere and as tools of advocacy. The bulk of the existing literature has addressed the implications of ICTs for the Moroccan diaspora in Europe (Loukili, 2007; Charef, 2009). Aziz Douai's (2009) article on the Arab and Moroccan "blogosphere" deals with the implications of blogging for Moroccan and Arab societies. Although the article does not deal specifically with the use of the Internet by civil society groups or organizations, it highlights some key issues involved in the appropriation of blogs as tools of advocacy and dissidence in the Arab world, and particularly Morocco. Despite its importance, however, the paper is too short to deal with the full complexities and variables surrounding such an issue. Likewise, Davis (2004) focuses on the use of the Internet in social and economic development, particularly in the promotion of women's economic participation in rural areas. Watson's (2006) PhD dissertation, *Production of the Public Sphere in Twenty-first Century Morocco*, discusses the impact of ICTs, particularly the mobile phone, on the Moroccan public sphere. However, because the research was conducted in the field of anthropology, the mediated public sphere is only one of the multiple spheres it explores, with the focus mainly on interpersonal communication in various social contexts. Ibrahine's (2005) PhD dissertation, entitled *The Internet and Politics in Morocco: The Political Use of the Internet by Islam-Oriented Political Movements*, so far remains the

only existing academic work that studies with some depth the implications of the Internet for collective action in the country. In this respect, it is a pioneering study that offers much needed insight into the use of the Internet for the purposes of collective action in Morocco and the larger Arab region, as well. However, like the rest of the literature on the subject, the study is predominantly descriptive and does not provide any systematic analysis of the studied websites, nor does it draw seriously on political communication or social movement theories to conceptualize the political use of the Internet within a Muslim majority society.

2.7 The Internet and the gender divide.

Though the majority of men and women in developing countries are still excluded from the network society through multiple forms of digital divides, women are much more affected by gendered inequalities that limit their access to and use of new technologies, especially the Internet (Norris, 2001a; Prasad, 2008; Shade, 2002). Prasad, for instance, argues that “if media access in the developing world is among the lowest, women are among the most marginalized sections of the population, their media exposure is certainly low, and their role as participants or producers is even more limited” (p. 80). Several scholars have pointed out that the gendered digital divide extends beyond issues of access to and use of wider social contexts shaping the development and diffusion of the technology, such as “the masculine nature of ICTs, the patriarchal nature within which ICTs are introduced, feminization of low-skill ICT jobs, the unequal gendered access to technological education, and the degradation and devaluation of women employed in certain sectors” (Mitter & Ng, 2005, p. 10).

Although gender divides, including those related to the access to and use of the Internet, remain very high in Muslim Arab countries, the issue has not been given its due by scholars in the field. This research gap has been underscored by Bunt who, in his 2003 book, *Islam in the Digital Age*, advances that

questions which still need to be approached include how Muslim women are applying the medium in relation to Islam, and whether typologies of female Cyber Islamic Environments are emerging; alternatively, are women being “relegated” to sections within sites, or being simply content rather than content originators[?] (p. 210)

Since then, there has been insufficient progress in the field, as the number of studies focusing on the issue remains very limited. It is true several studies have appeared lately that explore various dimensions of the gendered use and diffusion of the technology (Al-Roomi, 2007; Kort, 2005; Mazrui & Mazrui, 2001; Skalli, 2006; Voadanovich, Urquhart & Shakir, 2010; Wheeler, 2006). However, none of them focuses on the use of ICTs or the Internet by feminist groups and women activists. This observation equally applies to existing literature focusing on the situation in Morocco, a country where the ICT gender gap is very wide due to economic and social inequalities that subjugate women, especially in poor social classes and regions of lower status. Taefnout and Timjerdinge’s (2005) paper on the use of ICTs by feminist NGOs remains an exception and provides some insight into the role of new media technologies, including the Internet, in enhancing the collective action capabilities of women, especially in their fight against gender violence in the country. Despite its importance, the paper is very short and provides limited data on the issue, which indicates that

research on the implications of the Internet for women, in general, and feminist action, in particular, has yet to be done either in the context of Arab countries or that of Morocco specifically.

3. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the principal theoretical perspectives dealing with the notions of civil society social movements and their applications to and use in different political and socioeconomic settings. It has also discussed the conceptualization of the political and democratic potential of the Internet in general and the implications of the medium for social movements, in particular. Among the key issues raised in the literature and that are of concern to the current thesis are the dialectic between social and technological determinism, and between agency and structure, and the link between the diffusion of technology and social and political change and development.

But despite the development of a massive literature on social movements on one hand, and the political use of the Internet on the other, studies attempting to bring these two fields of enquiries together, whether in sociology, political science, or communication studies, remain surprisingly limited in quantity and scope. In the context of developing studies, and more particularly Islamic ones, the scarce attention paid to this important issue is even more alarming. The thesis aims to contribute to filling this huge gap, and more importantly, to paving the way for more research on the subject by proposing and applying the multidisciplinary methodological and conceptual approaches discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Theory and Methods

Multidisciplinarity and Triangulation: Towards a Holistic Approach

Introduction

Studying the implications of the Internet for collective action and social movements in Morocco raises a number of important questions about the role of technology in social change, and the conception of this role in the context of developing countries. First, how can we conceptualize the political role of the Internet in light of its ongoing dichotomous conceptualization between utopian and dystopian stances, and between technological and social determinism? Second, to what extent can social movement theory help us understand collective action within developing countries? How can we assess normatively the implications of the Internet for advancing democratic change? Finally, how can we assess the impact of the Internet on social movements, on the one hand, and the Internet's contribution to social and political change, on the other?

As is clear from the above questions, the thesis deals with complex and interrelated issues spanning multiple fields of inquiry that include political communication, the social study of technology (SST), political science, sociology, and development studies, among others. The breadth and scope of this study thus enjoins the use of a multidisciplinary approach that can account for the complexity of the studied phenomenon and take into consideration numerous factors and variables surrounding it. Employing a plurality of theoretical perspectives can yield satisfactory results only if they can be supported by the use of more than one method to probe the studied phenomenon from multiple angles, and to generate rich and deep insights into it.

1. The Theoretical Framework

1.1 Studying social movements in the context of developing countries.

One common characteristic of existing social movement theories is that they have been developed as a response to questions and realities proper to Western societies and their recent history. In the case of new social movement (NSM) paradigms, for instance, it was the rise of postmodern or post-industrial society and the appearance of new types of contention centered on non-class conflicts that prompted theorists to come up with new interpretations and conceptualizations of collective action phenomena. This issue raises a question about the extent to which these models can be applied to different contexts, especially those of developing countries. Faced with a similar question, Edward Said (2000) asked:

What happens to [a theory] when, in different circumstances and for new reasons, it is used again and, in still more different circumstances, again? What can this tell us about theory itself—its limits, its possibilities, its inherent problems—and what can it suggest to us about the relationship between theory and criticism, on one hand, and society and culture on the other? (p. 199)

As a response to Said's queries, a number of commentators have stressed the importance of linking social movement studies to the discourse on development and the notion of modernity. For instance, assessing the usefulness of social movement theories to the study of collective action in Latin America, Escobar (1992) has observed that within developing countries, social movements have emerged largely "in response to the failure of development" (p. 63). Accordingly, social movements in these countries should be placed "within a reinterpreted context of the crisis of development and

modernity, [so] it becomes impossible to see them only in economic or political terms” (p. 64). In consideration of the situation in Africa, Ellis and Kessel (2009) suggest that although it has been criticized, many aspects of development theory, such as dependency theory, remain relevant to studying the social movement phenomenon in Africa, “provided it is recognized that Africa’s dependency is the historical consequence of action by various parties” (p. 7). As an alternative, and complementing the existing theoretical paradigm, Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2009) propose a multidisciplinary approach that highlights the “interaction between structure and action” that can “connect the micro level of individual protesters with the meso level of social movements, and macro level of national political systems and supranatural processes” (p. 36). Similarly, Shigetomi (2009) argues that the study of social movements in developing countries should pay extra attention to “environmental factors” affecting collective action (p. 9). These factors include “state-level political structures”, “resource endowment and institutions” for accessing these resources, the “social embeddedness of actors”, and the “broader historical and social context” within which collective action framing takes place (p. 10).

While not dealing specifically with the context of developing countries, Norris’ (2002) multidisciplinary approach provides a very useful framework that accounts for macro, meso, and micro dynamics shaping political activism and collective action in the postmodern era. Combining modernization, institutional and agency theories, she contends that instead of relying on “an oversimple monocausal explanation of (...) how and why citizens get involved in public affairs” (p. 29), it is important to take into account various factors and the interactions between them. Norris proposes a three-level

structure that links together these theories, starting from the macro perspective of modernization theories to the micro level of individual resources and civic culture (pp. 20–30).

1.2 Social movement theory.

As evident in the above discussion, there is a need to customize dominant theorizations of social movements to the realities of collective action in the developing world. One way to do this is through the articulation of multiple theoretical perspectives to highlight various aspects and dynamics involved in collective action at the macro, meso, and micro levels. From the perspective of structural paradigms—namely, resource mobilization and political process theories—the current study examines the roles of socioeconomic and political structures in Morocco in shaping social movements’ appropriation of the Internet and collective action in general. Such a perspective constitutes a departure from dominant research on collective action in Muslim-majority societies, which tends towards foregrounding the roles of ideologies and discourses at the expense of paying close attention to the roles of resources and organization (Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 4).

In addition to structural paradigms, the research draws on NSM theory to emphasize the use of the Internet by oppositional civil society groups to challenge and counter dominant interpretations and discourses, and to disseminate collective action frames. Commentators in this paradigm have highlighted the extra-institutional dimension of social movements, the fluidity of membership within them, and the central roles of collective identity, symbols, and values in collective action mobilization. An important distinction can be made between theorists emphasizing political contention and conflict

as the basis of social movement action (Touraine, 1981; 1985), and those who have stressed the role of cultural identity and transformation as the main field of contention in the public sphere, as well as in the private one (Melucci, 1989; Habermas, 1981). A synthesis between these two theoretical models, however, is necessary to study collective action in the context of developing countries, where social movements lead both political and cultural struggles against multiple forms of injustices—namely, resource redistribution inequalities, authoritarian rule, and ethnic and gender discrimination.

1.3 Social movements and political change.

Central to the present study is the extent to which the Internet can empower social movements to affect dominant political and social orders in Morocco. Before embarking on this main task, it is first necessary to conceptualize the causal link between social movements and social change itself. Commentators have pointed out that the relationship between social movements and political change is neither automatic nor linear: “Social movements sometimes fizzle, sometimes make marginal differences to politics as usual, but sometimes produce substantial social changes” (Giugni, 1998, p. ix). Moreover, theorists have argued that social movements can affect politics and generate change on three levels: “(1) to alter power relations between challengers, authorities, and third parties; (2) to force policy change; and (3) to produce broad systemic changes, both at the structural (institutional) and cultural level” (Giugni, 1998, p. xv).

The capacity of social movements to affect policy and governance is to a great extent contingent upon dominant political opportunity structures (POSs) that can cause social movements to fail, make marginal differences in “politics as usual,” or produce substantial social changes and “influence the choice of protest strategies and the impact

of social movements on their environment” (Kitschelt, 1986, p. 58). Moreover, Della Porta and Diani (2006) identify two main ways through which social movements can influence public policy: they can change policy and decisions on specific issues; and they can affect the way in which the political system as a whole functions. Though social movements’ capacity to change policies on single issues is limited, they are more effective, however, in affecting the environment surrounding policy-making and governance procedures, as they “demand and, often obtain, decentralization of political power, consultation of interested citizens on particular decisions, or appeals procedures against decisions of the public administration” (pp. 229–233).

However, despite their importance, the weakness of such typologies, as Giugni (1998) notes, is that while they describe social and political realities, they “do not tell us how movements provoke change” (p. xv). Giugni (1998) also proposes an alternative model that rests on three processes or steps, incorporation, transformation, and democratization:

Most typically, movements gradually become incorporated in existing structures and procedures, yet without transforming the basic rules of the game. This path may lead to institutionalization, but also simply to the integration of the movements’ demands into public agendas and policies. Sometimes, however, they provoke a transformation of some aspects of the existing social and political system.... Finally, the process of democratization develops when a transfer of power couples with a modification of the mutual rights and obligations between the state and its citizens. (p. xv)

Giugni's conception of the effects of social movements corresponds better to undemocratic countries, like Morocco, because it highlights the slow and gradational impact of social movements on the political systems in such countries. Indeed, the ability of social movements to influence policy making or procedure in the short term is much more difficult in the case of autocratic regimes, since social movements have limited opportunities through which they can interact with public policy institutions.

1.4 Technology and social change: Technological versus social determinism.

The issue of the political role of the Internet cannot be discussed without placing it in the wider debate around the role of technology in social change. Two paradigms have dominated this debate. On the one hand, there is the scientific and technological determinism paradigm, based on the idea that science and technology can cause major changes in society, and that "technological development is autonomous with respect to society; it shapes society, but is not reciprocally influenced" (Mackay & Gillespie, 1992, p. 686). On the other, there is the social determinism paradigm centered on the idea that "science and technology never determine social change in and of themselves or independently, but that this change is always already cultural or social" (Schroeder, 2007, p. 1). Between these two extreme positions, however, there is a vast spectrum of positions ranging from "hard" to "soft" determinisms (Smith & Marx, 1994).

Mackay and Gillespie (1992) identify two broad approaches dealing with the social shaping of technology (SST). The first one concentrates on "micro" dimensions of the issue, and comprises three theories, namely "social constructivism," the "systems," and the "actor-network" theory (p. 685). Drawing on the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), the constructivist approach considers scientific facts as "social phenomena," and

technological artifacts as socially constructed. The “systems” approach focuses on the “system builders—inventors, engineers, managers and financiers—creating and presiding over technological systems” (p. 686). As for the “actor-network” theory, it is “opposed to the social constructivist agenda in that it collapses any distinction between the ‘technical’ and the ‘social’—and, for that matter, between these and the ‘scientific,’ the ‘economic’ or the ‘political’” (p. 687). The second broad approach is the neo-Marxist one. It deals with the “macro” dimensions of the social shaping of technology by focusing on the socio-economic factors that “affect the nature of technological problems and solutions” (p. 687).

The critique of technological determinism in the framework of SST has significantly contributed to problematizing the relationship between science and technology and society. Nevertheless, a number of commentators have pointed out many shortcomings within the SST perspective itself, arguing that the social shaping of technology has either ignored many factors, such as the role of social actors in the process, or has gone too far in downplaying the transformative effects of science and technology on various domains in society. Mackay and Gillespie (1992), for instance, argue that the social shaping of technology has often ignored the way people appropriate the technology, while this appropriation in turn plays a prominent part in the social shaping of technology. According to them, “people may reject technologies, redefine their functional purpose, customize or even invest idiosyncratic symbolic meanings in them” (p. 698). However, they remind us that the appropriation of technology remains, in its turn, shaped by the options and limitations that are an integral part of the technical and material possibilities of the technology itself. Hughes (1994) points out that recognizing the dialectic

relationship between the social and the technological should not obscure the fact that technology, at some point or another in its development, can shape society more than it is shaped by it.

Indeed, technological systems and society can be both cause and effect of one another. However, “as they grow larger and more complex, technological systems tend to be more shaping of society and less shaped by it” (Hughes, 1994, p. 112). In addition, Schroeder (2007) criticizes the perspectives subsuming science and technology under culture, arguing that

science and technology must be separated from culture, and at the same time that cannot be analyzed independently of their effects; or to put it differently, they must always be related to their causes and consequences in the other spheres of life. (p. 122)

Schroeder, in fact, lambasts the view that denies all deterministic effects of technology. He contends that science and technology may not be imposing an “iron cage”¹⁵ on society, but they certainly impose a “rubber cage” or an “exoskeleton,” “since the advance of science and technology also gives us greater power over the environment, extending the human footprint” (Schroeder, 2007, p. 9). Comparing the impact of the automobile, the telephone, and television broadcasting in American and Swedish societies, Schroeder points out there is both “rationalization (uniformity) and culturalization (increasing diversity)” in the way these technologies have affected the two societies (p. 99). At the micro-level, technologies are mediated through the social life of individuals, which shapes the way technology affects society. These effects at

¹⁵ Weber used the metaphor to describe the extension of science and technology’s “instrumental rationality throughout the social world” (Schroeder, 2007, p. 9).

the micro level, however, aggregate towards more homogenizing effects at the macro level, which indicates that technologies “do shape society” (Schroeder, p. 119).

Schroeder (2007) further argues that science and technology do not only “reinforce existing social or cultural patterns,” but also “create a distinctive disenchanting culture” (p. 124).

1.5 Radical democracy and the agonistic public sphere.

Commentators have observed that in the absence of real democratic representation, civil society in Morocco has acquired a facet of contestation insofar as it is deemed to act as a counter-power to the hegemony of the state and monarchy over politics and governance (Desrues & Moyano, 2001; Sater, 2002; 2007; see more detail in Chapter Three). The present research does not depart from this framework, as it focuses on “oppositional” social movements that are engaged in conflictual collective action aimed at changing social and political orders, and/or promoting alternative identities. As a consequence, the present research uses the concept of an “agonistic” public sphere, as conceived by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and Mouffe (1993, 1999, 2000; 2005). This concept can indeed help explain the Moroccan political system and the relationship between the main actors within it. But specifically, it can shed light on the use of media and the Internet by social movements in their struggle with the state and other power holders in society.

Contrary to the deliberative model of democracy, the radical or agonistic perspective views politics as intrinsically conflictual and no-consensual, and thus places difference and contestation at the heart of the democratic system. The dominant ontology of “consensus” within liberal democracy, according to Mouffe (1999) is bound to fail,

because “consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and ... always entails some form of exclusion” (p. 756). Hence, building democratic politics on consensus and reconciliation “is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with political dangers” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 2). For this reason, she argues, politicians and theorists should instead aspire to creating “a vibrant ‘agonistic’ public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted” (p. 3). This requires an approach that places the questions of power, antagonism, and adversarial relationships at its very centre. The role of democracy, however, is to turn antagonism into agonism:

While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are adversaries, not enemies. (p. 20)

1.6 Contribution of the Internet to radical democracy.

Various commentators have argued that the Internet’s main contribution to democracy has been its promotion of agonistic politics (Atton, 2002; Carroll & Hackett, 2006; Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2005). Dahlberg and Siapera (2007) identify in the literature four dimensions linking the Internet to radical democracy theory. First, the Internet is deemed to contribute to the development of radical democracy theory itself, as it opens new venues for mediated politics. Second, the Internet contributes to the constitution of alternative political communities, and creates new possibilities for collective action and radical democratic

culture. Third, the Internet is believed to “directly strengthen the voice of alternative, marginalized, or otherwise oppressed groups” (pp. 11–12). Finally, the Internet contributes to the development and actualization of radical democratic culture and “imaginaries” online.

In this literature, the public sphere is thus understood as the site of “agonistic politics associated with power and exclusion” where diverse “understandings of identity, institutions, and actions” compete and battle for power (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007, p. 133). As a cheap, non-hierarchical, and interactive communication medium, the Internet has allowed antagonistic politics to mushroom, as diverse groups have been able to voice dissentious opinions online. But the Internet also has the potential to link adversaries through webs of hyperlinks, thus facilitating the development of agonistic politics. Bennett (2003) concurs, arguing that a network-based communication “becomes potentially transformative when networks spill outside the control of established organizations” (p. 20), which can contribute to the growth of democratic organizations. But the impact of the Internet on collective action and social movements has not been unidirectional. The technology itself has been appropriated by activists, as well as by “hacktivists” who, through open source and peer-to-peer software, have been contributing to the generation of globalization “from below” (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Jordan, 2002, 2007).

1.7 The Internet as an alternative medium.

Closely connected to the radical democracy perspective, the political and democratic potential of the Internet has also been extensively approached in alternative media theory (Atton, 2004, 2001; Bennett, 2003; Couldry & Curran, 2003; Carroll & Hackett, 2006;

Downing, 2001; Downey & Fenton, 2003). Commentators have observed that social movements make strategic use of mainstream media (MSM) in their action “to broaden the scope of conflict” (Gamson & Wolsfeld, 1993, p. 116). However, because of the asymmetrical relationship between MSM and social movements, there is always “a tension in using a hegemonic system for oppositional purposes which poses continuing challenges to critical movements” (Carroll & Ratner, 1999, p. 2). That is why social movements have to use alternative communication strategies and tools to bypass MSM, in order to support their struggles and communicate with actual and potential constituents.

The use of alternative media by progressive and oppositional social movements involves two key processes. On the one hand, these movements use alternative media to achieve various objectives in domains outside the mainstream media sector. On the other hand, they endeavour to democratize the media themselves by implementing and incorporating non-commercialized and non-professionalized communication practices and structures that challenge those of MSM (Carroll & Hackett, 2006). The appropriation of the Internet by social movements over the past decade has deeply questioned established distinctions between activism and journalism, and between professional and civic and, to use Rodriguez’ term (2001), citizen media.

1.8 The social embeddedness of the Internet.

As mentioned above, studying the implications of the Internet on Moroccan social movements touches upon the dialectics between social and technological determinisms, and structure/technology and agency. One possible and convincing alternative to the many polemical stances on this issue is the concept of embeddedness (Sassen, 2004).

Sassen contends that “digital networks are embedded in both the technical features and standards of the hardware and software, and in actual societal structures and power dynamics” (p. 78); she also points out that online communication and content are “deeply inflected by the cultures, the material practices, [and] the imaginaries that take place outside electronic space” (p. 80). The conception of the Internet as being embedded in the social and the material-phenomenological worlds and experience “allows us to go beyond the common duality between utopian and dystopian understandings of the Internet and electronic space generally” (p. 80). Gendered cyberspace provides a clear example of how the Internet’s effects are mediated through existing cultural systems. It is a space where women’s use of the Internet and their presence on the web, characterized by both inhibitions and growing opportunities, reflects “the contradictory features of women’s conditions in [the] larger social world today” (p. 88).

1.9 Re-conceptualizing the digital divide.

Studying the social embeddedness of the Internet cannot be carried out without paying close attention to discrepancies in the diffusion of the medium and the disparities marking its use in society, particularly in collective action. To examine this issue, the thesis draws on the notion of “digital divide”, a term that “became popular in the mid-1990s to describe disparities between those who had access to the Internet and those who did not” (Shade, 2010, p. 127). Dominant interpretations of the term “digital divide” define it as differences between rich and poor countries, and between people within the same country in terms of access to computers and Internet connection.

Numerous commentators, however, have criticized the dichotomous interpretation of the term, pointing out various socio-economic and technical aspects underpinning this

type of divide (Clement & Shade, 2000; DiMaggio, Hagittai, & Neuman, 2001; Norris, 2001a; Shade, 2010; Van Dijk, 2005, 2006; Wilson, 2004). Pippa Norris (2001), for instance, distinguishes between three levels of digital divide, namely the global divide, the social divide and the democratic divide:

The *global divide* refers to the divergence of Internet access between industrialized and developing societies. The *social divide* concerns the gap between information rich and poor in each nation. And finally within the online community, the *democratic divide* signifies the difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life. (p. 4)

Clement and Shade (2000) provide a more elaborate “access rainbow model” that contribute to “broadening the focus on access beyond narrow digital connectivity issues” (p. 34). The model is made up of seven layers highlighting the technical and socioeconomic aspects of infrastructures involved in having access to network services:

- (1) Carriage: the facilities that store, serve, or carry information (telephone, ADSL, integrated services digital network [ISDN], mobile phones, etc.).
- (2) Devices: the actual physical devices that people operate (workstations, PCs, public kiosks, mobile devices, etc.).
- (3) Software tools: the programs that operate the devices and make connections to services (Web browser, e-mail program, encryption and other privacy enablers).
- (4) Content/services: the actual information and communication services that citizens find useful (e-mail, World Wide Web content, e-commerce, etc.).

- (5) Service providers: the organizations that provide network services and access to users.
- (6) Literacy/social facilitation (basic literacy, numeracy, media-savvy skills, computer literacy).
- (7) Governance: how decisions are made concerning the design, development, operation and policy of ICTs. (pp. 36–45).

While the thesis draws on these two models above to discuss multiple aspects in the digital divide characterizing the appropriation of the Internet by Moroccan social movements, it relies more on Van Dijk's (2005) model, in which he highlights four stages of digital divide:

- (1) motivational access (motivation to use digital technology);
- (2) material or physical access (possession of computers and Internet connections or permissions to use them and their contents);
- (3) skill access (possession of digital skills: operational, informational, and strategic); and
- (4) usage access (number and diversity of applications, and usage time). (p. 21)

These stages are both accumulative and recursive. First, they follow a successive pattern, with motivation to use the technology as the precondition for the others. "Both physical access and adequate digital skills are requirements for a satisfactory use of the potential applications of the new media. Subsequently, the stages are recursive, as they return, wholly or partly, with every new technology or innovation" (p. 22). Furthermore, Van Dijk (2005) proposes a model explaining the social implications of digital divide through five causal points:

- (1) Categorical inequalities in society produce an unequal distribution of resources.
- (2) An unequal distribution of resources causes unequal access to digital technologies.
- (3) Unequal access to digital technologies also depends on the characteristics of these technologies.
- (4) Unequal access to digital technologies brings about unequal participation in society.
- (5) Unequal participation in society reinforces categorical inequalities and unequal distributions of resources. (p. 15)

Combining these models together will allow the thesis to go beyond a technology-centered understanding of the digital divide, and to shed light on various articulations between technology and the socioeconomic realities of Morocco as a developing country that is strongly marked by stark social inequalities between classes, regions, and gender.

1.10 Community informatics and the question of sustainability.

While there is a general consensus on the existence of a deep and widening digital divide within and between nations, the question of how to address it remains a controversial issue. From the perspective of the dominant discourse in ICT4DEV, the digital divide can be bridged principally by providing universal access to hardware and Internet connection. An alternative interpretation has been developed within community informatics (CI), a discipline that pays close attention to the contextual use and application of technology in a given community:

CI is an approach to ICT, which includes a concern for accessibility of the hardware, the software, the connectivity, and the information; and for the use and user to which the technology is being applied, particularly within the context of the user's physical community. Incorporating the user and his community into the system design process introduces new elements and new "stakeholders" into an extended approach to ICT design, development, and implementation. (Gurstein, 2000, p. 6)

Among the core issues the discipline has dealt with is the question of the sustainability of IT projects designed to promote the use of ICTs in various domains, including the political sphere. A principal contribution of CI is its rejection of a monocausal approach to promote sustainability, and its adoption of a multifarious perspective recognizing the interplay between various factors emphasizing "the interplay between physical infrastructure, soft technologies, social infrastructure, and social capital as critical elements in the foundation for effective implementation and sustainability of CI initiatives" (Simpson, 2005, p. 104).

2. Methodology

2.1 Triangulation of methodology.

The choice of triangulation, which Denzin (1978) defines as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (p. 291), is based on various considerations: the objective of the research, the research questions, and the social phenomenon being investigated, in addition to the theoretical perspective and premises adopted by the research. The research deals with the implications of the Internet as a techno-sociological phenomenon for social movements. It tries to highlight the complex

and multilayered interconnections between technological innovation and appropriation, on one hand, and socioeconomic, cultural, and political processes, on the other.

Understanding the implications of this interplay necessitates the use of multiple methodologies in order to capture, as much as possible, the various levels of articulations between the Internet, both as a technology and a practice, and the sociopolitical processes within which it is embedded. Recognizing the complexity of online communication as a social and technological phenomenon, Norris (2001a) argued that “research on the Internet needs to integrate research findings drawn from numerous disciplines” (p. 35). She recommended the use of triangulation because “no single methodology can hope to capture the rich complexities of life on the Internet” (p. 36).

The Internet is a hybrid technology or a “meta medium” comprising various protocols and interfaces, such as the World Wide Web, e-mail, and voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP). It also combines various forms of communication, such as one-to-many, many-to-many, and one-to-one communication. The nature of the Internet as a communication technology and medium, combined with its constant evolution, poses “challenges for scholars as they seek to develop methodological approaches that permit robust examination of [W]eb phenomena” (Schneider & Foot, 2004, pp. 114–5).

Combining methodologies in the investigation of the Internet constitutes an effective solution, since triangulation “can stimulate the creation of inventive methods, new ways of capturing a problem to balance with conventional data-collection methods” (Jick, 1979, p. 608). Furthermore, since all methodologies have both advantages and disadvantages, using multiple methodologies can enhance the reliability of the research, as the weakness of any single method is offset by the strengths of the others (Sudweeks &

Simoff, 1999, p. 37). Similarly, Brewer and Hunter (1989) argue that different methods are not necessarily exclusive alternatives among which the researcher must choose; a “diversity of imperfection allows us to combine methods . . . to compensate for their particular faults and imperfections” (pp. 16–17).

The strict separation between quantitative and qualitative methods has been questioned by a large number of commentators who argued that both methods can be joined together to highlight various aspects of the studied phenomenon (Howe, 1988; Hyde, 2000; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). While quantitative methods “condense data to reveal the big picture” (Ragin as cited in Blee & Taylor, 2002, p. 109), qualitative analysis, by contrast, can provide a deeper insight into specific cases and experiences that cannot be captured statistically. As such, qualitative methods are aptly described as “data enhancers: they enhance data to make it possible to see aspects of their subjects that might otherwise be missed” (p. 109).

2.2. Exploring web platforms: feature analysis.

Scholars across many disciplines have used a variety of methodologies that range from ethnography and focus groups to textual and network analysis, among others, to analyze several dimensions of the Internet, such as forums, e-mail, and websites. As far as Web studies are concerned, Schneider and Foot (2004) point out three major methodologies that have been used in the literature, namely rhetorical or textual analysis, structural or feature analysis, and socio-cultural analysis (p. 116). The first methodology deals mainly with the content of a website, while feature analysis focuses on the structure of a site, and socio-cultural analysis on the “cross-site action on the web”, to study “the hyperlinked context(s) and situatedness of [websites]” (p.117). Despite the use of a range

of diverse methods, content analysis based tools remain the most widely used in political communication because they can generate less subjective results about specific characteristics of the Internet as a technology and political medium (Weare, & Lin, 2000; Gibson & Ward, 2000; Norris, 2001b; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002; Stein, 2009).

A principal objective of the thesis is to examine how the Internet as a new tool of communication is enhancing the collective action capabilities of Moroccan social movements. This necessitates paying close attention to the technological and structural aspects of the Internet, particularly websites, and assessing their potential for political activism. Such a task is best performed through the use of feature analysis, a methodology based on both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. In this manner, it is a research tool that allows for the systematic analysis of websites without overlooking non-quantifiable dimensions, such as design and efficiency. The advantage of using this method, as Gerodimos (2008) points out, is that it can produce “formal and rigorous data that is comparable across cases, while also allowing for further exploration within cases, thus avoiding common pitfalls such as informal or impressionistic assessments, as well as an excessive focus on frequencies and numbers” (p. 972). Moreover, while feature analysis relies on quantitative content analysis, it is also qualitative, in that the occurrence or nonoccurrence of features, rather than their frequency, is analyzed (George, 2009, p. 144).

2.3. Studying online texts: framing analysis.

To complement the structural analysis of the studied social movements' websites, framing analysis was used to examine their textual content, including linguistic and non-linguistic data. The concept of “framing” is traced back to Heider's (1959) work on

attribution theory. Recent work on framing links the concept to Goffman's work (1974), in which the term is used "to denote schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large" (as cited in Snow, Rochford, & Worden, 1986, p. 464). Frames have also been defined as "tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters We frame reality in order to negotiate it, imagine it, manage it, comprehend it, and choose appropriate repertoires of cognition and action" (Giltin, 1980, p. 6). Framing analysis has been used in a variety of fields, including communication studies and social movement theory. A central epistemological basis for the concept and its relevance to social movements is the recognition that "meaning is constructed out of social and political interaction with supporters and opponents" (Tarrow, 1998, p. 107).

Accordingly, the main objective of this analysis is to examine the extent to which the studied websites are used to communicate alternative and oppositional interpretations, discourses, and symbols, and to assess the extent to which Web-based platforms are appropriated for collective action mobilization. While feature analysis seeks to assess the extent to which the studied websites draw on the potential of the Internet as a medium of communication, framing analysis examines how much of this potential is actually being used in collective action mobilization in general, and in the context of specific struggles and causes, such as the Israeli attack on Gaza that took place between December 2008 and January 2010.

2.3 In-depth interviewing.

As discussed above, the current study is premised on the belief that the Internet is based on hardware and virtual data, as much as it is rooted in social practices, public

policies and regulations, and power relations. This reality means that, notwithstanding the insights that can be gained from applying feature and framing analyses to websites, such analyses will remain incomplete without probing the deeper part of the iceberg that remains submerged in the social conditions of the human experience and historicity. In-depth interviewing is thus a methodology that is appropriate for the type of investigation in which the researcher has to dig under the surface of social and cultural manifestations to discover “what is usually hidden from ordinary view or reflection or to penetrate to more reflective understandings about the nature of that experience” (Johnson, 2002, p. 107).

This is particularly pertinent to the purposes of the present study. Blee and Taylor (2002) outline a number of benefits for applying in-depth interviewing to the study of social movements. First, it provides an insight into the “motivations and perspectives of a broader and more diverse group of social movement participants than would be represented in most documentary sources” (Blee & Taylor, p. 94). Moreover, it allows the researcher to grasp the way activists understand their participation and their social world, thus giving access “to such nuanced understandings of social movement outcomes as the construction of collective and individual identities” (p. 95). Finally, it is a method that “brings human agency to the centre of movement analysis” (p. 96), while allowing the researcher to examine the ways in which the messages of social movements are received by actual and potential constituents (p. 96).

Summary and Conclusion

Grounded in a multidisciplinary approach, the current study seeks to shed light on the implications of the Internet for social movements (SMs) and the prospects of political

change in Morocco. From the point of view of social movement, radical democracy, and alternative media theories, the study will investigate the extent to which the new communication technology has enhanced the capacity of oppositional social movement organizations (SMOs) and groups to lead their combats against political, social, and cultural injustices. Drawing upon insights from two complementary streams of research—namely, the social shaping of technology (SST) theory, and community informatics (CI)—allows the study to highlight many limitations in the diffusion and appropriation of the Internet as a political medium, as well as point out key shortcomings in the use of the Internet as a tool of political development. Equally important, a mixture of methods will be used in the present study, as triangulation is better suited to the topic of the research as an academic field of enquiry, and as a sociological and ontological phenomenon. Triangulation can, therefore, provide a deeper, multi-dimensional insight into the complex social and political issues that the present study is addressing.

Chapter Five: Feature Analysis

The Web's Potential for Collective Action: Usages and Limitations

Introduction

While the Internet is a multifaceted medium made up of several technologies and platforms, such as the World Wide Web, e-mail, and voice-over-Internet protocol (VoIP). The Web and, more precisely, websites are the most accessible and visible insofar as they can be accessed, at least in theory, by all users, without the need to be members of a group or to have special online accounts (as is the case for e-mail and e-lists, for instance). In this manner, websites achieve higher publicity or “publicness,” which is a cornerstone of the public sphere in the Habermasian interpretation: “Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all” (Habermas, 1991, p. 4). Websites are also complex platforms since they can, in addition to textual data, incorporate other technologies and software applications, such as video, e-mail, and instant chat, which favours horizontal and participatory communication, networking, and dissemination of information. Moreover, because websites can support far richer data, both textual and non-textual, they allow for the exchange and sharing of a greater amount of information at a low cost, and potentially enable social movements to considerably reduce communication costs. Further, websites can be used as platforms from which it is possible to search and retrieve archived information, a feature that can enhance the continuity of collective action and discourse, and also help members and the group reduce the costs and time associated with storing and accessing important information needed for mobilization.

Despite the exponential growth in the number of Internet users in Morocco, the number of those who use political websites in general remains very low. According to information provided by Alexa Traffic Rank¹⁶, none of the 100 most-visited websites in Morocco belongs to a civil society group or institution. Moreover, the first website among the ones studied here, that of Justice and Spirituality, is ranked 803rd. There are a number of reasons for this. One, despite the rapid growth in the number of Internet users in the last few years, the digital divide in the country is so deep that the majority of Moroccans do not have access to computers or an Internet connection. Moreover, with the exception of Islamic social movement organizations (SMOs), the majority of civil society groups, including political parties, are composed of small constituencies that expand and shrink in accordance with political circumstances and contingencies. Also, the younger generations that constitute the majority of Internet users in Morocco are less politicized than previous generations were, and their use of the Internet is directed towards entertainment and social networking. Among the top 10 most-visited websites in the country are Facebook (first on the list), YouTube, Windows Messenger, koora.com (or soccer.com), and a website providing Middle East television programming (Alexa, top sites in Morocco).

These statistics¹⁷, however, are not surprising. In fact, collective action has always been the domain of a few elite groups of people rather than the majority. This is not particular to Morocco since Alexa's statistics about Canada, for instance, reveal similar

¹⁶ The information provided by Alexa.com, though revealing, remains biased. This is because Alexa, as all similar traffic-ranking sites, measures site popularity only among users who have downloaded their Web plug-ins or sidebars.

¹⁷ This web ranking was provided upon my access to Alexa.com on July, 2010, and it is subject to change over time.

trends, with business, social networking, and governmental sites topping the most visited websites, as well. Moreover, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, Internet traffic to social movements' websites rises and falls in accordance with the visibility or latency of the movements themselves and their activities. Furthermore, measuring the contribution and importance of alternative media with criteria that typically govern mainstream and commercial media, i.e. online traffic or the number of viewers, is inappropriate. These websites principally address the actual and potential members of these movements and their needs, and only secondarily the general public. As alternative media, their main value and contribution is not in competing with mainstream media for influence, but in creating subaltern public spheres that challenge the dominance of the former over communication of frameworks and discourses. Additionally, even in cases when not all of a group's members are able to access these websites, the Internet is usually used in synergy with other communication tools, including those that are face-to-face, that complement and reinforce one another (see a discussion of this issue in Chapter Five).

1. Objectives

Numerous commentators have attempted to outline the main consequences of the Internet, especially web platforms, for social movements. Edwards (2004), for instance, outlines the main uses of the Internet in terms of the following functions: a) mobilization; b) soliciting opinions/opinion polling; c) discussion; d) facilitating contacts amongst the organization's members; e) service; and f) networking with other organizations (p. 187). Similarly, Stein (2009) summarizes existing literature on the subject and points out the Internet's six functions for social movements: a) providing information; b) assisting action and mobilization; c) promoting interaction and dialog; d)

making lateral linkages; e) serving as an outlet for creative expression; and f) promoting fundraising and resource generation (p. 757).

Building on the existing literature, this chapter attempts to answer two main questions: First, to what extent are Moroccan social movements and SMOs appropriating the potential of the Internet for collective action? And, second, to what extent is the Internet enhancing the capacity of these movements to engage in collective action? These questions will be answered by assessing the potential of the studied websites to deliver the following key functions:

- (a) providing updated information;
- (b) enhancing internal cohesion and collective identity within movements and SMOs;
- (c) enhancing their capacity to link to other movements and organizations at the national, regional, and international levels;
- (d) maximizing their ability to mobilize actual and potential constituents;
- (e) and building participatory communication structures and interactions.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sampling.

The study combines representative and purposive sampling at various levels in the process of selecting websites for analysis. The study uses representative sampling, a method that is considered a more rigorous and “scientific” method, as it allows the research results to be generalized. There are, however, a number of drawbacks to this method. One, applying it exclusively in a study using a small population such as the current one will inevitably involve errors and biases (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Moreover, “for a true random sample to be selected, the characteristics under study of the whole

population should be known” (p. 523). This is, however, impossible when studying websites, as their number on the World Wide Web increasing continuously.

Furthermore, while the chapter uses quantitative content analysis, it equally draws on qualitative content analysis. Unlike with purely quantitative research, representative sampling is not always needed in qualitative research “where improved understanding of complex human issues is more important than generalizability of results” (p. 524). Also, a major obstacle encountered at the sampling phase of this study was finding websites that reflect a satisfactory level of usage, as a significant number of websites belonging to Moroccan civil society fall into disuse and become stagnant a short time after their creation.

In order to compensate for these limitations, purposeful sampling was also used at different stages. According to Patton (1999), “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169). Two levels of sampling were used to conduct this study. The first level dealt with identifying social movements that were to be the subject of study. Given that social movements can comprise a large number of organizations and groups, the second level of sampling dealt with choosing particular groups and organizations whose websites would be analyzed. One core difficulty I encountered at this level was the scarcity of literature in the domain, as very few studies have examined collective action in Morocco through social movement theory. Thus, I had to find clear parameters for defining and identifying social movements as social and political phenomena. To do this, I drew on Diani’s (2000) definition of social

movements because it synthesizes various interpretations in the literature on the subject: “A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflict, on the basis of collective identity” (p. 165). Applying the above criteria to the plethora of groups and organizations active within Moroccan civil society and extensively discussed in existing literature on the issue (see Chapter Three), eight social movements were identified:

- 1) the Islamic-oriented movement;
- 2) the alter-globalization movement;
- 3) the human rights movement;
- 4) the feminist movement;
- 5) the Amazigh cultural movement;
- 6) the graduate unemployed movement;
- 7) the radical left movement;
- 8) the trade union movement.

These movements represent the major ideological paradigms and collective action-oriented groups constituting Moroccan civil society (see, for instance, Kausch, 2008; Sater, 2007; and Sidi Hida, 2007), especially those that follow oppositional agenda, and aim at achieving social and political change in the country.

The next step in sampling was to identify the social movement organizations and groups within the identified social movements whose websites would be studied. Two main criteria were employed at this stage. First, the studied groups were chosen from

among groups and social movement organizations that are considered to be the major groups in a movement and operate at the national and transnational level. The use of this criterion is motivated by a number of factors. One, the thesis focuses on social movements that have the potential to produce societal change at the national and not just the local level. Two, the thesis aims to examine the impact of the Internet on the capacity of SMOs to coordinate action and enhance organizational structure and collective identity formation at the translocal level. Three, a preliminary survey of political websites in the country revealed that a limited number of SMOs have been able to set up websites, and these groups tend to be the biggest SMOs and operate at the national level. The other criterion concerns whether a SMO has a website, and whether these websites reflect a sufficient degree of usage and activity.

Thus, drawing on existing literature, as well as on media and institutional reports on Moroccan civil society, a list of the major social movement organizations within each movement was established. Using this list as a guide, I searched for those that have websites. In a few cases, particularly with regard to the Islamic movement, I found a large number of SMOs that had websites, and therefore I opted for the biggest and most important Islamic SMOs in the country, namely Justice and Charity, Unity and Reconstruction, and Justice and Development. In other cases, such as that of the feminist movement, only one had a functioning website, namely the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM¹⁸). In addition to the latter, Justice and Charity's women section, Sisters of Afterlife, was chosen because it also addressed women. In still others, namely the Amazigh cultural movement, I found that the majority of SMOs did not have

¹⁸ The acronyms of SMOs used in the study are based on their French titles, since they are commonly used in the literature to identify Moroccan SMOs.

websites, while those that did have websites, did not keep them updated. In contrast to institutionalized groups, I noticed that non-institutionalized Amazigh groups and individual activists' usage of the Internet provided richer and more active examples of the use of the Internet in collective action. The case of the Amazigh cultural movement is a good example of a social movement made up of informal network of organizations, individuals, and groups as described in Diani's definition above.

Two websites and groups or SMOs were selected from each studied social movement. The only two exceptions to this rule are the Islamic and the Amazigh cultural movements, which are represented by three websites and SMOs or groups. This is meant to reflect the superior quantitative online presence of these two movements compared to the other ones. Thus, the following is the list of the studied SMOs and groups and how they were selected:

- The Islamic-oriented movement: The three studied SMOs in the movement represent the most powerful ones in the country.
- The alter-globalization, radical left, trade union and unemployed graduates' movements: While numerous groups in these movements have websites, those selected were found to be the only ones that were regularly updated and active during the preliminary survey and observation of social movement's websites.
- The human rights movement: The human rights movement includes a large number of local and national SMOs. However, only three of them had websites, among which only the Moroccan Association of Human Rights' 24 websites were updated. The websites of Rabat and Essaouira's ¹⁹ chapters were selected because

¹⁹ A small town in Morocco.

they were among the most active in terms of updating, and they provide a ground on which to compare the contribution of the Internet for reducing inequalities between urban centers, i.e., Rabat, and peripheral regions, namely Essaouira's chapter.

- The feminist movement: At the time of sampling, only two websites belonging to women's or feminist SMOs were available, namely those of the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) and the Sisters of Afterlife, which is Justice and Charity's women's section;
- The Amazigh cultural movement: Sampling from among the Amazigh cultural movement's websites was more difficult because of their relatively large number, and because the majority of websites belong to non-institutionalized groups or individual activists. A list of websites was established by drawing on information provided by online directories, blogs, and search engines. These websites were observed, and those that were found to be more frequently updated and to deal with explicitly political issues were shortlisted. Two of the selected websites are collective blogs, while the third belongs to an Amazigh SMO.

In total, 18 websites are studied in this chapter (see table 1). While the chapter aims to provide, as much as possible, a representative overview of the appropriation of the Internet by various Moroccan social movements, its aspiration is more to analyze and understand the implications of the medium for collective action in general, specifically for its capacity to engage in oppositional collective action that can eventually lead to political and social change. Also, some of the selected websites consist of multilingual versions. In these cases, I have opted to concentrate on the Arabic websites, as they are

the ones that were assumed to address the majority of local users, and because, in most cases, multilingual versions tend to be identical to one another in structure and design.

Table 1. List of websites and SMOs.

Movement	Organization	Website URL
Islamic oriented	1) Justice and Charity	http://www.aljamaa.net/ar/index.asp
	2) Unity and Reconstruction	http://www.alislah.org/
	3) Justice and Development	http://www.pjd.ma/pjdstat/#
Human rights	4) AMDH–Rabat	http://amdh-section-de-rabat1.skyrock.com/
	5) AMDH–Essaouira	http://essaouira-amdh.blogspot.com/
Feminist/women’s	6) Democratic Association of Moroccan Women	http://www.adfm.ma/index.php?lang=ar
	7) Sisters of Afterlife	http://www.mouminate.net/ar/index/index.shtml
Alter-globalization	8) ATTAC–Morocco	http://www.maroc.attac.org/attacmaroc/index.php
	9) Forum des alternatives Maroc	http://www.e-joussour.net/ar
Amazigh cultural movement	10) Amazigh blog–Ageddim	http://ageddim.jeeran.com/
	11) Amazigh–Ameghnass	http://ameghnas.blogspot.com/
	12) Amazigh Network for Citizenship	http://www.forumalternatives.org/rac/?lang=fr
Unemployed graduates	13) The Youth Group	http://alfatiya.maktoobblog.com/
	14) Forum Group	http://marocchomeurss.blogspot.com/
Radical left	15) Democratic Path	http://www.annahjaddimocrati.org/
	16) Unified Socialist party	http://psu.apinc.org/index.php
Trade union	17) Democratic Labour Confederation	http://www.cdt.ma/
	18) Employees’ Syndical Union	http://www.umt-usf.com

Equally important, while political parties are commonly excluded from various conceptualizations of civil society and social movements, the thesis argues that such exclusion should not be rigidly upheld in every political environment, especially in the context of developing countries where the interconnection between these entities is very

deep. In fact, as noted by many commentators (see Chapter Four), one major characteristic of Moroccan civil society is that a great number of the major associations and NGOs are rooted in political parties with which they continue to share members and various resources. Such interconnectedness has prompted a number of commentators either to incorporate the two under the banner of civil society, as Lise Garon (2004) did in her study on Morocco, or to question the rigid separation between the two (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Diani, 2000). Diani (2000), for instance argues that

under certain and specific conditions some political party may feel itself as part of a movement and be recognized as such both by other actors in the movement and by the general public. This is likely to be the exception rather than the rule, and to be largely restricted to parties originated by social movements, such as the Green Parties. (p. 167)

In light of Diani's explanation, and while maintaining the distinction between political parties and social movements, the current thesis has opted to study three political parties because they are rooted in distinct social movements, namely those that are Islamic or radical left, have never participated in government, and are clearly adopting oppositional agendas and collective action tactics. Similarly, the thesis studies the case of the trade union movement, a category of organizations that is often excluded from the social movement literature dealing with the Western context. Unlike in the West, where trade unions mainly defend special interests of members, trade unions in Morocco have always been at the fore of political struggle for social justice and democracy that has pitted civil society against the Monarchy and the Makhzen (Garon, 2004; Sidi Hida, 2007).

2.2 Downloading.

One of the difficulties related to doing research on the Internet is that online data can be ephemeral and it is not usually possible to rely on a website's existing archives to access to past information. Downloading websites in their original format to analyze their structural and functional features is also another challenge. An important difficulty encountered during the current study was finding a reliable software tool that would allow websites to be downloaded, stored for easy retrieval, and viewed in their entire and original format, including graphics and active hyperlinks. Moreover, because the current analysis included downloading the websites over the course of one month, downloading the homepage and the next page separately requires both time and the right software in order to limit the volume of data needing to be stored. Several software programs were tried initially, including portable document format (PDF) software, Internet Explorer's Web page saving option, and HTTrack, but none could perform all the above functions effectively and reliably. Finally, the software tool surfoffline²⁰ was successfully tested and used.

2.3 Unitization.

A common problem facing research that focuses on the Internet is how to define the boundaries of the units to be studied. Unlike in media, content exists in a non-linear way on the Internet via hyperlinks to other textual and non-textual material on the same page or website or to external sites. Such issues have raised questions about "what constitutes a webpage, what constitutes a website, and how these elements combine to form identifiable messages" (Weare & Lin, 2000, p. 281). For the purpose of the study, I opted for a two-step unitization process. Initially, the website as defined by a URL

²⁰ The software tool is available at www.surfoffline.com for a one-time fee.

address was taken as the first unit. This strategy is suitable for studies dealing with the structural aspects of websites (p. 281). Since the study also seeks to analyze the textual content of these websites, another level of unitization was chosen, namely the homepage and a one-level domain page from the homepage. A number of considerations underlie this choice. First, websites can contain hundreds of pages and thousands of textual and multimedia files, so coding entire websites can be “unrealistically demanding” (Weare & Lin, p. 282). Second, the sampled websites for this study include various Web formats, namely blogs, wikis, and conventional site formats, which differ in structure and the manner of presenting and archiving content. Thus, focusing on homepages minimizes the number of variables that separate these web genres, and enables the researcher to concentrate on the same level of websites. Finally, a homepage constitutes the single most important part of a website, considering “its attention-grabbing and organizational roles” and given that it is “likely to contain many central elements of Web design” (Weare & Lin, p. 281).

2.4 Categorization.

Categorization is a major step in conducting content analysis. Categories should follow some basic rules: “they must reflect the purpose of the research” and “be exhaustive” and “mutually exclusive” (Holsti, as cited in Mostyn, 1985, p. 135).

Building on the objectives outlined above, six categories are used to organize website analysis:

- a) user-friendliness;
- b) mobilization;
- c) interactivity;

- d) networking;
- e) information about the movement or SMO;
- f) and how up-to-date the site is (“updatedness”).

The majority of the functions above are reflected in the literature under various descriptors, mainly mobilization, interactivity, networking, and information providing. It is worth noting that the function “information providing” is represented by two categories, namely “information on the movement or SMO” and “updatedness”. In fact, each of these categories focuses on a different aspect within the generic function of the Internet as a source of information, which will be described in more detail below. As for “user-friendliness,” it is more a feature of websites than a function of the Internet. Its importance, however, lies in the fact that it sheds light on the Web structure through which all other functions can be delivered effectively. Despite its importance, only a small number of studies in political communication have paid attention to user-friendliness, perhaps because the bulk of studies on the subject are conducted in various other fields, mainly business- and IT-related disciplines.

2.5 Coding.

Using the above categories, a preliminary set of codes was derived from both existing literature and the data itself. An initial set of codes was derived mainly from existing literature. This set of codes was then tested in a pilot study on part of the data before it was ultimately refined and expanded by adding new codes as coding of data progressed. Additional analysis was performed in order to determine the efficiency of the codes and their compatibility with the objectives of the present research. The process of testing and

refining the codes was carried out several times until a satisfactory set of codes was obtained.

2.6 Reliability and intercoding.

The reliability of the coding procedure is considered a key component of (quantitative) content analysis, and it is commonly described as “the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion” (Neuendorf, 2002; Lombard Synder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). The issue of reliability is thus related to the essence of content analysis itself, which Krippendorff (1969) defines as the use of a “replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties of its source” (p. 103). For the purposes of the current chapter, three coders were used to code data independently. The first coder was the researcher; the other two were graduate students who were sufficiently trained for several hours on using the codes developed for this study. Several pilot rounds of coding were conducted to test the coding scheme and the level of compatibility between the coders. Krippendorff’s alpha was used to measure intercoder reliability, as this method is considered to be conservative and “allows for any number of coders and is explicitly designed to be used for variables at different levels of measurement from nominal to ratio” (Lombard et al., 2002, p. 592).

Because the vast majority of codes deal with manifest content or features, they had a reliable alpha higher than .90. The exceptions to this result are the codes analyzing “user-friendliness” and “information about SM/SMOs.” In the first category, some codes that were used initially received less than .60, and therefore, they were replaced or discarded. The three codes used in this feature, namely consistency, navigation and

culturability, had received .85, .83, and .71 respectively, while the code in the second category had an alpha of .74.

3. Studied Movements and SMOs: A Brief Background

While some of the selected movements have been studied extensively, such as the Islamic movement and to some extent the feminist movement, others have received scant attention, as is the case with more recent movements such as the unemployed graduate movement. Some movements also share an ideological background and premise; the alter-globalization, human rights, radical left, and feminist movements, for example, all draw, with varying degrees of emphasis and levels of interpretation, on Marxism and leftist discourse. Others share organizational structure, such as professional organizations versus grassroots organizations. As well, many of these movements share not only an overarching ideology, but also members and resources. While analysis will accordingly pay attention to their idiosyncrasies, it will still group them together under broad banners, such as “left” or “professional,” when appropriate.

3.1 The Islamic movement.

The Islamic-oriented (or Islamist) movement is undeniably the largest and most influential in Morocco. The rise of Islamism or a politically-oriented and militant Islamic movement in Morocco can be linked to a number of factors. As with many Arab countries, the movement in Morocco developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a reaction to failed development policies and to leftist political parties and secular movements that gained momentum with Nacirism²¹ (Glennie & Mepham, 2007). The rise of Islamism can also be seen as a direct result of the absence of democracy and

²¹ In reference to Jamal Abdul Nasser, Egypt’s president between 1956 and 1970.

political freedoms in Islamic countries where “Islamic activism becomes a natural vehicle for political discontent” (Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 8).

The social and political rootedness of Islamism is well explained by Castells (2004), who argues that

for all the efforts of exegesis to root Islamic identity in history and the holy texts, Islamists proceeded, for the sake of social resistance and political insurgency, with a reconstruction of cultural identity that is in fact hypermodern.... Indeed, the explosion of Islamic movements seems to be related to both the disruption of traditional societies (including the undermining of the power of traditional clergy), and to the failure of the nation-state, created by nationalist movements, to accomplish modernization, develop the economy, and/or to distribute the benefits of economic growth among the population at large. (p. 17)

The case of the Moroccan Islamic movement is not an exception. As Munson (1986) points out, “it would be misleading to characterize this entire movement as ‘fundamentalist,’ since the ideological orientation of the most conspicuous groups in it is far more reminiscent of “liberation theology” in Latin America than it is of Christian fundamentalism in the United States” (p. 267).

Islamic brotherhoods and Sufi orders can be considered early precursors of the modern Islamic movement in Morocco (Dialmy, 2000). However, the first militant Islamic group was the Islamic Youth Association (Jamayyat Shabiba Islamiyya), founded by Abdessallam Mutti’a in 1969 as a clandestine and revolutionary organization. In the early 1980s, the group ended its clandestine tactics to become legal under the new title Reform and Renovation. Later on, the group merged with another Islamic organization,

leading to the creation of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in 1998. The party participated in two legislative elections in 2002 and 2007, and established itself as the main opposition party in parliament. In parallel with the party, the SMO continued to exist as an association with its own structures and leader, ultimately changing its name to Unity and Reconstruction. Unity and Reconstruction focuses on broader social and public “awareness” activities through its numerous spirituality services and cultural centres while providing support to the PJD party.

The second major Islamic organization is Justice and Charity (J&C) founded in 1984 by its charismatic leader Abdessalam Yassine. Since the early 1970s, Yassine challenged King Hassan II publically, which brought him long periods in prison and house-arrests. This SMO advocates the non-violent transformation of society; its activities range from public demonstrations and protests to organizing spirituality and welfare services. The exact number of members of the group is not known, but it is estimated to be between 50,000 and 600,000 (Cavatorta, 2006). J&C combines charitable activities with advocacy based principally on Yassine’s writings, which draw on Sufist non-violent teachings and call for the establishment of an Islamic state. Concurring with Munson’s assessment of the Moroccan Islamic movement, Ottaway and Riley (2006) describe J&C as

a complex and at times bewildering organization. In part, it is an organization in the mould of Morocco’s numerous traditional Sufi brotherhoods, nonviolent and suffused with a strong current of mysticism, including a belief in the importance of dreams. In part, it is a very political movement, with some of its leaders prone

to using the radical language of dependency theory and Third World revolution.
(pp. 15–16)

Though the organization has been outlawed since its foundation, J&C was relatively well tolerated by the state. In recent years, however, police and judiciary repression against it has significantly intensified. According to the organization, in two years, more than 5,000 members have been incarcerated, of which, 877 were women, while more than 1,000 were sentenced to various prison terms and a total of \$730,000 (USD) in fines were imposed (Justice and Charity, 2008). Moreover, the state banned all the group's print publications and repeatedly, albeit unsuccessfully, tried to block access to its websites too.

3.2 The feminist movement.

Although a few pioneer Moroccan feminist associations appeared as early as the 1940s during the French Protectorate (Naciri, 2006; El-Boudali, 2005), the feminist movement remains a recent phenomenon, as the majority of NGOs were established in the 1980s and 1990s. Belhabib (2004), for instance, points out that “87.5% [of feminist NGOs were] created in 1980, while 32% started only since 1994” (p. 1). Commentators link the evolution of the feminist movement in this period to numerous factors. First, it is a movement that sprang from the progressive development of an elite class of women who are well educated and active in the public sphere. Many of these women were also militants in various leftist political parties and radical groups. Many feminist NGOs developed out of women's sections in opposition parties, where women had to “struggle with their fellow party members ... to be convinced of the appropriateness of independent feminist institutions” (Eddouada, 2001). The appearance of the first feminist

publications—namely, the monthly newspaper “8 March” in 1983 and “Kalimat” [meaning “words”] in 1986—contributed to further spreading a militant and critical feminist discourse to a larger public of educated women.

The first major feminist NGO to be established was the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc, or ADFM). It was founded by Amina Lmrini in 1985 from a section of the Moroccan communist party, Parti du progrès et du socialisme (PPS). Since then, hundreds of local, regional, and national feminist NGOs and small associations have appeared in the country,²² the majority of which focus on providing various services and assistance to women in health, education, professional training, and judicial counseling, among others. In addition to providing some of these services, major feminist NGOs focus on lobbying the state to demand more rights for women through the elimination of all types of discriminations against them.

Moreover, the Moroccan feminist movement has been predominantly associated with secular and leftist organizations. The emergence of many women’s associations that are Islamic-oriented or have a direct link with current Islamic movement organizations raises questions about whether they can be considered to be part of the mainstream feminist movement, given that the majority of Islamic movements strongly adhere to rigid patriarchal interpretations of gender issues that tend to oppress women. This is true for Justice and Charity’s women’s section, Sisters of Afterlife, established by Nadia Yassine. While some commentators have dubbed religious-oriented women’s activism as “Islamic feminism,” others have warned against an easy dismissal of the contribution of religious-

²² Although exact statistics do not exist, the database on the Tanmia Portal, a major ICT4DEV project in the country, has 990 registered women’s associations.

oriented women's movements. In the words of Tohidi (2003), it is necessary to "avoid polarizing a 'faith position' and a 'secular position' with regard to commitment to women's rights.... To equate the secular or the modern with equality and feminism is as naïve and misinformed as equating faith and religion with anti-feminism" (p. 137).

3.3 The human rights movement.

As in the case of the feminist movement, the origins of the Moroccan human rights movement are rooted in party politics and rivalry. The first human rights SMO, la Ligue Marocaine des droits de l'homme (LMDH), was established in 1971 by activists in the nationalist Istiqlal (Independence) party. The second was the Association Marocaine des droits de l'homme (AMDH), established in 1979 by members of the leftist Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP) party. In 1983, AMDH broke from the USFP and aligned with the Parti d'avant-garde démocratique et du socialisme [PADS], a radical left faction that seceded from the USFP. AMDH's political alignment and highly critical stance were deemed too radical by the state, which led to the arrest of many of its members and the outlawing of its activities until 1988. During the same year, a rival NGO was established by a group of USFP activists, namely the Organization Marocaine des droits de l'homme (OMDH). OMDH strived to be less politicized than AMDH and more professional in dealing with the issue of human rights (Sater, 2007). However, AMDH's defence of broader political and social rights, its challenge of the monarchy and its use of direct collective action tactics have gained it greater social capital, and it has become the biggest and most respected SMO in the domain. As defined on its website, AMDH is "a human rights and democratic movement [militating] for the establishment of a democratic constitution, a state of rights and law, and a society of dignity and

citizenship” (AMDH, Presenting the Association, 2010; my translation). AMDH, which slightly modified its name to the Association Marocaine des droits humains, currently comprises 91 chapters distributed throughout the country and more than 10,000 registered members (AMDH, Presenting the Association, 2010). In addition to these two main NGOs, there is a large number of other human rights NGOs operating at the national, regional, and local levels.

3.4 The alter-globalization movement.

Compared to other social movements, the alter-globalization movement is a new one in Morocco, since it only emerged in 2000. The first SMO in the movement is ATTAC-Maroc, the Moroccan section of the Association pour la taxation des transactions financières pour l'aide aux citoyens (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens), an INGO that originated in France in 1998 to protest initially against extra taxation, but which extended its action to militate against neo-liberal global capitalism and its social and environmental consequences in developed and developing countries. The INGO is present in 40 countries including Morocco. ATTAC-Maroc was founded in 2000 as a reaction against economic liberalization and the creation of free trade zones with Europe and the US (Cheynis, 2005). While present in numerous regions of the country, ATTAC is more active in big cities, such as Rabat and Casablanca, and has some 500 members distributed over 12 chapters. Since its establishment, the SMO has faced serious problems, particularly state repression and lack of formal state recognition, scarcity of resources, and internal conflicts and divisions, particularly between the Rabat and Casablanca chapters. Despite being a small NGO, ATTAC benefits from cross-membership, as many of its militants are also active in leftist

parties and unions. The organization also relies on networking and forming short-term alliances with other protest groups and leftist-oriented SMOs over particular issues and campaigns, forming what has become common in Moroccan activism—“tansikiyyat” or local coordination committees.

The second major SMO in the alter-globalization movement is the Forum des alternatives Maroc (FMAS) an NGO, founded in 2003 and operating as a coalition of associations and groups that militate for various social and political causes. This is why a distinctive characteristic of the SMO is the pluralism marking its identity, derived simultaneously “from the number of its members, [the] diversity of those constituting it, their objectives, and the differences in their visions about collective action” (Sidi Hida, 2007, p. 122). The group declares that one of its main objectives is to establish a strong, democratic, and independent social movement sector in the country. It also aims to defend “economic, political, social, civil, and cultural rights, regardless of racial, ethnic, linguistic, or sexual differences” (FMAS, 2006, Who We Are link [my translation]). Thanks to direct support from INGOs, particularly the Montreal-based Alternatives International, FMAS has been able to organize a series of social forums in which activists from diverse civil organizations and social movements take part. The first of these forums was held in 2002 prior to the official constitution of FMAS. Since then, it has organized numerous social forums at the regional, national, and international levels, the last of which were the Maghreb Social Forum held in 2008 and the International Social Forum held in March 2010. The wiki-portal of E-Joussour (E-Bridges) is another project initiated by FMAS in partnership with Oxfam Novib and Alternatives International with an aim to allow civil society groups in countries in the Middle East and North Africa

(MENA) to “benefit from the visibility of the Internet” and to enable civil society actors and ordinary citizens in the region to have access to alternative information, and to produce and publish analyses in Arabic, as well as in French and English (E-Joussour, 2010, Who We Are link).

3.5 The Amazigh cultural movement.

Like the Islamic movement, the Amazigh cultural movement has become one of the strongest social movements in the country, given its size, geographical expansion, and political influence. The movement has a strong regional and international dimension, extending as it does over most of North Africa and into Western Europe. Weitzman (2006) defines this movement as follows:

The “Berber/Amazigh culture movement” (mouvement culturel Berbère/Amazigh; MCB/MCA) is an amorphous, multifaceted phenomenon with a clear core demand: the affirmation by state authorities—in North Africa, first and foremost, but also in the Berber diaspora in Western Europe and North America—of the existence of the Amazigh people as a collective, and of the Amazighity (Berberness) of the land of “Tamazgha,” defined as the area stretching from the Siwa Oasis in Egypt’s Western Desert to the Canary Islands, and as far south as the Sahel. In practical terms, their core demand is for the recognition of Tamazight as an official language in the North African states, and for educational, social, and economic policies to redress the multitude of injustices said to have been inflicted on the Berbers during the colonial and independence eras. (pp. 72–73)

While existing throughout the whole North Africa region, the Amazigh cultural movement is mostly active in Algeria and Morocco where strong Amazigh-speaking minorities live, and also in the diaspora, especially France and the Netherlands. As far as Morocco is concerned, the movement's demands center on cultural and linguistic rights and rarely on ethnic ones, because the long and close co-existence of Amazigh and Arab populations over nearly 1,500 years has produced an ethnic mixture to the point that "we can no longer speak about populations that are purely Amazigh or Arab" (Janjar, Naciri, & Mouaquit, 2000, p. 51). Although some Amazigh associations appeared as early as the 1960s, the emergence of the Amazigh cultural movement as a political movement was relatively late—towards the end of the 1980s and into the early 1990s—with the publication first of the Agadir Chart in 1991, "in which Amazigh demands were formulated for the first time" (Sater, 2007, p. 62).

The Moroccan state has tried to curb the movement either by repression and intimidation or co-optation, by providing "just enough space to prevent the cultural Amazigh movement from developing into a political movement" (Van Heelsum, 2002, p. 3). Under pressure from international actors and Moroccan civil society actors, the Moroccan state began to respond to some of the movement's demands, first by establishing the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture in 2001, and later through the partial introduction of the Amazigh language in education and the launching of an Amazigh TV channel in 2010. However, many Amazigh activists and associations find these measures to be insufficient and continue to militate for the full recognition of Amazigh culture and identity. Moreover, while some Amazigh groups have shifted their demands from identity issues to the socio-economic development of "Amazigh" regions, radical factions

in the movement are asking for full regional autonomy, thus leading increasingly to the “racialization” of the issue and to more divisions within the movement itself (Silverstein, 2010).

3.6 The unemployed graduates movement.

This movement emerged in the beginning of the 1990s in reaction to the worsening unemployment situation and the sharp rise in the number of young people with university education and diplomas. While the Moroccan state had been for decades the main employer, this situation changed as Morocco entered a deep recession in the 1980s and opted for economic readjustment measures that included significant cuts in public expenditures and the liberalization of the state. As a consequence, the number of unemployed graduates grew from 84,000 in 1990 to 202,000 in 1997 (Sidi Hida, 2007, p. 38). With this, the movement witnessed a steady increase in membership and became highly visible, particularly as its members use direct action such as street protests, sit-ins, and the occupation of streets and buildings (Emperador, 2008).

The movement is composed of a large number of loosely connected groups that are formed according to the students’ year of graduation and their geographical origins. Moreover, membership in these groups is provisional, since it ends once a person gets a job. Some of these groups cease to exist because all of their members are offered jobs through collective agreements with the government. Although the primary objective of all groups in the movement is to get employment, they also link this demand with other social and political goals such as the reduction of the disparity between high and low incomes, the recognition of the legitimacy of their cause, and respect for freedom of speech (Sidi Hida, 2007). Burton-Rose (1998) estimates that the movement is one of the

rare ones that escaped state co-optation, while Sater (2007) affirms that, “in terms of street presence” the group has become “one of the most active” in Morocco (p. 94). Sidi Hida (2007) points out that the successful endurance of the group’s collective action is due to many factors—chiefly, its opening towards other movements, especially the human rights and trade unions, which provide logistical support such as premises where numerous groups can hold their meetings and coordinate action.

3.7 The trade union movement.

The trade union movement is one of the oldest social movements in the modern history of the country, dating back to the 1930s when Morocco was under the French Protectorate. However, the first Moroccan nationalist union, the Moroccan Confederation of Labour (UMT, after its French initials), was set up in 1955 as a clandestine organization and played a central role in the nationalist movement that militated for the independence of the country in 1956. Because it was close to the nationalist Independence Party (IP), the UMT was also affected by party divisions between conservative and socialist factions, which eventually led the IP to found the General Union of Moroccan Workers (UGTM) “to break up the UMT's monopoly of organized labor” (Bendorou, 1996, The media and civil society section). The state also tried to weaken the movement by fuelling divisions within it and through extensive use of co-optation and violent repression. In 1978, the Democratic Labour Confederation (CDT) was established by militants close to the Union socialite des forces populaires (USFP). The birth of the CDT was a landmark in the development of the trade union movement, as it “offered the possibility of greater union independence from the government, a less top-down structure and locally controlled strikes, rather than constant

intervention from the confederation” (Clement & Paul, 1984, p. 24). In addition to the three central syndical unions above (the UMT, the CDT, and the UGMT), there are a large number of professional unions, including the National Union of Labour in Morocco (UNTM), which is close to the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD), and the National Union of Higher Education (SNESUP). The UMT and the CDT continue to be the country’s major unions, as they include a large number of members and affiliated professional unions, such as the Employees’ Syndical Union. In the last decade, the influence of the trade movement in general has waned due to internal divisions and controversial decisions taken by its leaders to appease the government, especially after the participation of opposition political parties in successive alternance governments since 1998.

3.8 The radical left movement.

The radical left movement is rooted in various leftist organizations and political parties such as the National Union of Popular Forces political party (UNFP), the Moroccan Communist party and, most important, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist SMOs and groups such as the “Movement 23 March,” the National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM) and “Ilal Amam” (meaning “forward”). The latter was cofounded and led by Abraham Serfati, a Moroccan engineer of Jewish descent, in 1970. It operated as an underground organization and preached revolutionary change to the regime of Hassan II during the 1970s. Ilal Amam, along with other groups, was brutally repressed and many of its members, including Serfati, were sentenced in 1974 to decade-long prison periods which they spent in the infamous prison of Tazmamart in the south of the country. Upon their release, many of these activists become active in the Moroccan Association of

Human Rights (AMDH), along with small political parties such as the Democratic Path, The Democratic Socialist Vanguard Party (PADS), and the Unified Socialist Party (PSU).

The PSU was founded in 2002 out of the fusion between four radical-left groups, the most important of which is the Organisation of Popular and Democratic Action founded by charismatic leftist leader Bensaid Ait Idder in 1983. The party changed its name from Party of Unified Socialist Left (Parti de la gauche socialiste unifiée) to the Unified Socialist Party in 2005, after a radical faction from the central Left party, the Socialist Union of the Popular Forces, joined it. In the 2002 legislative elections, the party obtained two seats in parliament. In 2007, the party allied with the Democratic Socialist Vanguard Party (PADS) to participate in the legislative elections, in which they received 4 seats. As for the Democratic Path (“La voie démocratique”), it was founded in 1995 by militants of the radical left, and regards itself as the “legal” version and heir of the Ilal Amam organization²³. While the Moroccan state tolerates the party, it still refuses to recognize it officially because of the party’s stances on various issues, particularly its support of the Popular Liberation Front for the Western Sahara (POLISARIO) front in its conflict with Morocco over the Western Sahara. For this reason, it was only in 2004 that the party was able to hold its first general assembly and elect its leaders, many of whom are also members in the Moroccan Association of Human Rights. The party continues to refuse to participate in elections on the ground that elections do not guarantee a real democratic process.

²³ The Democratic Path’s website.

4. General Information on the Websites in the Study

4.1 Category of websites.

Because the Internet is a complex medium involving a bundle of technologies, the selected websites reflect this diversity in their use of various interface types, such as blogs, wikis, and standard websites. The distribution of the studied websites along interface genres is as follows:

Table 2. Categories of websites.	
Type of website	SMOs/SM
Standard websites	Justice and Charity Unity and Reconstruction Justice and Development Democratic Association of Moroccan Women Sisters of Afterlife Democratic Path Unified Socialist Party Amazigh Network for Citizenship and Culture Democratic Labour Confederation Employees' Syndical Union
Collective blogs	Moroccan Association for Human Rights- Rabat chapter Moroccan Association for Human Rights- Essaouira chapter. Amazigh Movement–Ageddim Amazigh Movement–Ameghnas Unemployed Graduates–The Youth Group Unemployed Graduates–Forum Group
Wikis	ATTAC–Maroc Forum des alternatives Maroc–E-joussour

4.2 Languages on the websites.

Morocco is characterized by a great cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. At the linguistic level, although the majority of Moroccans speak a dialect derived from Standard Arabic, called “Darija,” a minority of Moroccans speak various

dialects of Tamazight—the language of the Amazigh or Berbers, the indigenous people of North Africa—and consider it to be a native language. Moreover, while Arabic is the official language of the country, French, the language of the former colonizer, has long been the primary language in various domains, including public administration, higher education, and the worlds of finance and business. French has also been dominant in both print and electronic media. But with the increased liberalization of the media sector over the last few years, the dominance of the French language has declined, as a large number of Arabic and, to a lesser extent, Amazigh media²⁴ have been established. Understandably, then, French has been the dominant language online, with Arabic catching up over the last few years. In fact, the use of Arabic on the Internet has been developing very slowly in the late 1990s and in the early twenty-first century. Technical problems related to the use of Arabic script and suitable Web design, IT skills, low access to the Internet among users speaking only Arabic (compared to francophone users), and the general absence of adequate infrastructure were all barriers that stalled Arabic expansion compared with many other languages. In the last couple of years, however, the online use of Arabic has been growing very quickly²⁵, thanks to increased Internet access in the region and the appearance of technologies and software that facilitate the use of Arabic script. Still, French continues to enjoy a privileged status online, as it is still the primary language of business and government, even when most government institutions have websites in both languages. Bilingual sites are as frequent among civil society groups, although French websites are often more up-to-date and professionally designed than are Arabic ones. The linguistic division marking Moroccan, and perhaps

²⁴ There are 280 publications in Arabic, 151 in French, and around 9 Amazigh publications (Ministry of Communication, 2009).

²⁵ According to Internet World Stats (2010), Arabic ranks seventh among the top 10 languages on the Web.

North African, Internet has serious implications for the visibility and impact of Arabic websites. As Douai (2009), observes in the case of Arab and Moroccan blogosphere, “although many Arab bloggers tend to write in Arabic, only those who use English, or French as in the case of North African bloggers, are more likely to attract the attention of the local advocacy rights community” (p.147).

Website	Arabic	French	Amazigh	English	Spanish
Justice and Charity	✓	✓			
Unity and Reconstruction	✓				
Justice and Development	✓				
Sisters of Afterlife	✓				
ADFM	✓	✓		✓	
ATTAC	✓	✓			
AMDH–Essaouira	✓	✓			
AMDH–Rabat	✓	✓			
E-Joussour	✓	✓		✓	
ANFC	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ageddim blog	✓		✓		✓
Ameghnas blog	✓	✓	✓		✓
Youth group	✓				
Forum group	✓				
Democratic Path	✓				
Unified Socialist Party	✓	✓			
D. Labor Confederation	✓				
Employees’ Syndical U.	✓	✓			

Preliminary observation of the studied websites (see table 3) shows that the majority (eight websites) have either a website in both languages (Arabic and French), or use Arabic and French extensively on the same website. Four mainly Islamic-oriented sites use only Arabic, while two have English websites, and three, belonging to the Amazigh cultural movement (ACM), have websites that use limited Amazigh language transliterated either in French or Arabic script. While language was not a criterion for

research purposes, the linguistic distribution of the websites reflects, more or less, the linguistic mosaic within “Moroccan” civil society.

4.3 Domain names and server location.

The Internet is often described, in theory at least, as being based on networks of equal nodes. In reality, however, the Internet’s infrastructure and network traffic reflect deep hierarchical structures where connections from and to servers and Internet provider (IP) addresses located in rich countries overwhelmingly dominate global Internet traffic. Using the online crawler webhosting.info (<http://www.webhosting.info>), information about the location of the server where each website is hosted was generated. Results (see website 4) revealed that only 5 of the 18 websites have their servers inside Morocco, while almost half of the websites are located in the US (8 websites), four in France, and one in Canada. Moreover, only three SMOs (for example, the ADFM) use Morocco’s country code top-level domain (ccTLD) .ma, while the remaining use generic TLD names such as .com, .net, and .org.

These results reflect the global divide in Internet infrastructure and network traffic (Clement and Shade, 2000; Norris, 2001a; Shade, 2000) as a few countries host the majority of the servers that constitute the backbone of the Internet, as well as the domain names that exist on the Web. The poor quality of IT infrastructure in Morocco, security issues, fear of censorship, and lack of resources are all factors that may play a role in SMOs’ preference for hosting their websites in Western countries. According to testsped.com, Morocco’s average Internet connection speed is 1.59 mega bits per second (Mbps)—the highest in Africa, but still very limited compared to Europe (5.6 Mbps) and North America (5.53 Mbps).

SM/SMOs	Domain Name	Server location	Creation date
Justice and Charity	aljmaa.net	USA	2000
Unity and Reconstruction	Alislah.org	Morocco	2003
Justice and Development	pjd.ma	Morocco	2003
Sister of Afterlife	Mouminate.net	USA	2005
ADFM	Adfm.ma	Morocco	2008
ATTAC	Attac.org	France	1998
AMDH–Essaouira	essaouira-amdh.blogspot.com	USA	2007
AMDH–Rabat	amdhd-section-de-rabat1.skyrock.com	France	2007
E-Joussour	E-joussour.net	Canada	2007
Ageddim blog	Ageddim.jeeran.com	USA	2006
Ameghnas blog	ameghnas.blogspot.com	USA	2007
ANFC	Forumalternative.org	Morocco	2007
Youth group	alfatiya.maktoobblog.com	USA	2007
Forum group	marocchomeurss.blogspot.com	USA	2008
Democratic Path	annahjaddimocrati.org	France	2007
Unified Socialist Party	psu.apinc.org	France	2005
Labour Confederation	Cdt.ma	Morocco	2008
Employees’ Union	Umt-usf.com	USA	2007

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 User-friendliness.

Setting up a well-designed or user-friendly website is a key factor in the site’s potential to attract and retain users’ attention. In the context of social movement collective action, attracting users and establishing credibility can influence a group’s capacity to mobilize actual and potential constituents, and build up support for its cause and frames. The concept of usability has its roots in the research on human computer interaction (HCI) “which has long focused on the need for an understanding of human factors to successfully design and implement technological devices” (Tisinger, Stroud, Meltzer, & Gans, 2005, p. 42). Usability in Internet studies refers to those features that can either facilitate or hinder navigation in and interaction on the Web, such as Web page

layout and navigational tools on the site, as well as the aesthetic features of a website that help attract and retain users, convey the message more effectively, and provide a favorable impression of the group or the institution to which it belongs.

A number of studies have concluded that the surface appearance and the usability of a website are the first factors determining users' judgment of a website's credibility and their decision to return to it or not (Darlington, 2005; Robin & Holmes, 2007; Rosen & Purinton, 2004; Wathen & Burkell, 2002; Warnick, 2006; Zhang & von Darn, 2000). Robins and Holmes (2007), for instance, argue that "when the same content is presented using different levels of aesthetic treatment, the content with a higher aesthetic treatment was judged as having higher credibility. We call this the amelioration effect of visual design and aesthetics on content credibility" (p. 397). In addition, some aspects of webdesign have a direct bearing on the processes of collective action mobilization and identity construction. In particular, these include the use of culturally laden symbols, colours, and other visual clues that appeal to shared culture, sensibilities, and history. The extent to which a website taps into shared cultural values should, therefore, be considered part of a social movement's frames, through which it interprets the social world and the types of relationships within it.

The present study uses three main categories to assess the user-friendliness of the websites under study: consistency, navigation, and culturability. These categories cover the most important aspects of Web usability and design as discussed in the literature (Badre & Barber, 2001; Cyr & Trevor-Smith, 2004; Darlington, 2005; Geissler, Zinkhan, & Watson, 2006; Rosen & Purinton, 2004, among others). First, consistency of design and layout throughout a website is important because it gives "confidence to viewers

from their familiarity [with] the system, for they know what to expect which makes the site easier to use” (Darlington, 2005, p. 49). Consistency can be achieved by avoiding using different colours, font styles and sizes, and positions for navigation across the pages.

Second, in the hyperlinked environment of the Web, users can easily lose the sense of orientation or location, which is “a common navigation problem” online (Yu & Roh, 2002, p. 924). Consequently, optimal navigation on a website is made easy by the use of menu bars, navigation bars, back links, clear icons and graphics or text-based aids to help users situate themselves, and a “return home” symbol, among other features (Yu & Roh; Darlington, 2005).

Finally, “culturability” refers to the connection between culture and usability in Webdesign; usability “must be re-defined in terms of a cultural context, as what is user-friendly for one culture can be vastly different for another culture” (Barber & Badre, 2001, p. 22). Two main models stand out as far as cross-cultural Web-design is concerned: the cultural dimensions model and the cultural markers model (Fitzgerald, 2004). In the cultural dimensions model, researchers use “deep” cultural markers distinguishing one culture from another, such as individualism versus collectivism, power relations and feminism versus masculinity, to compare cross-cultural Web design (Marcus & Gould, 2000). As for the cultural markers model, it uses “surface” markers corresponding to Web design features, such as colour, spatial organization, icons, and metaphors, that are “prevalent, and possibly preferred, within a particular cultural group” (Barber & Badre, 2001). For the purposes of the present research, the second model has been applied, as it has been documented to yield the most evidence within the literature.

Indeed, it is based on clearer and more measurable criteria than the cultural dimensions model, which has been mainly designed for application within the business sector (Kondratova & Goldfarb, 2005).

These features were coded on a scale from 1 to 3, with (1) corresponding to low, (2) to medium, and (3) to high. The overall score of the four categories was then further coded on a scale from 1 to 3 to provide a final and comprehensive result on the websites' user-friendliness. Analysis of user-friendliness (see table 5 below) demonstrates that half of the number of the websites scored "high" while the remaining eight scored "medium." Islamic-oriented Unity and Reconstruction, E-Joussour, and Employee Union's websites are the most user-friendly. By contrast, websites for the Democratic Path, the Democratic Labour Confederation's (CDT), and the unemployed graduates' Forum are the least user-friendly (which mirrors their low scores for the other functions).

Superficially, the overall results illustrate noticeable progress in web design know-how and a satisfactory investment of resources on the part of Moroccan SMOs. In reality, however, the majority of leftist-oriented websites that scored either high or medium have been set up thanks to the help of INGOs or development agencies. While the E-Joussour website was set up through the direct support of Alternatives International and Oxfam, ATTAC's was designed and is being hosted and maintained by ATTAC International in France. As for ADFM, the feminist organization benefited from the financial support of a number of international development agencies, including the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to finance the outsourcing of the website to a private company. This support includes the design, maintenance, and hosting of websites and, in some cases, the payment of the salaries of the people

operating them as well. By contrast, the Islamic SMOs rely on their own resources, particularly through their capacity to mobilize the support of qualified and dedicated volunteers inside Morocco and among diaspora constituencies.

Access to resources and investment in new technologies are not the only factors shaping a website's professional design, as a number of blogs are among the websites that scored high for this function. Blogs do, indeed, offer a free and easy-to-maintain interface; however, because they are based on a limited number of ready-to-use templates offered by the service providers, blogs also impose limitations on the design possibilities available to users. As illustrated by the Amazigh blog *ageddim*, one dedicated and skillful blogger can produce better results than a team in an SMO, which testifies to the huge potential of the Internet for collective action and its function as an alternative medium.

Furthermore, all websites scored lower for "culturability" in relation to other usability features. This proves that, despite progress in web design, awareness about the importance of customizing the Web medium to accommodate target users' cultural biases and expectations is still not sufficient. In general, cultural customization has been achieved with more success at the level of webpage layout and the use of colour, and less through the use of symbols and hyperlinks. All sites tried to accommodate the particularity of the Arabic language, which is written from right to left, by positioning the main menu bar on the right rather than on the left.

Moreover, with a few exceptions, most websites did well at the level of colour choice, with three main colours (blue, green, and white²⁶) dominating the majority of

²⁶ There is a difference between choosing colours that are culturally resonant with the users and using colours efficiently on a website.

websites. The choice of these colours resonates well with the cultural expectations of the target users, since green is a central colour in Islamic culture, while blue and white are strongly associated with faith, truth, and virtue within Arab culture (Russo & Boor, 1993). The Ameghnas blog, for instance, uses the colours of the Amazigh flag²⁷ as a background for the blog (green, blue, and red; see figure 3).



Figure 3. The Amazigh movement’s Ameghnas blog.

Leftist-oriented websites, however, fail to use culturally resonant symbols and colours. Websites for ATTAC and the Democratic Path, for instance, incorporate heavy use of red and its variants, which are the traditional colours of leftist movements. However, the use of red on these websites may appeal to these SMOs’ members and sympathizers, but not necessarily to the general public. This reflects the difficulty facing SMOs when they have to “balance their appeal to popular culture and their awareness of

²⁷ The tricolour flag was proposed in the Amazigh World Congress in 1997.

regional variation in norms and values against the goals and values of the movement organization” (Johnston & Noakes, 2005, p. 9).



Figure 4. Justice and Charity’s website.

Using pictures of charismatic leaders is another important way various groups have tried to customize the Web to targeted users. Social movement theorists have stressed the critical role that social movements’ leaders play in the development and success of collective action. Morris and Staggengborg (2004) emphasize the strategic importance of leaders to social movements, as they can “inspire commitment, mobilize resources, create and recognize opportunities, devise strategies, frame demands, and influence outcomes” (p. 171). In the same vein, Melucci (1996) asserts that the “penetration of the movement in the society, the loyalty and involvement of its members, and the consensus of different social groups all depend upon the leaders’ actions” (p. 332).



Figure 5. The Democratic Path party's website.

Justice and Charity's website, for instance, continuously features a big picture of the SMO's founder and charismatic leader, Abdessalam Yassine, as well as an excerpt from his writings (see figure 4). It also continually presents other materials about the leader, such as audio and video files and a link to his personal website. The foregrounding of leaders is not just limited to Islamic-oriented websites, but also characterizes many leftist-oriented ones. On the Democratic Path's website, for instance, the picture of the party's general secretary is put on the top of every official statement issued by the "National Secretariat" (see figure 5). The prominence of charismatic figures on SMOs' websites can indeed play a unifying and mobilizing role for the SMO's adherents and sympathizers. However, in some cases, excessive visibility can also reflect the inability of a group to "reconcile leadership with the requirements of grassroots democracy" (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 142).

Website	Con.	Nav.	Cul.	Score	Code
Justice and Charity	3	2	2	7	3
Unity and Reconstruction	3	3	2	8	3
Justice and Development	3	1	2	7	3
Sisters of Afterlife	3	2	1	6	2
ADFM	2	2	2	6	2
ATTAC	3	3	1	7	3
AMDH–Essaouira	2	2	1	5	2
AMDH–Rabat	3	2	1	6	2
E-Joussour	3	3	2	8	3
ANFC	2	3	2	7	3
Ageddim blog	3	1	2	6	2
Ameghnas blog	2	3	2	7	3
Youth Group	1	1	2	4	2
Forum Group	3	2	2	7	3
Democratic Path	1	1	2	4	2
Unified Socialist Party	2	2	1	5	2
Labour Confederation	1	1	2	4	2
Employees' Union	3	3	2	8	3

Note. Consistency (Con); navigation (Nav.); culturability (Cul.); Code 1 = low (1–3); code 2 = medium (4–6); code 3 = high (7–9).

5.2 Information on the social movement or SMO.

Commentators have pointed out that the rise into prominence and the development of social movement collective action depend on a combination of factors—chief among them, the success of a group in defining its objectives and collective identity, and how these elements demarcate the group in society (Tarrow, 1998; Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Clearly articulating the objectives of the group and “who we are” on the website can indeed play a crucial role in mobilizing potential adherents and sympathizers by addressing affective and intellectual elements that may influence an individual’s sense of connection to a group. This can also contribute to identity building and enhancement among actual constituents by delimiting the boundaries of the movement or SMO, and

providing them with key references, codes, and symbols that inform the group's master frames, as well as its vision and interpretation of the social and political struggles in which it is engaged.

For the purpose of this study, the web feature providing information on the SM or SMO was examined by verifying the presence (or absence) of a folder or link for that purpose, usually on the vertical or horizontal menu bar of the homepage, under the title of "Who we are" or "Information about [name of organization]." Analysis involved looking for the availability of the following categories of information: the objectives of the group; its principles, ideology, and structures; historical background on its development; and information about key figures and leaders within it, among other features. The available information was assessed by coding it as having no information = 0, little information = 1, fairly sufficient information = 2, or extensive information = 3.

Results show that the majority of the websites (almost 80%) provide either extensive or a fairly sufficient amount of information on the SMO and/or SM to which they belong, while five websites provide little or no information (see table 6). Four of the low-scoring websites belong to two movements, the Amazigh cultural and the unemployed graduates movements. The two Amazigh blogs do not belong to specific organizations, but are individual efforts set up by Amazigh activists (see interview with Mohamed Lakjiri in Chapter Seven). Apart from anonymous e-mail addresses that do not reveal the bloggers' identities, there is no information as to who maintains the blogs. Anonymity is used in the two blogs as a tactic to protect the bloggers from state persecution, especially since the Websites regularly post radical content received from a large number of militant groups inside and outside the country. For instance, in my interview with Mohamed

Lakjiri, a blogger and Amazigh cultural movement activist, he pointed out that he regularly receives anonymous threatening e-mails, as well as pornographic spam e-mails, which he thinks are attempts by the Moroccan secret services to push him to stop blogging; he eventually did stop in January 2010. In the case of the two blogs belonging to the unemployed graduates movement, the inadequacy of information in one blog and its total absence in the other underscore the limited agenda of the movement and its objectives, as well as the ephemeral nature of the groups constituting the movement, as they remain active only as long as its members are unemployed.

Table 6. Information on SM/SMOs.	
Website/SMO	Code
Justice and Charity	3
Unity and Reconstruction	3
Justice and Development	3
Sisters of Afterlife	2
ADFM	2
ATTAC	3
AMDH–Essaouira	3
AMDH–Rabat	3
E-Joussour	2
Ageddim blog	0
ANFC	2
Ameghnas blog	0
Youth Group	1
Forum Group	0
Democratic Path	2
Unified Socialist Party	2
Labor Confederation	2
Employees’ Union	3

Note. 0= no information ; 1= little information; 2= fairly sufficient information; 3= extensive information.

5.3 Website updating.

Studying the freshness of a website (i.e., how often the site is updated and to what extent), provides valuable insight into the potential of the website as an information

provider and resource, and its ability not only to attract users, but also and more significantly to “encourage them to return” (Gibson & Ward, 2000, p. 5). The effort deployed by a group to update a website provides insight into the importance the platform plays in the group’s activities, and the extent to which the Internet in general is used as a tool of collective action. While analyzing many structural aspects of a website, such as user-friendliness and interactivity, can provide an idea about the platform’s potential as a tool of communication, studying how up-to-date a site is, or its “updatedness,” reveals whether some of this potential is being actualized in practice—what Gibson and Ward (2000) describe as the “delivery” of a website (p. 52). To examine the freshness of the websites under study, the textual content was coded for the number of new items added and the frequency²⁸ of updating during a one-month period, between December 17, 2008 and January 16 2009. The frequency of updating was measured using three codes: daily updating, weekly updating, and longer-than-weekly updating. To homogenize results, the data was further coded on a scale from (1) to (4), with (1) corresponding to “very low,” (2) to “low,” (3) to “medium,” and (4) to “high.”

Results demonstrate that more than half of the websites (nine) scored “low,” as they were updated only a few times during one month. Three websites scored medium, as they are updated on a weekly basis, while only six scored high (i.e., they are updated on a daily basis). The majority of medium- and high-scoring websites belong to grassroots movements, namely Islamic, Amazigh and, to some extent, alter-globalization movements. Low-scoring websites belong to professional and leftist-oriented SMOs and parties, trade union organizations, and included the two blogs belonging to the

²⁸ This was measured by using three codes: daily updating, weekly updating, and longer than weekly updating.

unemployed graduates' movement. Another key observation about the results is that with the exception of the Islamic movement's websites, those that scored satisfactorily on this function are either wikis or collective blogs, in contrast to low-scoring ones that are standard website format maintained by a single organization (see table 7).

Table 7.

Website freshness.

Website/SMO	New items added	Frequency of updates	Score
Justice and Spirituality	61	daily	3
Unity and Reconstruction	231	daily	3
Justice and Development	101	daily	3
E-Jousour	98	daily	3
Ageddim blog	180	daily	3
Ameghnas blog	43	daily	3
Sister of Afterlife	15	weekly	2
ATTAC	44	weekly	2
AMDH–Rabat	24	weekly	2
ADFM	4	more than a week	1
AMDH–Essaouira	9	more than a week	1
ANFC	4	more than a week	1
Youth Group	17	More than a week	1
Forum Group	8	More than a week	1
Democratic Path	3	More than a week	1
Unified Socialist Party	5	More than a week	1
Labor Confederation (CDT)	3	More than a week	1
Employees' Union (USF)	6	More than a week	1

Note. Code 1 = very low; code 2 = low; code 3 = medium; code 4 = high.

These results confirm many of the preliminary observations I made while surveying a large number of websites for sampling purposes. The issue of sustainability—i.e., the incapacity of most SMOs to continue using and updating websites over significant periods of time—is a major problem hindering the appropriation of the Internet in collective action, one that emerged from in-depth interviewing of social movements' activists (see Chapter Seven).

Though access to resources and ability to mobilize them can influence the degree of efficiency and sustainability in using the Internet, the above results show that these factors do not determine this process. Grassroots movements using collective platforms like blogs and wikis, for instance, are able to overcome many of the difficulties facing single-organization websites by sharing the effort and resources needed to update a website. This is the case of the Ageddim collective's blog that is maintained by one person and relies on the contributions of a large number of dispersed activists.

Furthermore, the infrequent updates on some websites can be attributed to a collective action repertoire used by certain social movements, as well as to their objectives. For example, groups constituting the unemployed graduates movement have a very limited agenda. Their use of the blogging tool is, therefore, restricted to one single issue, which partly explains the small quantity of items posted on them. These blogs, in fact, are not information-oriented; they function mainly as communication platforms and coordination tools for their groups. Mostly, the use of these blogs intensifies around periods when there is offline action or when there is a need to organize national assemblies and elections (see Chapter Seven for more discussion of this issue). This behaviour is not particular to this movement, however, as social movements are recognized as "characteristically alternat[ing] between 'visible' and 'latent' phases" (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 94). The website of the Employees' Syndical Union may not be frequently updated, but its purpose appears to be in providing a large number of services for members, mainly documents, forms, and various types of information maintained in folders in the sidebars of the website. Thus, although analysis may provide few insights into usage patterns and differences between websites, results should be

interpreted in the context of each group's organizational structure, collective action tactics, and objectives.

5.4 Direct mobilization.

The notion of "mobilization" is central to social movement theory. Mobilization refers to the incorporation of various processes in collective action, from access to material and non-material resources to the production of frames and symbols that delimit a movement's collective identity and field of action. Scholars have argued that the Internet favours a wide range of mobilization actions, such as disseminating information and symbols, coordinating action and building alliances and solidarity networks (Atton, 2004; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Downing, 2001). In this section, "mobilization" is used to refer to the use of the Internet to enlist direct support for a movement or a SMO and its collective action efforts, such as recruitment of new members, collection of funds, and participation in online campaigns. To analyze this function, eight codes have been used to designate various online-based and offline forms of direct mobilization: 1) becoming a member or joining; 2) volunteering; 3) donating; 4) boycotting; 5) signing a petition; 6) e-mail campaigning; 7) creating urgent alerts; 8) creating an action calendar.

Analysis was conducted by observing the studied websites for the absence or presence of these features, and coding them with either (0) for absence or (1) for presence. Results show that the use of online-based mobilization functions is very limited on the majority of the studied websites (see table 8 below). The most used features are the "action calendar," found on 16 websites, followed by "urgent alerts," which are found on nine of the websites. However, only five websites have a "sign up" or "become a member" feature; two have "a petition to sign" and "join e-mail-campaign" features, while the

“boycott” feature is present on only one website. Finally, none of the websites contains either the “donate” or “volunteer” features (see figure 6).

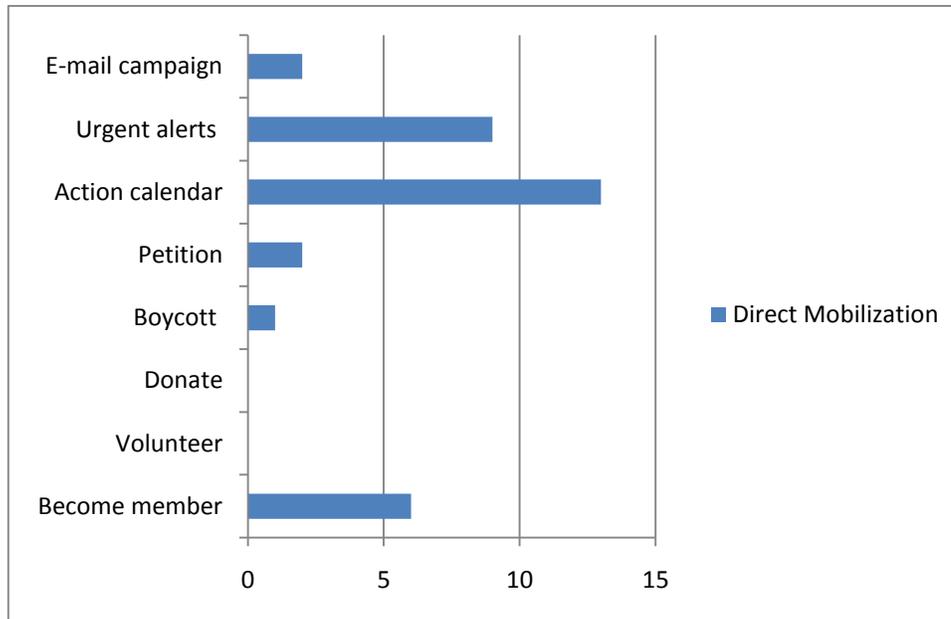


Figure 6. Use of direct mobilization features on the websites.

Several observations emerge from the results above. First, it is clear that the Internet is used mainly to support offline mobilization, rather than to create online based ones.

Many types of digital divides contribute to this; inequalities between members in terms of access to and use of the Internet; a general societal digital divide that concerns the bulk of people in Morocco; and insufficient access to material and human resources. Compared to offline mobilization, online mobilization-oriented features can be effective only if they target the general public and not just adherents and sympathizers. Online petitions and boycotting campaigns, for instance, are significant only if they can enlist a large number of people from among actual and potential members, and, especially, general users who may not share a movement’s core values, but who might become motivated by a particular issue. However, the number of Internet users is still low in Morocco and awareness about the political applications of the medium is limited among existing users.

In many cases, SMOs prefer to use other online tools, such as e-mail lists and social networking interfaces such as Facebook, in addition to other ICTs such as mobile phones, because they are faster, cheaper, and more secure than websites (see Chapter Seven for further discussion of this issue).

Table 8.
Direct mobilization features.

Website/SMO	Join	Vol.	Don.	Boy.	Pet.	Cal.	Ale.	E-mail	Total
Justice & Charity	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Unity & Rec.	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Justice & Dev.	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
Sisters of Afterlife	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
ADFM	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
ATTAC	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	5
AMDH–Essaouira	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
AMDH–Rabat	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
E-Jousour	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3
Ageddim blog	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Ameghnas blog	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
ANFC	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Youth group	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Forum group	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Democratic Path	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Unified Socialist Par.	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Labor Confederation	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Employees’ Union	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	6	0	0	1	2	16	9	2	34

Note. : Code 0 = absent; code 1 = present. Vol.= Volunteer; Don.= Donate; Pet.= Petition; Cal.= Calendar.

Moreover, SMOs, particularly those using radical tactics and espousing contentious agendas, remain suspicious vis-à-vis a state that often resorts to both “legal” and extrajudicial procedures against them. It is understandable that these groups avoid posting sensitive information about members and membership or action plans that can be used against them. In a country where contentious SMOs are frequently harassed, legally pursued, and fined by the state under various pretexts, open and direct online mobilization

strategies are double-edged, and though using them can help bypass the state-monitored public sphere, it can also lead to prison terms. Furthermore, installing recruitment features such as personal accounts and sign-up software requires additional human and technical resources that are beyond the means of the majority of SMOs struggling to secure basic resources for mobilization. Equally important, because e-commerce has only been initiated in the country in the last two years and on a limited scale, the “donating money” or “purchasing products” features are unthinkable for all SMOs.

5.5 Permanent hyperlinks and fields of networks.

Networks and networking have always been central to the structure and collective action of social movements. Often described as being “networks of networks” (Della Porta & Mosca, 2005; Diani & McAdam, 2003), social movements are generally based on a large and complex web of organizations, groups, and individuals. Moreover, they form alliances with diverse social actors, including SMOs, media, and political parties with whom they share common objectives, ideological background, and resources. As noted by many commentators (see literature review in Chapter Three), networking has become essential to contemporary social movement collective action, which has been immensely facilitated by ICTs, particularly the mobile phone and the Internet.

The networking potential of the Internet is commonly associated with its hyperlink feature, one of the major characteristics of the Internet (Downes & McMillan, 2000; Holt, 2004; Killoran, 2001; Liu, 2003; Warnick, 2006). The hyperlinked structure of the Internet is, in fact, what defines it as “a network of networks” (Berners-Lee, 1999; Della Porta & Mosca, 2005). Hyperlinks serve diverse functions such as providing sources of information, expressing membership or affiliation in a group or organization, and

advertising a product, among many others (Halvais, 2008, p. 45). Moreover, hyperlinks can serve as a tool to boost the visibility of a website on the Internet.

Achieving visibility (i.e., a higher ranking) on the Internet can be difficult due to the nature of online communication, which is characterized by a conflicting pattern: the voluminous quantity of online content on the one hand, and short attention span that users can devote to viewing such content, on the other (Webster, 2008). Koopmans and Zimmermann (2007) distinguish between two means through which political websites can achieve visibility, namely “vertical, hierarchical selection” via search engines, or “horizontal, network selection” via hyperlinks found on other websites (p. 22). The Google search engine, for instance, ranks Web pages in accordance with their centrality within a network of hyperlinks. Bloggers are known to try to boost the ranking of their weblogs by linking them to highly visible websites. This practice has developed into “Google bombing,” an attempt to manipulate Web ranking by “encouraging a large number of Web authors to create a hyperlink to a website with anchor text containing a specific word or phrase” (Halavais, 2008, p. 49).

The importance of the hyperlink for collective action goes beyond its immediate merit of increasing the visibility and ranking of websites. Commentators have argued that one of the strongest impacts of the Internet on social movements resides in its facilitation of coordination and networking between groups and organizations on a global level, especially as collective action-building involves negotiation and interaction with allies, adversaries, and bystanders (Taylor & Whittier, 1993; Melucci, 1996).

Summarizing these implications for social movements, De La Piscina (2007), points out:

Technology transforms the actions of social movements: determines their agenda, conditions their modus operandi, and broadens their range of influence. For this effort to obtain the maximum return possible, it must work as a network, in a cooperative way, connected to other movements, associations, communities, groups, and individuals that have similar concerns and/or similar objectives. (p. 78)

As such, studying the use of hyperlinks on SMOs' websites can allow us to map out the web of relationships and networks in which a SMO is engaged. It can also help us understand how SMOs try to mark off the boundaries of their social relations that include affinities and differences with other social actors. Through hyperlinks, SMOs can connect to one another, creating networks of solidarity, which is essential for "expanding the chains of equivalents between different struggles against oppression" (Hands, 2007, p. 91). Moreover, by linking sites, texts, sources, and frames that share particular interpretations of the world, hyperlinks help establish what White (1992) calls "networks of meanings," thus contributing to the reinforcement of the social movement's capacity to challenge hegemony (p. 65). Besides, SMOs may not, in theory, connect only to groups and sources with which they share similar ideological backgrounds and objectives, but also to those with which they may oppose or disagree, whether partially or entirely. Hyperlinks can contribute to establishing an agonistic instead of antagonistic public sphere in which different views and ideologies are expressed, come into opposition with one another, and yet remain tolerated.

External hyperlinks (as differentiated from internal ones that refer to text inside the website) found on SMOs' websites can be divided into two types. There are permanent

links, placed on the homepage or in a special folder containing the preference list of connections to the particular SMO. The other type consists in non-permanent hyperlinks provided in the body of text or on the homepage that can be used for diverse reasons, such as referring to a source of information or providing a link to a solidarity campaign or petition. For the purposes of the present study, analysis will be limited to permanent hyperlinks since they are part of the structural features of any website. Non-permanent/textual hyperlinks are discussed in Chapter Six below. Coding of hyperlinks was performed by counting the links that are placed directly in the sidebars or in a special folder on the homepage. After preliminary observation of existing links and their categories, hyperlinks were coded into seven categories in accordance with their geographical background and most defining characteristics:

- a) affiliated websites (aff.);
- b) national civil society (NCS);
- c) regional civil society (RCS);
- d) international civil society (ICS);
- e) mainstream media (MSM);
- f) alternative media (Alt);
- g) other.

“Affiliated websites” refers to those that belong either to the group/organization itself (as is the case with the personal website of Justice and Spirituality’s leader), or to an organization or movement of which the group is a local chapter or member (as is the case with ATTAC–Morocco in relation to ATTAC International). A link in this case is only

counted if it has an independent URL address on the Web. “Mainstream” and “alternative” media include both national and international media outlets.

Analysis shows that there are two dominant types of permanent hyperlinks on the websites in this study: links to “affiliated organizations and groups” (34%) and links to “international civil society groups” (20%) (see table 9 below). In contrast to these two categories, results reflect a very low linking to national and regional civil societies’ organizations. Moreover, results also show that links to mainstream and alternative websites are almost equal. However, these two categories were not equally distributed among all types of social movements and SMOs. Though linkage to affiliated websites is high on most of the websites studied, links in this category constitute all the hyperlinks found on the four studied Islamic-oriented websites, namely those of Justice and Charity, Unity and Construction, Justice and Development, and Sisters of Afterlife, and the majority of those belonging to the Amazigh cultural movement. By contrast, links to INGOs are dominant, specifically on leftist-oriented professional SMOs, namely ADFM, ATTAC, and E-Joussour. The majority of links to mainstream media are found on the blog belonging to The Youth, one of the unemployed graduate movement groups, and on the Democratic Path party’s website.

Hyperlinks are a pivotal online feature whose function is to do more than just establish a connection between two or more points: they “can express meanings, they betray biases, they invite or suggest inferences, and sometimes they manipulate the reader” (Burbules & Callister, 2000, p. 84). Moreover, one major function of hyperlinks is to establish the boundaries within which a social movement “marks the social territories of group relations” between itself and others (Hunt & Benford, 2004, p. 433).

As far as Moroccan social movements are concerned, results show that hyperlinks are used to establish two main types of boundaries: those marking the movement or organization as a cohesive group and those linking the movement or group to INGOs and agencies (see figure 7). In between these two boundaries, there remains a significant gap, testifying to the fragmentation of the national and regional online public spheres.

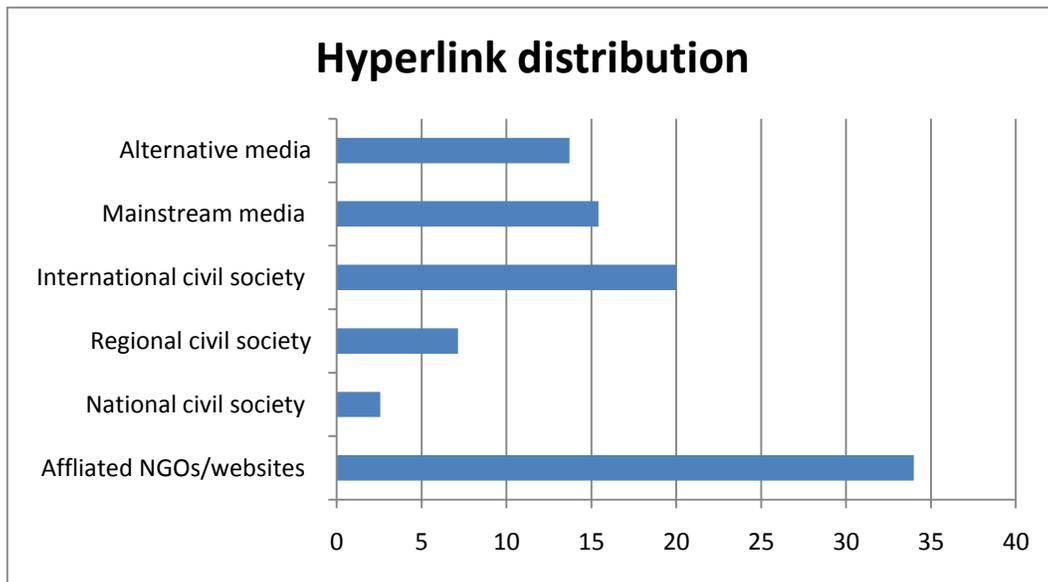


Figure 7. Distribution of permanent hyperlinks.

On the one hand, the prevalence of affiliated links in general indicates that this function is appropriated by the majority of SMOs and groups, mostly to enhance internal communication and cohesion—more than to establish connections with external groups. This is particularly relevant for identity-oriented SMOs and SMs that link exclusively or predominantly to other websites belonging to the same movement or organization. As such, the networking potential of the Internet is used primarily to promote internal cohesion or “bonding” at the expense of networking or “bridging,” to borrow Putnam and Goss’ concept (2002, p. 9). Moroccan Islamic SMOs are the most self-oriented, which proves Tilly and Tarrow (2007) right when they claim that, generally speaking, “religious

movements aim primarily at internal change” (p. 6). But this characteristic also reflects and contributes to the balkanization of Moroccan civil society and the online public sphere, which hinders the possibility of building large networks that extend beyond ideological affiliations.

On the other hand, professional and leftist-oriented SMOs link predominantly to foreign NGOs, development agencies, and institutions at the expense of intra-linking at the national and regional levels. The prevalence of international civil society links on many leftist-oriented websites illustrates the multifarious as well as asymmetrical relationship between Moroccan leftist SMOs and INGOs, which is characterized by cooperation, coordination, and dependence, on the part of Morocco. The advances in civil and human rights in Morocco during the last two decades could only be achieved “as a result of coordinated action inside and outside the country,” resulting in the development of “transnational human rights networks” (Granzer, 1999, pp. 115–116). While a large number of Moroccan SMOs depend on INGOs for funds, political support, and solidarity, the use of the Internet has intensified this dependence since Moroccan organizations need help setting up and maintaining websites, as well as enhancing their Web visibility.

Furthermore, the scarcity of links to Moroccan websites can also be explained by two main factors: the low presence of Moroccan SMOs on the Web and the use of other online tools, mainly e-mail listserves. First, while the number of legal associations in the country is estimated at more than 40,000 (El-Houdaigui, 2004), the number of those operating websites does not exceed a few hundred, most of which are no longer updated a short time after their creation. Second, most SMOs use e-mail lists that function as

alternative networking tools at the national level. Examples are the Press-Maroc and PAD-Maroc e-lists used by leftist groups to circulate information and coordinate action at the national level (see Chapter Five for more details on this issue).

Website/SMO	Aff.	NCS	Reg.	ICS	MSM	Alt	Other	Total
Justice & Charity	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Unity & Rec.	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Justice & Dev.	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Sisters of Afterlife	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
ADFM	0	5	0	36	0	0	11	52
ATTAC	3	0	6	20	2	5	3	39
AMDH–Essaouira	11	1	0	1	0	0	0	13
AMDH–Rabat	1	0	0	0	0	20	0	21
E-Jousour	2	1	5	10	0	0	0	18
Ageddim blog	12	1	0	0	0	5	0	18
Ameghnas blog	30	0	0	0	0	3	0	33
ANFC	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Youth Group	7	0	0	0	31	2	1	41
Forum Group	8	0	0	1	1	4	0	14
Democratic path	1	0	13	0	0	6	0	20
Unified soc. party	0	0	1	1	20	1	0	23
Labour Con.	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Employees' Union	6	1	0	0	0	2	2	19
Total	119	9	25	70	54	48	27	350
Percentage	34	2.57	7.14	20	15.42	13.71	7.71	100

Note. Aff.: Affiliated websites; NCS: National civil society; RCS: Regional civil society; ICS: International civil society (ICS); MSM: mainstream media; Alt.: Alternative media.

5.6 Interactivity.

Interactivity has widely been described in the literature as “a key variable for studying the uses and effects of new media technologies” (Sundar, Kalyanrman, & Brown, 2003, p. 32). As far as computer mediated communication (CMC) is concerned, various definitions and conceptualization have been advanced in studying this key notion. There are two broad types of interactivity: user-to-user and user-to-technology or -

medium (Lee, 2000; Stromer-Galley, 2000; Sundar et al., 2003). Sundar et al. (2003), for instance, distinguish between a “functional,” or user-to-medium interactivity, and one that is defined as “contingency” or user-to-user (p. 33). Functional interactivity refers to “the interface’s capacity for conducting a dialogue or information exchange between users and the interface” (p. 33). As to contingency interactivity, the definition of which is based on the work of Rafaeli (1988), it is a message-based conceptualization of interactivity that seeks to analyze levels of reciprocity within exchanges between users. Similarly, Warnick (2006) distinguishes between two main conceptualizations of interactivity: a user-to-medium and a user-to-user interactivity. The first view defines interactivity in terms of the technological features of the medium, “such as hyperlinking, activating media downloads, filling in feedback forms, and playing online games” (Warnick, 2006, p. 69). The second view claims that “interactivity occurs only when messages sustain reciprocal exchanges between communicators” (p. 69), via such means as e-mail, forums, and chat-rooms. In addition to these two main conceptualizations, some scholars have argued that interactivity may be “in the eye of the beholder”—in other words, that it should be understood through users’ experiences and perceptions (Lee, 2000; McMillan, 2000; Downes & McMillan, 2000). Warnick (2006), for example, explains that “the requisite criterion in this framework is that users must actively attend and respond to messages in order for there to be interactivity” (p. 70).

From the perspective of social movement theory, we can advance that interactivity on websites contributes to various processes, mainly mobilization and collective identity formation. Interactivity is one process through which the Internet contributes to what social movement theorists term “micromobilization”—i.e., “the collaborative work

individuals do on behalf of a social movement or social movement organization to muster, ready, coordinate, use, and reproduce material resources, labor, and ideas for collective action” (Hunt & Benford, 2004, p. 483). In the same vein, Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986) use micromobilization to refer to “the various interactive and communicative processes that affect frame alignment” or “the linkage of individual and SMO activities, goals, and ideology” (p. 464). Using interactive features on websites, members and sympathizers thus have the opportunity to contribute to the movement or organization’s action by redistributing material, producing content, and sharing ideas and resources. In doing so, individual users also contribute to consolidating affective bonds and connecting themselves and others to common goals, which form the core of social movements.

Interactivity has also been labeled as “essential to the formation of collective meaning and identity among members of social movements” (Stein, 2009, p. 760). The collective identity process, as Melucci (1996) argues, refers to “a network of active relationships between actors who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate, and make decisions” (p. 71). In the same vein, Polletta & Jasper (2001) contend that “collective identities are expressed in cultural materials—names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on” (p. 284). Accordingly, by allowing users to contribute to the movement’s mobilizing action and efforts, and to interact with leaders and with one another, online interactive features contribute to mediated and non-mediated communication processes through which collective identity, consciousness, and emotional bonds are developed and maintained. As such, online interaction does not supplant offline interaction, nor can it exist without prior social relationships. Instead, it

provides another dimension through which collective identity can be mediated and created.

For the purposes of this research, three types of interactivity are identified and used as a guide for the coding system used to analyze interactivity features on the websites under study—namely, user-to-document, user-to-system, and user-to-user or interpersonal interactivity. This categorization is one of the most commonly used in the literature and covers the major aspects of interactivity, particularly within new media studies (Carpentier, 2002; McMillan, 2002; Szuprowicz, 1995). These types of interactivity, McMillan (2006) argues, “do provide a basic framework for the investigation of the past, present, and future of interactivity” (p. 209). Thus, user-to-user interactivity deals with the “ways that individuals interact with each other” (p. 209). User-to-document interactivity refers to users’ interaction with documents and their creators, which involves “both perceived interaction with content creators and actual creation of content” (p. 213). Finally, user-to-system interaction focuses on the ways that “the human communicates directly with computers and other new media systems” (p. 218).

Interactivity features were coded either as (1), if they are allowed by the website, or as (0), if they are absent. In order to provide results that are as valid as possible, features were considered as “present” only when their links were active; features leading to broken links were disregarded. In total, 15 features were coded. These features are distributed within the three categories identified above, namely user-to-content, user-to-user, and user-to-system. Table 10 provides a summary of results for all the studied websites, while table 11 provides detailed results for each individual website.

Results show that the majority of the websites scored highest on user-to-system interactivity, medium on user-to-user interactivity, and low on user-to-content interactivity (see table 10). Only eight of the 18 studied websites allow users to comment on articles and other content, four websites have the “contact the author” feature, and only three invite users to contribute content. User-to-user interactivity scores slightly higher than content-to-user interactivity since five websites have a “synchronous chat” feature, and six have discussion boards or forums. But user-to-system interactivity is clearly the dominant type on the majority of websites as four features are found on at least half of the studied websites.

Table 10.			
Interactivity features on all websites.			
Features	Frequency	Percentage	Median
<i>User-to-content interactivity</i>			5
Comment on article	8	44.4	
Submit/contribute content	3	16.6	
Contact author/contributor	4	22.2	
<i>User-to-user interactivity</i>			5.25
Synchronous discussion interface	5	27.7	
Discussion or chat board	7	38.8	
Share article via e-mail	6	33.3	
Share via social media platforms	3	16.6	
<i>User-to-system interactivity</i>			8
Audio/video material	14	77.7	
Contact Web master	13	72.2	
Newsletter sign up/RSS feed	9	50	
Add to favorites or as homepage	4	22.2	
Download content	7	38.8	
Existence of website plan	2	11.1	
Search website field/archive	14	77.7	
Polls	1	11.1	

Commentators have argued that “control” and “reciprocal communications” are the two main variables in interactivity, since “the degree of interactivity is determined by the degree of control, exchange of roles and mutual discourse [that] participants have in a

communication process” (Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988, p. 10). Rafaeli (1988), a key theorist in the field, defines interactivity as “an expression of the extent that, in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions” (p. 111). Thus, Rafaeli provides a gradational taxonomy in which “full interactivity” is distinguished from “non-interactivity” and “quasi-interactivity” (p. 111). Fully interactive exchanges or acts of communication are those in which “all subsequent messages were relevant to both the content and meaning of earlier messages” (Warnick, 2006, p. 73). According to this conceptualization, most interactive features, such as all user-to-system and many of the user-to-user types of interactivity, can be labeled as quasi-interactive. McMillan (2006) provides a model that distinguishes between “feedback,” “responsive dialogue,” and “mutual dialogue” (p. 213), on the basis of the degree of control the sender and receiver have over a communication exchange. She notes that while feedback tools, like e-mail, open two-way communication channels, they “[provide] the person who is giving the feedback with relatively little control over the communication exchange” (p. 213). For McMillan, full interactivity only happens when there is a “mutual dialogue” which is not only “responsive,” but “also gives more egalitarian control to all participants so that sender and receiver roles become indistinguishable” (p. 213), as can occur in chat-rooms.

According to the analysis, the websites included in the study scored high on quasi-interactivity and responsive interactivity and very low on full-interactivity or mutual dialogue. While their user-to-system features give users some control over communication, particularly by allowing them to customize the way they receive and

consume content, these features restrict any control users might want over the production of content itself. Control over user-to-document interactivity observed on the majority of the websites under study is not typical of only Moroccan SMOs, since various studies done on political websites in the context of developed countries have reached similar conclusions. One such study (Warnick, 2006), for instance, advances three reasons: lack of resources to respond to users, fear of losing control over discourse, and fear of losing “strategic ambiguity” (p. 72). Norris’ (2003) important study of European political party websites found that they function more as vehicles for top-down provision of information than for bottom-up interactive communication, even if they provide more interactivity than traditional media. Although these studies were conducted on political parties and not on SMOs and SMOs, their findings largely match those of the present research.

While analysis has revealed shared patterns between the studied websites, it also highlighted important variations amongst them. In fact, the results of this initial coding were further coded using a scale from (1) to (3) (see table 11). Analysis reveals that the overwhelming majority of professional and leftist websites scored “low”, and those that did not get a low score still did not score high, which ranks them behind grassroots movements’ websites. The most interactive websites are those belonging to grassroots movements, namely the Islamic movement, in addition to the blogs belonging to the Amazigh and unemployed graduates’ movements. On the one hand, this illustrates that the communication flow in professional organizations’ websites is predominantly downward oriented, establishing a unidirectional relationship between the website/SMO Web master, the leaders, and authoritative authors, and the users who are perceived as passive consumers. This conclusion will be further corroborated by the results of the

analysis of frame entrepreneurs in Chapter Six. On the other hand, the results indicate that movements relying on extensive grassroots bases, and that are flexibly organized and geographically distributed, appropriate the Internet in a way that enhances lateral cohesion and communication between members, and between members and their groups. What is more, access to material resources is not a guarantee that the Internet potential is appropriated effectively, while their absence does not prevent many groups from using free software and platforms to maximize their communication capacities, as the example of blogs illustrates.

Table 11.
Interactivity on individual websites.

SMO/SM	User-content	User-user	User-system	Total	Percentage
	No.	No.	No		
Justice & Charity	0	3	5	8	53.2
Unity & Rec.	2	3	7	12	80
Justice & Dev.	0	0	5	5	33.3
Sisters of Afterlife	0	2	1	3	20
ADFM	0	1	4	5	33.3
ATTAC	1	0	4	5	33.3
AMDH–Essaouira	0	1	1	2	13.3
AMDH–Rabat	1	2	4	7	46.6
E-Joussour	1	1	4	6	40
Ageddim blog	2	2	6	10	66.6
Ameghnas blog	3	1	4	8	53.2
ANFC	1	0	4	5	33.3
Youth Group	2	3	6	11	73.3
Forum Group	2	1	4	7	46.6
Democratic path	0	0	3	3	20
Unified soc. Party	1	1	3	5	33.3
Labor Con.	0	0	1	1	6.66
Employees' Union	0	2	4	6	40
Total	16	23	60	109	

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has yielded mixed results about the functions of the websites studied. First, analysis of user-friendliness demonstrated that the majority of websites are satisfactorily designed to attract users and facilitate communication. This can be partly explained by the fact that many activists and groups have accumulated experience and knowledge about the particularity of online communication during the last decade. The sharp decrease in IT service costs, and the availability of free and more sophisticated online software can also explain the amelioration of Web design, in general. Moreover, many websites have been set up through financial and technical support from INGOs and development agencies.

Second, as platforms for the dissemination of information, the websites performed differently for the two functions used to assess this role, namely “information on SMs/SMOs” and “updatedness”. Analysis has shown that while most websites provide sufficient or extensive information on the groups to which they belong, nearly 60% of them scored low for the second function. Like user-friendliness, providing information about the organization or movement is a one-time job that requires a limited amount of sustained work over time. Updating a website, however, requires a concerted and organized effort, from the stage of collecting material and editing information to posting and arranging everything on the website. Moreover, unlike Web design that can be outsourced to a private company, updating must be performed by the group’s members on a daily basis, which usually puts severe pressure on the organizational and material resources of a group (see discussion of this issue in Chapter Seven). The chapter has confirmed the idea that “resource-rich groups are more likely to have websites with more

content, an attractive layout, and more technical possibilities” (Edward, 2004, p. 118). However, it also demonstrated that efficiency in using Web potential is not necessarily linked to the availability of material resources. Analysis has demonstrated that a blog maintained by one person functions much better than one maintained by an organization.

Third, another key Web function tested is the use of the Internet to build network solidarity and meaning at the local and transnational levels. Analysis has demonstrated that the majority of websites are either inward linking—in other words, connected to websites belonging to the same organization or movement—or predominantly linked to INGOs and development agencies. On the one hand, the results of analysis corroborate information yielded by in-depth interviewing (see Chapter Seven), which show that local groups are increasingly using the Internet to build networks of solidarity, especially with Western NGOs, in order to maximize their capacity to influence the local public sphere and exercise pressure on the Moroccan state. By contrast, the studied websites are rarely used to establish networks at the national or regional levels, which could be attributed to the weak presence of Moroccan SMOs online and to the use of more convenient and easier networking tools such as e-mail lists.

Fourth, the inward-linking orientation of the websites identified above has another function, namely that of enhancing internal cohesion and collective identity within the SMs. This is further reinforced by the use of interactive features, which are also central characteristics of the Internet as a medium and artifact. The websites are dominated by two types of interactive features: user-to-system and user-to-user. The first category allows users to have some control over the consumption of information and data presented on the websites and thus to contribute to mobilization action of the group

(micromobilization). The second enables members to interact with one another and with leaders either through one-to-one or one-to-many tools, which also contributes to the reinforcement of the group's internal cohesion and solidarity as well as its collective identity. User-to-document type of interactivity, however, has very limited use on the overwhelming majority of the websites, which shows that users can have control over the consumption of discourse, but not over its production. This casts doubt on the ability of the Internet to contribute to genuine participatory communication. It is true that content on many of the websites in the present study is collectively produced by diverse SMOs and groups. Others feature a high number of members who contribute articles (see frame analysis in Chapter Six below). Nonetheless, not allowing users, either members or non-members of the groups, to comment on content or at least contact authors restricts the production of discourse either to SMOs' leaders or, at best, to a limited number of elite members.

Finally, analysis has revealed that the majority of websites are used mainly for offline direct mobilization and rarely for online mobilization. This is not surprising, given the existing digital divides marking the diffusion of the Internet in a society that restricts the possibilities of using the Internet to reach the majority of members, sympathizers, and a portion of general users, which is required for successful mobilization.

These results corroborate to a large extent similar findings in the literature. For example, in her study on US social movements' websites, Stein (2009) found that the "the majority of national SMOs are not utilizing the web to its full potential" (p. 767). Stein attributes this to various reasons, such as "organizational goals, strategies and objectives, organizational resources and organizational efforts to share or pool resources

made available to movement supporters” (p. 767). While sharing these conclusions, the present study has also highlighted many variations that are proper to the context of Morocco and social movements there.

Analysis has shown that websites belonging to grassroots social movements, namely the Islamic, Amazigh, alter-globalization, and, to some extent, the unemployed graduates’ movements, are clearly the most successful in terms of exploiting the Internet’s potential for encouraging collective action. Professional and leftist-oriented SMOs’ websites, by contrast, perform the least well. Flexibility of organizational structure, combining both institutional and anarchist collective action; the ability to recruit from among the young and to attract skilful volunteers; and, above all, embeddedness and rootedness in local social networks allow these groups to overcome some of the major constraints related to the appropriation of the Internet, specifically, the scarcity of material and human resources (see table 12 for more details). While a hierarchical structure and professional work have enabled many SMOs, such as the human rights and feminist groups, to enhance the efficiency of their action and their ability to lobby the state on various issues, it also led to their gradual isolation from their social bases that are critical to maintaining the sustainability of Web projects. Striking a balance between professionalism and hierarchical organization and a non-hierarchical structure is a delicate task for many groups, as Tarrow (1998) remarks:

The dilemma of hierarchical movement organizations is that, when they permanently internalize their base, they lose their capacity for disruption, but when they move in the opposite direction, they lack the infrastructure to maintain a sustained interaction with allies, authorities, and supporters. This suggests a

delicate balance between formal organization and autonomy—one that can only be bridged by strong, informal, and non-hierarchical connective structures. (p. 137)

Among the groups that are best able to achieve this balance are Islamic-oriented SMOs, which explains why their websites have scored highest than all the sites studied. On one hand, these SMOs benefit from solid and well-organized institutions; on the other, they draw on large grassroots constituencies that are active in a large number of local groups and associations inside Morocco and in the diaspora.

Table 12.
Characteristics of top scoring groups and websites.

Groups	Web platforms
Grassroots movements	Web 2.0 software Collaborative production of content
Geographically dispersed	Heavy, but not exclusive, reliance on open source and collective platforms
Use mainly radical forms of direct action	Promote inward networking
Often repressed by government	Promote construction of collective identity as a main form of mobilization
Do not rely on print media as main communication tool	Use vast number of interactive tools
Rely totally or in a great party on voluntary work	Frequently updated

To sum up, feature analysis has demonstrated that Moroccan social movements are able to tap some—but not the full—potential of the Internet in collective action. It has also illustrated the great variations between and within movements in their appropriation of this potential. These two main conclusions will be further confirmed by other ones

highlighted in coming chapters: the impact of the Internet on collective action in the country is deeply marked by both the new possibilities offered by the medium, as well as the serious limitations resulting from the mediation of the appropriation of the Internet through local and global socioeconomic, cultural, and political conditions and structures. Despite the usefulness of feature analysis as a research method, however, one of its limitations is that it concentrates chiefly on structural aspects and, consequently, does not shed light on the content of the websites. Moreover, it studies websites as having a fixed temporal structure, and does not allow for the possibility of seeing how they function over a period of time. To address these limitations, the content of the studied websites will be analyzed using framing analysis, which is the main subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Framing Analysis

The Use of the Internet in Collective Action Framing: The Multifarious Aspects of Mobilization

Introduction

Despite the relative longevity and size of the literature dealing with collective action through social movement theory, the study of collective frames and framing processes has acquired a central importance in the literature only in the last two decades. The lacunae in the literature becomes more glaring in regard to the use of the Internet by social movements, as existing studies have not examined the content of the websites in much detail and did not use framing analysis to evaluate it (see, for instance, Stein, 2009; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2004).

Williams (2004) argues that the most important contribution of framing studies to the field is their focus on the “symbolic” dimensions in the action of social movements as they “articulate grievances, generate consensus on the importance and forms of collective action to be pursued, and present rationales for their actions and proposed solutions to adherents, bystanders, and antagonists” (p. 93). Commentators have maintained that social movements’ framing efforts are the foundation of collective action as a whole, because recognizing peculiar situations as unjust precedes the collective action that strives to address the injustice (McAdam, 1982, p. 51).

Additionally, frames may also perform a transformative function in the sense of altering the meaning of object(s) of attention and their relationship to the actor(s),

as ... in the transformation of routine grievances or misfortunes into injustices or mobilizing grievances in the context of collective action (Snow, 2004, p. 384).

In this manner, social movements' framing is not just an anterior process to action; the two processes are interdependent, since both the attribution of meanings and the action determine the process of collective action and its results (p. 404). Framing analysis has one other key contribution—namely, its capacity to demonstrate how individuals become involved in collective action, thus highlighting the interplay between agency and structure in the development and action of social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Williams, 2004). Thus, drawing on social movement theory and framing analysis, the current chapter seeks to answer the following key questions:

- (1) What are the most salient frames on the studied websites?
- (2) To what extent are these websites used to convey alternative and oppositional frames?
- (3) How did the studied SMs/SMOs frame the Gaza War?
- (4) How can we understand the contribution of this framing process to overall social movement mobilization?
- (5) To what extent has the Internet's potential as a medium and technology been appropriated in framing?
- (6) What do framing processes in the websites communicate about the studied SMs/SMOs?

1. Methodology

1.1 Sampling.

In addition to the 18 websites studied in the previous chapter, another website was added to the list, namely the tanmia.ma portal. The Tanmia association (“tanmia” means “development” in Arabic) and its portal are the outcome of cooperation between foreign state agencies: the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which is supervised by the US Department of State; international organizations, such as the Development Gateway Organization; and a private telecommunications consulting firm located in Rabat, called Morocco Trade and Development Services (MTDS). The US Government selected MTDS to serve as the senior consultant in the implementation of the Leland Initiative, an ambitious project to assist 22 African countries in establishing Internet infrastructure and access. While the Tanmia portal is not affiliated with any Moroccan social movement, it was conceived and implemented to provide various services for local civil society groups, such as a detailed database on Moroccan associations, information on the association’s laws and regulations, and resources and information on diverse development issues. The portal also acts as a platform that can be used by all civil society groups to publish articles, announcements, and statements. As such, its inclusion in the current study aims to assess the extent to which a development-oriented website such as this is used by local civil society, especially oppositional social movements, to disseminate and share alternative and critical content and information.

1.2 The case of the Gaza War.

The studied websites were downloaded within a one-month period, between December 17, 2008 and January 16, 2009. The choice of this period was initially

motivated by the fact that, in the previous months, most of the studied social movement groups were actively involved in mobilizing support to demand the release of activists and citizens who were incarcerated in the wake of various social protests that galvanized many regions of the country. Many of these groups were also active during this period to demand the lifting of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. The downloading period also coincided with the three-week attack by the Israelis on the Gaza during the winter of 2008–2009. In fact, major political crises and upheavals constitute an ideal framework for the study of social movements in action. This explains why “much of the recent work on social movement tactics comes out of what is referred to as ‘protest event’ research” (Taylor & Dyke, 2004, p. 267). Thus, while the chapter deals with the role of the websites in political mobilization generally, it focuses on framing and mobilization strategies and tactics used by social movements during the Gaza War, especially those that can help shed light on the appropriation of the Internet’s potential for collective action.

1.3 Framing analysis.

One key observation about the existing literature on social movements’ use of the Internet is that the majority of studies have examined the textual content of websites under the category of “information” (see, for instance, Norris, 2001b, and Stein, 2009). Analyzing web content production as information is a reductive perspective that fails to recognize complex processes involved in social movements’ collective action efforts. By appreciating the link between social movements’ frames and mobilization, framing analysis provides a basis for bridging the gap between the ideational and symbolic dimensions of collective action and direct forms of mobilization. Moreover, framing

analysis provides a suitable framework with which to link online communication with offline action, and allows us to better understand how the Internet's potential and specific characteristics as a technology contribute to social movements' mobilization efforts. Despite its wide currency in social movement literature, no clear-cut conceptualization of framing analysis as a methodology exists, especially with regard to data gathering and analysis. A wide range of methods have been used to study media and collective action frames, such as discourse analysis, content analysis, ethnography, surveys, and in-depth interviewing. Moreover, some theorists have pointed out the existence of a conceptual blurring with regard to the interchangeable use of framing analysis with other approaches, such as discourse analysis (Johnston, 2002; Kitzinger, 2007). For example, Kitzinger (2007) contends that "for some people, framing analysis is achieved through systematic, quantitative content analysis. For others, however, framing analysis is just another word for discourse analysis" (p. 14). Johnston (2002), nonetheless, argues that framing analysis should be distinguished from these pre-established methods with which it shares many features:

despite a shared qualitative orientation to texts, there seem to be two key differences between frame and discourse studies (...). Framing studies mostly describe collective action frames and their role in movement development. Discourse studies treat cultural processes and their effect on what gets talked about. Second, as one might expect, framing studies offer less reference to the actual texts on which the frames are based, while discourse studies tend to analyze the texts more closely. (Johnston, 2002, p. 72)

In order to guarantee a systematic exposition of frame structure within a text, Johnston suggests the use of the “simple tactic that clarifies the textual basis of frame analysis (...) [by listing] the lines of the text on which the categories at various levels are based” (p. 73). Another strategy is the systematic articulation of the frame content through the use of clear categories such as those used by Charlotte Ryan’s (1991) study of media and social movements’ frames. Ryan organized her analysis around four general themes:

- (1) the key issue in the frame; (2) the responsibility/solution proposed in the frame, or its diagnosis and prognosis; (3) the symbols used, especially visual images, metaphors, historical examples, stereotypes, and catch phrases; and (4) the supporting arguments, especially in terms of the historical roots of the grievance, the consequence of the frame’s success, and appeals and links to broader cultural values. (Ryan, as cited in Johnston, pp. 74–75)

In the same vein, Kitzinger (2007) argues that framing analysis can be carried out with “varying degrees of methodological rigour, sophistication or sensitivity” (p. 140). She proposes mixing various methods to analyze multiple aspects of texts and to identify key cues making up the frames, such as “images, language, labels and definitions, offered explanations, assigned responsibility, proposed solutions, contextualization and links, historical associations metaphors, [and] emotional appeals,” among others (pp. 141–2). The current chapter expands on this literature by drawing on key concepts in social movement theory to conduct framing analysis. First, Gamson’s (1992) distinction between three principal components of collective action frames—namely, (1) injustice,

(2) identity, and (3) agency frames—provides a general framework for the analysis of data in this chapter. According to him, the

injustice component refers to the moral indignation expressed in this form of political consciousness. This is not merely a cognitive or intellectual judgement about what is equitable.... [as it] requires a consciousness of motivated human actors who carry some of the onus for bringing about harm and suffering. (p.7)

Agency frames refers to the “consciousness that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through collective action. Agency frames “empower people by defining as potential agents of their own history” (p. 7). As to the identity frame, it refers to “the process of defining this ‘we,’ typically in opposition to some ‘they’ who have different interests or values” (p. 7).

This conceptual model is reinforced by Benford’s and Snow’s (2000) breakdown of the core tasks of framing: “diagnostic framing,” “prognostic framing,” and “motivational framing” (pp. 615–7). Diagnostic framing deals primarily with “problem identification and attributions” (p. 615), wherein “injustice frames” (i.e., identifying victims and amplifying victimhood) constitute the main part of the framing process. Diagnostic framing also pinpoints the “sources of causality blame and culpable agents” (p. 616). Prognostic framing involves the “articulation of a proposed solution to the problem or at least a plan of attack and the strategies for carrying out the plan” (p. 617). As for motivational framing, it is a “call to arms” of sorts, or the “rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies and motive” (p. 617).

These two interlinked models are well suited to the objectives and theoretical premises of the thesis, which focuses on oppositional social movements' uses of the Internet, and examines the extent to which the medium contributes to the development of agonistic public spheres and politics in the context of Morocco. Collective action frames are, indeed, built around "injustice frames," inasmuch as movements facing oppression have to "develop a new diagnosis and remedy for existing forms of suffering, a diagnosis and remedy by which this suffering stands morally condemned" (Moore as cited in Tarrow, 1998, p. 111). Moreover, these models synthesize major interpretations of social movements and collective action, since they emphasize equally the role of opposition and contestation (Touraine, 1981; Tarrow, 1998) with that of collective identity formation (Melucci, 1989; 1994).

Furthermore, the study draws on the concept of "frame resonance" that "describes the relationship between a collective action frame, the aggrieved community that is the target of mobilizing efforts, and the broader culture" (Noakes & Johnson, 2005, p. 11). Thus, Noakes and Johnson identify three variables that affect a frame's resonance: the makers of frames or "entrepreneurs"; the receivers of a frame or targeted audience; and the frame qualities—i.e., their cultural compatibility, consistency, and relevance. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used as a part of the framing analysis. Despite the widespread use of quantitative methods within framing analysis, especially in media studies, Hertog and McLeod (2008) point out that

one shortcoming of quantitative text analysis methods, however, is that many very powerful concepts, central to frames, need not be repeated often to have a great

impact. *One or two references may be enough to set the frame for a large amount of content* [italic added]. (p. 154)

In the same vein, Kitzinger (2007) notes that frames are often condensed in powerful symbols or images, and that “the whole frame does not have to be spelt out in every detail in order to invite readers/viewers to recognize and place the issue within the frame” (p. 141).

Thus, building on the conceptual framework above, the analysis included four main steps. First, the entirety of the data was analyzed to determine the extent to which the studied websites are used to convey the three main collective action frames, namely injustice, identity, and agency. Second, focusing on the data dealing specifically with the Gaza War, Benford and Snow’s (1986, 2000) framing tasks of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing were used to examine how various social movements dealt with the issue and the extent to which they drew on the Internet’s potential to do it. Third, as a part of the process of analyzing frame resonance, makers of frames (i.e., the authors and sources on the websites) were studied to see how each group seeks to achieve the credibility of the frames communicated through the websites.

2. Analysis

2.1 Collective action frames’ salience and patterns.

In order to examine the extent to which the studied websites are used to communicate the key collective action frames of injustice, identity, and agency, a two-step analysis was applied. First, a thematic analysis was used in which an inductive coding was applied to a third of the data. The codes obtained from the pilot study were applied afterwards to the rest of the data. The fact that these codes were only slightly modified at this stage

demonstrates their reliability. Boyatzis (1998) also argues that using inductive analysis to generate codes yields more reliable results than using deductive methods:

Working directly from the raw information enhances appreciation of the information, in addition to eliminating intermediaries as potentially contaminating factors. With a complete view of the information available, the researcher can appreciate gross (i.e., easily evident) and intricate (i.e., difficult-to-discern) aspects of the information. Previously silenced voices or perspectives inherent in the information can be brought forward and recognized. (p. 30)

The unit of coding was the article or single post as defined by a number of markers that include a distinct hyperlink, a title, and an author or a source when available. Each of the three main collective action frames includes a number of themes and sub-themes that are detailed in table 13 below. It is important to note that in the majority of cases, textual units rarely deal with one issue or theme and thus can serve multiple frames. Human rights and identity issues, for instance, often converge and overlap on identity-oriented SM's websites such as in the cases of the Amazigh and Islamic movements. Equally important, the "agency" frame code does not necessarily describe independent units within the data because agency frames are usually interwoven with the other two types of frames at various levels on the websites. For the purposes of this study, agency frames were analyzed by paying attention to the use of the Internet to encourage and sustain direct mobilization, or what Gamson calls "affirmative action", such as protests, sittings, online petitions, among others (p. 69).

The framing analysis has yielded five principal results (see table 14). First, the majority of the websites are used to convey the three core collective action frames,

namely injustice, identity, and, to a lesser extent, agency. Injustice-oriented frames are dominant in the vast majority of websites, with human rights issues constituting the major component of these frames; this is followed by identity frames. There are important variations between the studied social movements with regard to the level of emphasis they put on each of these core frames. Identity frames are more salient on the websites belonging to the Islamic, Amazigh, and feminist/women's SMOs, while injustice frames (human rights, social injustice, lack of democracy) are higher in leftist, alter-globalization, and SMOs' websites. Third, except for the feminist/women's websites and the Tanmia (development) portal, all others feature a relatively high number of items dealing with direct action that constitute the agency frame. Fourth, the attack on Gaza is the most salient issue in the majority of the websites, especially those of the Islamic and alter-globalization SMOs (see below for more details). Finally, attention to gender-related issues is very limited or absent in the majority of the studied Websites.

Table 13.
Main frames and their content.

Core frames	Main themes	Description of themes
Injustice frame	Gaza/Palestine	News about the blockade and the Israeli attack; statements of solidarity; news and reports on demonstrations and other action taken in support of the Palestinians.
	Human rights	Police violence against activists and citizens; arrest and prison sentencing of activists and citizens; violations of freedom of expression and assembly; absence of rule of law and accountability; protest and strikes to denounce human rights violations; other types of action, such as solidarity campaigns and petitions on human rights abuses.
	Social inequality	Poverty and marginalization of people and regions; exploitation of workers and poor people; unequal distribution of resources and income.
	Democracy & citizenship Gender inequalities	Need to develop civic participation; lack of fair elections and real representation; governance issues. Gender equality; social and cultural injustices against women; legal discrimination against women; general discussion of and report on gender issues.
Identity frame	Cultural, ethnic, & religious identifications	Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. “Islamic” versus secular identity. Amazigh versus Arab identity. Celebration of special calendar dates and events; obituaries on famous figures; distinction of the Amazigh people and culture. Amazigh literature and arts; contesting official history and national identity; interpretation of religious texts and teachings. History of past Muslim communities; Islamic education and upbringing. Role of women in the household.
Agency frame	Direct mobilization	Action calendar for upcoming strikes, Street protests, sittings, hunger strikes and other direct action events. Reports and news on these events; urgent messages on offline action; other forms of mobilization tactics.

2.1.1 Identity versus injustice frames?

Benford and Snow (2000) criticized the claim that all social movement frames are related to injustice, and maintained that in the case of religious and identity groups, “it is questionable whether a well-elaborated collective action frame need include an injustice

component” (p. 615). The results of the current study corroborated this claim to a great extent, but they also proved that injustice frames dominate the way social movements perceive and interpret the social and political issues and problems they are trying to address.

Identity and injustice frames emphasize distinct categories of societal inequalities rooted in the politics of “recognition” and “distribution” respectively, to borrow Nancy Fraser’s (1995) concepts. However, both injustice and non-injustice frames can be used together in a way that “connects and assigns some common meaning to experiences of collective action dislocated over time and space” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 95). It is rare to find identity frames standing separately from injustice frames, particularly in the case of Islamic and Amazigh cultural social movements. Analysis has demonstrated, indeed, that identity frames are frequently interlinked with injustice frames and subtly run through different themes, from the celebration of important religious days to obituaries for fellow members. Various tactics are used to articulate a distinction between the two, such as the use of allegory and subtle comparisons and symbols, and serve to increase the effectiveness of the frames or their “resonance” by linking them to the shared culture and consciousness of the targeted users, while at the same time enabling the group to avoid censorship or judicial persecution. From amongst 90 items posted on Justice and Charity’s website during one month, for instance, 10 are obituaries for a founding member of the organization, the late Mohammed Sulaymani. But while these obituaries highlighted the life and achievements of the deceased leader, they were also an opportunity to reflect on the history of the movement, its particularity, and the hardships

it has been facing since its establishment, especially its persecution by the state, all of which parallel the life of the late leader.

Similarly, though an important number of posts on the studied Amazigh websites deal with human rights violations and social inequalities, the majority, nonetheless, touch upon diverse issues, including the celebration of cultural events, such as the Amazigh New Year,²⁹ the commemoration of Amazigh art and culture, and announcements about Amazigh publications and lectures. These posts do not deal with human rights issues per se, but provide subtle yet conspicuous articulations between the act of identity expression and the victimization of the Amazigh movement. Cultural events, for instance, are celebrated under ACM slogans calling for “freedom”; musical concerts are organized to support the movement’s activists in prison; and the Amazigh New Year is celebrated to counter the official version of the country’s history.³⁰

2.1.2 The foundational discourse of human rights.

The results of the analysis reflect the prevalence of the master frame of “human rights” in leftist-oriented websites. The salience of the human rights frame confirms Sidi Hida’s (2007) conclusion that “the question of human rights has become the fundamental principle of all emerging social movements in Morocco” (p. 23), mainly human rights, feminist, unemployed graduates, and alter-globalization movements. The last two movements are especially exemplary, since their collective action strategy revolves around protesting against economic and social inequalities, namely neo-liberal economic policies at the global and local levels, and unemployment. For instance, the majority of

²⁹Distinct from the Islamic lunar calendar, the Amazigh calendar dates back to the Roman era in the region and has been used ever since to regulate the agricultural seasons. Today, it is used by the ACM as one of the main symbols of Berber identity.

³⁰ The official history adopted by the state usually ignores the pre-Islamic era, during which aboriginal Amazigh culture and people dominated the region.

posts on the websites belonging to the Unemployed Graduates' movement and ATTAC deal with human rights violations against the movement's members, in particular, the police's excessive use of force to disperse demonstrations and the sentencing of activists for different prison terms.

While these examples highlight the centrality of human rights issues for this movement, they also demonstrate the important role the Internet plays in sustaining collective action by disseminating alternative information about state repression. As many activists in these movements have indicated (see Chapter Seven), the focus on human rights violations by the Moroccan state aims to expose the contradictions underlying the state's discourse and stance on this issue; this discourse usually praises the "big advances" achieved in the domain during the last decade. By focusing on human rights issues, the groups aim to rally the support of INGOs in order to pressure the Moroccan state to ease its repressive measures against oppositional social movements. However, it also sheds light on the high costs involved in collective action and the vulnerability of Moroccan social movements, which remain tremendous obstacles preventing SMs from transforming political and social structures in any considerable way without the support of international civil society.

2.1.3 The invisibility of women and the gender issue.

A key observation that has emerged through various stages of the current research concerns the huge gender divide marking the diffusion and appropriation of the Internet in society, and at the level of Moroccan civil society particularly. Feature analysis in Chapter Five has demonstrated that the two studied women's-oriented websites are amongst the least interactive and updated. These results have been further corroborated

by framing analysis, which has proved that, excluding the Tanmia.ma development portal, these websites are the only ones that do not feature agency frames, thus reflecting the passive, or at least less active, role of women as political actors in society.

Gender-related issues were rarely addressed by the majority of the studied websites, thus reinforcing the invisibility of the patriarchy as a social and cultural regime that subjects women to a lower status and profile, both offline and online. The invisibility of the gender issue is not limited to male-dominated SMOs, but also to the women's section of Justice and Charity too. A comparison of the ADFM and the Sisters of Afterlife's websites reveals major differences between Islamic-oriented and leftist groups. On the one hand, as a feminist group's website, ADFM's is the only one that concentrates exclusively on gender equality issues that are clearly framed as political, economic, and social injustices. On the other hand, with the exception of the items dealing with the Gaza War, the website belonging to the Sisters of Afterlife consists of non-injustice frames.

The dominant frame on the website is that of the role of women as mothers and wives, since most of the textual content addresses the role of women in providing an "Islamic" education to children, their duties towards their families, the ethics of relationships in society, and "inspiring" stories from the history of women in Islam. The dominance of this latter frame contrasts with the declared objectives³¹ of the website, which claims to seek to contribute to J&C's societal and universal mission to redress the "illnesses" that have befallen the Islamic community or "ummah" by "renewing its Islam."

³¹ The objectives of the website and JC's women's section are provided under the file name "Who we are" (<http://www.mouminate.net/thema/1.htm>).

In the framework of Justice and Charity's "re-Islamization" project, the Sisters of Afterlife SMO and its "communication tool" aim to address the "dangerous deterioration of the status of women along[side] the deterioration of the ummah." According to the Sisters of Afterlife, this can be done by taking inspiration from women in the early Islamic community and the companions of the Prophet who were active in every walk of life without neglecting their roles as mothers and wives. As such, the objective of the SMO and its website is to "transcend shallow handling of the gender issue" by transforming the role of women from mere caregivers to individuals who are actively involved in the wider issues that concern society and the Islamic community worldwide. This perspective sees the gender question as an identity issue that can be addressed by reviving an imagined "Islamic" model emphasizing the traditional role of women in the private sphere, while allocating them some limited roles in the public one. In the words of Belghazi (2004),

Moroccan Islamism focuses more and more on self-transformation. It engages its struggles in areas previously considered typical of the private sphere.... This is the reason why, despite the contradictions that obtain between the radical and the moderate wings of Islamism, we can talk of an Islamist community that partakes in a shared attitude towards the traditional patriarchal family considering it as the most important element of Morocco's Islamic identity. (p. 1)

It is true that compared to other political groups in the country, including political parties, the Islamic-oriented SMOs, Justice and Charity and Unity and Reconstruction, are the only ones who have set up websites targeting women users.³² Additionally, one of the few activists who launched a personal website and uses it as a tool of activism is

³² In 2009, Unity and Reconstruction launched the Zahraa Forum, a website targeting Moroccan women.

Nadia Yassine³³, a founder of the Sisters of Afterlife. In the same vein, more than 20% of all individual authors found on Unity and Reconstruction's websites are women³⁴, which constitutes by far the highest rate amongst all the studied websites. While some of these women do express political opinions on the website, none of them deal with gender inequalities and some of them even express their disapproval of the king's statements regarding his approval of lifting existing reservations on the Committee on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These websites thus contribute to increasing content produced by and destined for women, and alleviate the male dominance over online content production. However, as Shade (2003) argues, it is essential to distinguish between "the feminization of the Internet versus feminist uses of the Internet" (p. 49), since the latter involves the production of critical discourse challenging the patriarchy in all its forms.

2.1.3 Development without contestation.

Another important observation about the results concerns the Tanmia.ma portal, an ICT4DEV project that provides various services for Moroccan civil society organizations, including the possibility of publishing content on the portal. Arguably, all civil society groups can use the website to share content that must be filtered first by the portal's staff before it can be posted. Framing analysis, however, has demonstrated that there is a low presence of the three analyzed collective action frames (injustice, identity, and agency), as the vast majority of content on the portal deals with broad economic and societal development issues. Moreover, none of the studied oppositional social movements are amongst those who published content on the portal. These results show

³³The website can be retrieved from <http://www.nadiayassine.net/fr/>.

³⁴ See the section on frame entrepreneurs below.

that the portal promotes a type of civil society that is perceived mainly as a partner to the state rather than as its political rival, and where society is perceived to be “free of social tensions of oppressive inequalities” (Sarmadov, 2005, p. 396). The following statement posted on the portal by a local development NGO, Assader, summarizes such a view:

On the basis of the participative study performed by the association in the region, [the association] took these problems into consideration [in order to] to find appropriate solutions to end the isolation of the region. The association addressed a request to the Ministry of Social Development and Solidarity to receive funding for the project ... on the basis of which the ministry agreed to support it [my translation]³⁵.

Supported by international development agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), such a vision seeks to enhance the role of local NGOs with an aim to “decrease opportunities for corruption, stabilize state finances, create entrepreneurial opportunities, attract foreign investment, increase public participation, and ultimately foster political stability and sustainable economic growth” (Sardamov, 2005, pp. 394–5). Such a view of civil society, however, has only increased the dependence of local NGOs on foreign aid, while failing to promote accountability, rule of law, and real participative governance in society.

³⁵ Posted on Tannia.ma on December 17, 2008.

Table 14.
Main frames on the websites.

	Injustice Frames										Identity		Agency	
	Gaza		HR		SJ		Dem.		Gen.		No.	%	No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%				
Islamic	241	57	10	2.42	13	3.14	55	16.47	19	4.60	9	2.17	59	14.2
Human rights	16	48.4	13	39.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	42.4
Radical left	6	18.18	17	51.5	5	15.1	5	15.1	0	0	0	0	9	27.2
Alter-globalization	81	40.7	55	27.63	39	19.5	11	5.52	25	12.5	4	2.1	57	28.6
Amazigh	22	8.6	51	19.31	18	6.84	1	0.38	0	0	88	33.4	43	16.3
Feminist/Women	12	37.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	25	11	34.3	0	0
Unemployed graduates	2	8	12	48	4	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	12
Development	1	1.47	1	1.47	4	5.88	0	0	5	7.35	5	7.35	0	0

Note. HR (Human Rights); SJ (Social Justice); Dem. (Democracy); Gen. (Gender).

2.2 Framing the Gaza War.

As stated above, social movements' collective action typically alternates between long periods of latency and short intervals of high visibility. The bulk of literature on social movements' use of media deals with the latter periods because they provide rich environments and conjunctures in which to examine social movements' communication strategies. The shortness of the visibility periods also permits researchers to concentrate on a limited body of data both, and thus allows them to determine the impact of media on

social movements' action and causes. In this sense, the 2008–2009 Gaza War offers an “ideal” context in which to analyze and compare online framing strategies and tactics used by the studied SM/SMOs. It is an issue that has immense mobilization potential because it draws on deeply ingrained symbolic values, beliefs, and ideologies for all involved parties. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is of unique significance within the Arab and Islamic worlds. It is also one of the most mediated conflicts internationally, particularly during times of war and tension. In Morocco, as in the other Arab countries, very few issues have the power to draw a quasi-general public consensus, mobilize support, and, most importantly, send people into the streets to protest, as the “Palestinian cause” does.³⁶ This explains why concerned sides, including Arab police regimes, political parties, civil society organizations, and outlawed radical groups all show support for “the Palestinian cause,” either out of genuine solidarity or from mere political opportunism, and try to score points against political adversaries, both inside and outside these countries. It is, in fact, the only conflict in which Islamic, leftist, and liberal groups can be seen marching together in the streets to express solidarity for the Palestinians. For many radical movements and groups that are targeted by police repression, highly symbolic and mobilizing issues like the “Palestinian cause” constitute an opportunity to challenge censorship and control by demonstrating their mobilization capabilities and openly attacking dictatorship and rulers.

As discussed above, there are important variations in the degree of salience of this issue on the websites covered by the study (see table 14). Islamic-oriented SMO's websites are at the top of the chart with almost 60% of all posts allocated to this issue which is, by contrast, least visible on the Tanmia portal, with only 1.47% of posts

³⁶ This is the term commonly used by Arab media to refer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

dedicated to it. This is primarily due to the level of freshness characterizing each website, as several, including ADFM's, were scarcely updated during the war. The variations also result from the collective action strategies of each movement; some of them concentrate on a single issue, as is the case with the Unemployed Graduates movement. Therefore, while analysis of the framing of the Gaza War will try to cover the majority of the studied SMOs/SMs, it will concentrate on those whose websites provide rich data on the issue.

Benford and Snow's three main tasks of framing (1986, 2000) are analyzed, namely diagnostic, prognostic, and mobilization framing. In addition to these main tasks, the study will explore other framing strategies used to increase the "frame resonance" that "describes the relationship between the collective action frame, the aggrieved community that is the target of mobilizing efforts, and the broader culture" (Noakes & Johnston, 2005, p. 11). Though a large number of frame resonance strategies have been discussed in the literature, this chapter focuses on those that can shed light on the use of the Internet as a medium in the case of Gaza, namely "frame amplification," "frame articulation" or "bridging," and the "credibility of the 'frame's promoters'" (p. 11). While the study of frame salience and distribution on the websites above concentrates on textual data only, the study of the framing of the Gaza War examines textual and non-textual data alike, including graphs, symbols and hyperlinks, to determine whether Internet-specific tools and functions have been appropriated to frame the war.

2.2.1 Diagnostic framing.

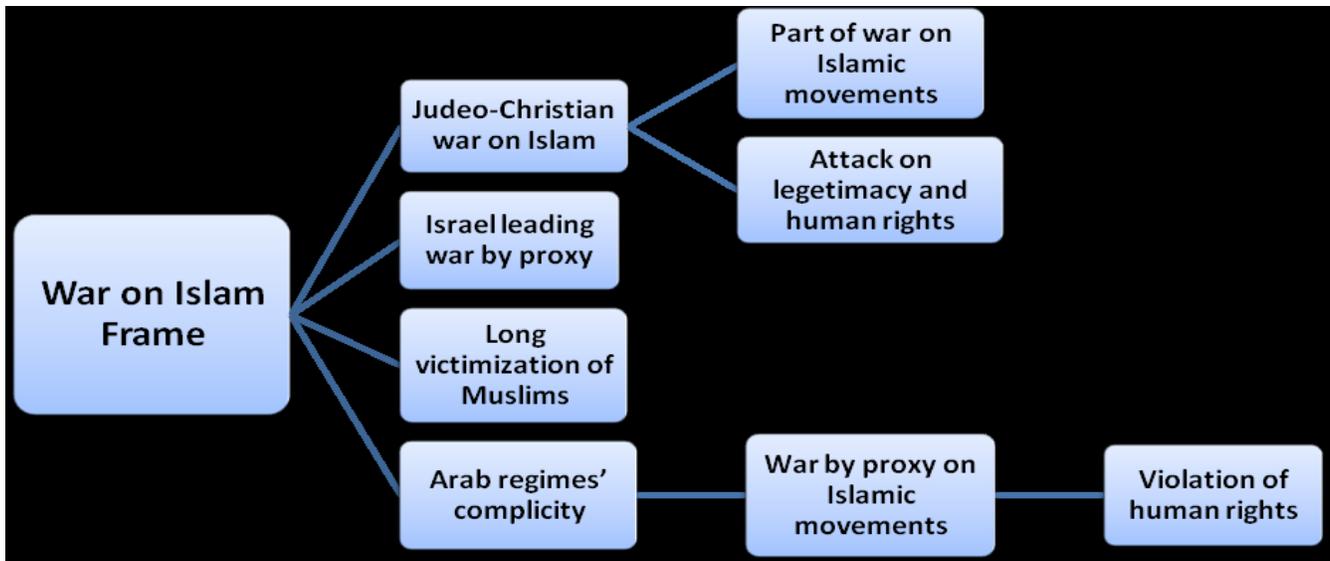


Figure 8. The “War on Islam” frame.

As mentioned earlier, diagnostic framing defines the boundaries of a problem or injustice, “telling what is wrong and why” (Noakes & Johnson, 2005, p. 5); it also identifies the victims and the parties to blame for this injustice. Analysis of diagnostic framing was done by going through the data to identify “master frames”—i.e., those that are specific to the movement and play an organizational role in it (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 219), and the sub-frames derived from the master or primary ones. Various interpretations about the war on each website were organized in a chart to establish the link between them and identify the primary frame from which other interpretations are derived.

Information about victims and parties to blame for the problem was also noted. Though the data shows that all groups share the belief that the Gaza War was part of a continuing injustice against the Palestinian people perpetrated by the state of Israel, it

also reveals important variations in the way these groups interpret the attack and the causes behind it. Two master or primary frames have emerged from the data: the “war on Islam” frame, and the “imperialist war” frame (see figures 8 and 9 below).

Islamic-oriented websites largely subscribed to “the war on Islam” frame. Thus, the Gaza War was interpreted mainly as a war on Islam launched by a Judeo-Christian coalition and abetted by collaborative Arab/Muslim undemocratic governments. The attack was in fact considered just the latest chapter in a hundred-year-long victimization of Muslims at the hands of Christians, in coalition now with the Zionist “enemy”. While this worldview has existed since the early days of the conflict, it has gained unprecedented support in the last decade with the “war on terror”. More importantly, the last war in Gaza is specifically viewed as a war, not only against the Palestinian people in general, but also and especially against Hamas, an Islamic movement that was democratically elected in Gaza.

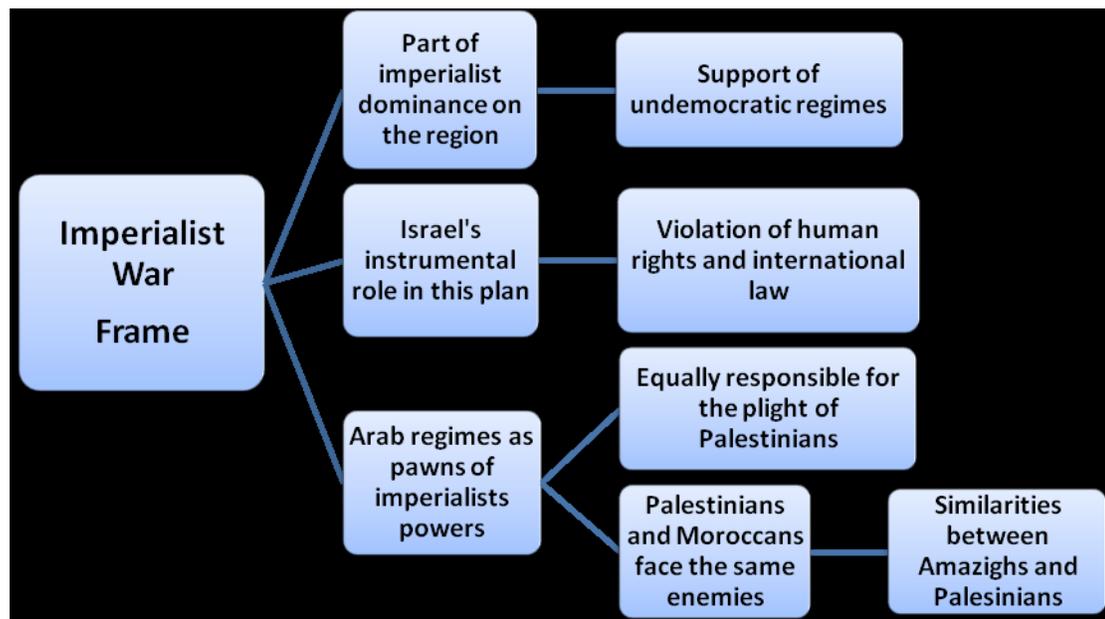


Figure 9. The “Imperialist war” frame.

The “global imperialism” frame was dominant on the leftist-oriented websites that include alter-globalization and human rights SMOs, as well as the Amazigh cultural movement and radical Left parties. According to this frame, the Gaza War and, in general, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, are perceived to be an integral part of global imperialist wars and dominance all over the world, but especially in the Middle East. Equally, Arab regimes are blamed for being “lackeys” of imperialism, which imposes them against the will of the people of the region. The “imperialist” and the “war on Islam” frames share many features, particularly their focus on the international character of the Gaza War, Israel’s link to the West or imperial powers, and the role of undemocratic local regimes in supporting the war, either overtly and covertly, and in oppressing the region’s people. However, while Islamic-oriented SMOs view that religious and cultural “differences” are the main factors behind the war, leftist-oriented movements attribute it to relentless expansionism of capitalism and neo-imperialism.

2.2.2 Frame articulation.

Frame articulation involves “the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they can hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion” (Benford & Snow, 2000 p. 622). This is achieved by assembling, collating, and packaging different perspectives on various events and experiences, which result in the creation of new frames and interpretations. Analysis of the two main frames used to describe the Gaza attack shows that they both articulate various components, as all groups try to produce frames that can mobilize actual and potential constituencies. However, identity-oriented movements, such as the Islamic and Amazigh cultural movements, were more able to draw on the local cultural context to frame the issue. As Tarrow (1998) argues, “it is the

combination of new frames embedded within a cultural matrix that produces explosive collective action frames” (p. 122). A telling example is provided by the framing of the issue on the websites belonging to the Amazigh cultural movement. Because the blogs are collective and used by diverse Amazigh groups, a multitude of interpretations and opinions added up to form a complex frame that runs through a large number of posts. While the conflict was generally perceived in the Muslim/Arab world as an aggression perpetrated by Israel and the US against the Palestinians, a large number of posts about the Gaza War ascribed the responsibility of the suffering and victimhood of Palestinians almost equally to the Israeli’s aggression and to “Arab” treason and collaboration. The title of one post on the Ageddim blog, for instance, reads “Gaza is dying and the collaborators are silent,” while another one reads “death for traitors, both Arab and Zionist.” A number of other posts questioned the wide solidarity with Gaza of Moroccans, especially in Amazigh majority regions, arguing that it smacks of Pan-Arab Nationalism, which the ACM militates against. While they expressed solidarity with Gaza, they explained they were doing it “only from a human rights perspective” and not out of ethnic or religious sympathies. These framing tactics serve to define not only the boundaries of the conflict, but also those outlining solidarity with the victims, and the possibilities and limits of action that can be taken to address the injustice.

Frame articulation can also be done through the use of non-textual tools, especially hyperlinks. This function provides an easy and efficient way to link ideas and texts on multiple and different websites, offering users more control over the construction of frames by allowing them to choose to follow the provided links or not. Hyperlinking also creates a non-linear relationship between various sets of frames. Analysis of this function

has been carried out by paying particular attention to the use of hyperlinks within textual data, as compared to the use of permanent hyperlinks discussed in the previous chapter. Analysis has demonstrated that the use of in-text hyperlinks remained very limited, as only four websites, namely the Arabic and French E-Joussour websites and the ACM–Ameghnas and Ageddim blogs use hyperlinks. The majority of these links, however, are not embedded within texts themselves, but are provided at the end of texts as references to the sources of the texts and their authors.

2.2.3 Frame amplification.

Frame amplification involves “accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 623). Analysis has demonstrated that amplification of the Gaza injustice frames has been achieved primarily through the tremendous attention paid to the issue by the majority of social movements. Amplification of the issue was also accomplished via the large number of multimedia tools permitted by the Internet. Compared to frame articulation, the majority of websites drew extensively on non-linguistic tools, especially graphics for the purpose of frame amplification.

The use of graphics on the studied websites was analyzed by observing and measuring the extent to which textual items on the homepage and second page are reinforced with graphics items such as pictures, slideshow photos, flashing images, caricatures, and other types of illustrations. It is worth noting that this chapter draws on the same units of analysis used in the previous one, whereby separate paragraphs or titles on the homepage functioning as hyperlinks to larger texts or articles are considered as the basic units for analysis. Moreover, a differentiation was made between two levels of

graphics: those used on the homepage, and those used on the second-level pages. The results obtained were then coded in a scale between 0 and 3 to provide a synthesis of the use of graphics on both the first- and second-level pages (see table 15).

Table 15.			
Use of graphics on websites.			
SM/SMO	Graphics % Homepage	Graphics % Second-level page	Code
Islamic-oriented	60.3	50.6	3
Human rights	73.2	0	2
Alter-globalization	18.7	1.5	1
Amazigh	67	40.3	3
Feminist/women	36.6	55.2	2
Unemployed graduates	0	61.3	2
Radical left parties	11.4	5.6	1
Tanmia/Development	21	1.33	1
Median	36.02	26.97	

N.B.: 0 (absent); 1 (low 1 > 25); 2 (medium 36 > 50); 3 (high 50% >).

Analysis has shown that, with the exception of trade unions and radical lefts, the majority of websites drew heavily on graphics, mainly photos and pictures, and to a less extent caricatures and slide photos. Islamic-oriented SMOs' websites, followed by the Amazigh cultural movement's blogs, are the richest in terms of the use of graphic material on the homepage and the second-level pages. Justice and Charity's website featured a Flash photo slide show with pictures of victims, specifically children, endorsed by the expression "Gaza: from siege to extermination" or "a new Zionist holocaust" in big red font which starts streaming like blood. Drawing parallels between the Holocaust and Israel's attack on Gaza as a tactic to magnify the suffering of Palestinians is shared by the majority of websites, but it is more frequently used on Islamic-oriented ones.

Moreover, the website made use of Flash slides showing pictures of marches and protests in solidarity with Gaza, and a scrolling news bar that provided news and updates

about the event. It also used flashing ad banners inviting users to participate in an instantaneous discussion with the movement’s leader on the theme of “how we can support Gaza.” Likewise, the Unity and Reconstruction website drew heavily on Web tools such as Flash photo slides showing Gaza victims and making solidarity statements. On the main top banner of the website, which normally only features the logo of the movement and its leader’s picture, Flash slides were used, urging users to send their suggestions about how to help Gaza, and presenting pictures of Palestinian children crying (see figure 10).



Figure 10. The Gaza War on Unity and Reconstruction’s website.

The majority of websites feature pictures and illustrations that borrowed from other websites or that are circulated widely by e-mail. In addition to pictures of victims, many websites featured caricatures, as is the case with the caricature on the Amazigh blog “Ageddim” that makes fun of Islamic countries’ armies and their inability to help Palestinians (see figure 11).



Figure 11. The use of caricature on the Amazigh blog “Ageddim”.

2.2.3 Prognostic and motivational framing.

In theory, diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing describe distinct processes—namely, identifying the injustice, proposing a solution, and motivating constituencies to take action. In practice, however, they are most of the time interconnected through multiple framing and discursive tactics. While the “War on Islam” frame was used on Islamic-oriented SMOs’ websites to provide a diagnosis or interpretation of the Gaza War, for instance, it also served to mobilize constituencies into action by tapping on collective memory, religious beliefs, and shared culture. Moreover, by linking the victimization of the Palestinians to that of the people in the region—and at the same time, equating the responsibility of the West and Israel with that of the authoritarian Arab regimes—diagnostic framing serves to identify not only the roots of the injustice, but also what can be done to address it, particularly by establishing democracy in these countries. Gamson’s (1992) study, for instance, highlighted many

levels of agency that range from pro-action discourse in activists' conversations to the media's focus on social movements' protests (pp. 61–8).

Similarly, as far the studied websites are concerned, multiple solutions and strategies of action were proposed by various social movements, from forming Islamic alliances against “new crusades” to the need to establish democracy in Arab societies, thereby allowing people to participate more actively in supporting the Palestinians. For the purposes of this study, prognostic and motivational framing were analyzed by paying attention to the use of the Internet's characteristics as a technology and medium in collective action. Accordingly, three mobilization aspects have been distinguished in the data on Gaza: a) news and reports about action taken; b) an action calendar and call for participation in upcoming offline action, such as protests, sittings, information on how to donate money; and c) online-based action.

Results (see table 16) show that the bulk of motivational framing on the studied websites focuses on reporting past actions such as news of protests and sittings. Only half of the websites, namely those belonging to Islamic, human rights, Amazigh, and alter-globalization movements, provide an action calendar or other types of calls for future action. Finally, online-based action was found only on one website, namely Unity and Reconstruction's.

Table 16. Prognostic and motivational framing.			
Social movements	Action news & reports	Action calendar & call for offline-action	Online action
	%	%	%
Islamic-oriented	42	9.8	1.5
Human rights	87.5	25	0
Alter-globalization	53.25	35.3	0
Amazigh	61.2	7.2	0
Feminist/women	20	0	0
Unemployed graduates	100	0	0
Radical left	70	0	0
Tannia/Development	0	0	0
Median	61.99	11.04	0.21

A significant aspect of the data on the Gaza War issue was limited to solidarity statements and action reports in the form of text, photo, and video files documenting protests, marches, and various other solidarity activities. Highlighting the action taken by a group has a direct mobilization effect, in that it provides actual and potential constituents with clear and tangible examples of “what to do,” and encourages them to join in future street protests. Gamson (1992) argues that mobilizing people into direct action is a daunting task because of “structural impediment to collective action” that can be reinforced by “a political culture that operates to produce quiescence and passivity” (p. 60). Street protests and demonstrations were the first level of a “visually affirmative action” used by civil right movements in the United States, while its reporting by the media, especially television, is another level of this visualized action (pp. 60–1). Further, explaining the role of communication about action in expanding collective action opportunities, Tarrow (1998) asserts that

by communicating information about what they do, once formed, movements create opportunities—for their own supporters, for others, for parties, and elites. They do this by diffusing collective action and displaying the possibility of coalitions, by creating political space for kindred movements and counter movements, and by producing incentives for elites and third parties to respond to. (p. 88)

Thus, highlighting action taken by state harassed groups, such as the Justice and Charity and ATTAC SMOs, provides these groups with a rare opportunity to showcase their mobilization and organization abilities, and thus to send information to potential members and adversaries alike.

Technical and bandwidth limitations imposed restrictions on the number of photos and other multimedia files that can be posted on the websites. As a solution, a number of groups posted links to additional photo and video files that can be accessed and viewed on social networking sites such as flickr (www.flickr.com), as well as video sharing platforms (mainly YouTube). This use testifies to the synergy between multiple platforms and media, and to the many possibilities offered by the Internet to bypass the resource, technical, and political barriers in order to achieve better results.

Whereas a large number of groups posted video clips about demonstrations and other types of action, Islamic-oriented SMOs were the ones to use video files more extensively, as the case of Justice and Charity, which has many channels on YouTube and hundreds of video clips on them (see figure 12). As a hugely popular³⁷ and mainly visual platform, YouTube and other video sharing tools allowed by the Internet are used by these

³⁷ According to Alexa.com, YouTube is the second most visited site by Internet users in Morocco after Facebook.

movements to foil state censorship and to reach different and larger segments of users beyond the limited circles of constituencies and sympathizers (see interview with an activist with Justice and Charity, Hasssan Bennajah, in Chapter Seven).



Figure 12. Justice and Charity’s channel on YouTube.

Equally important, although nearly half of the studied websites provide information about future (offline) action, only the Islamic movements’ websites used multimedia fetures to call for action and, more importantly, allowed users to take action online. On the J&C website, horizontal menu bars invited users to participate in the movement’s online forums to express their solidarity, announce future marches, and, encourage people to stage public protests. Likewise, Flash slides called on users to participate in instantaneous discussions with the movement’s leaders about how to support Gaza, and to download files containing a large number of pictures of the sittings and marches in which the movement members participated around the country.

Similarly, as soon as the war started, Unity and Reconstruction’s website invited users to send their suggestions on how to help Gaza. Justice and Development’s website was the only one to use a video call by the party’s secretary general, Abdelilah Benkiran, in which he urged members to participate massively in protests and to support Palestinians. Referring to the biggest rally that took place in Casablanca in support of Gaza, one Flash image on the top menu bar read: “After the one-million march: Al-Islah (Reconstruction) website welcomes your suggestions.” This example shows how online action enhances and promotes offline action to keep constituencies alert and ready for further activities.

One reason for the low level of online-based mobilization is the lack of technical, human, and hardware resources needed to set up and follow up on such online functions as petitions and fund raising. The lack of resources, however, encourages some groups to resort to “bricolage,” as illustrated by the handwritten petition above (see figure 13 below) calling for popular marches on the Ageddim blog, and accompanied by a poster taken from the Web to achieve better mobilization results.

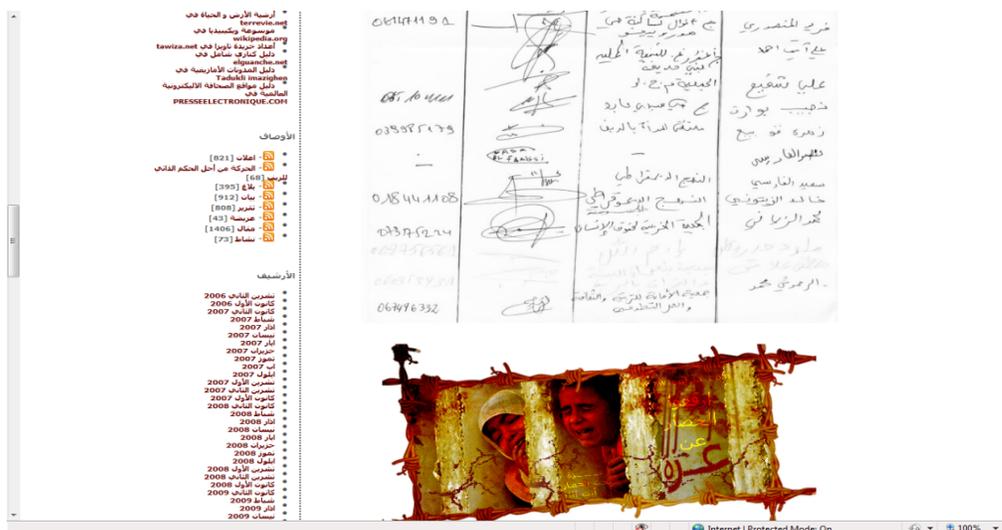


Figure 13. Mobilization for Gaza on the Ageddim blog: Handwritten petition.

2.2.4 Frame entrepreneurs and credibility.

Social movement theorists agree that within SM collective action, the credibility of a frame depends greatly on the credibility of the makers of the frame, their authority, and their professional credentials and status (Benford & Snow, 2000; Camzon, 1992; Noakes & Johnston, 2005; Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Identifying frame entrepreneurs is an integral part of frame analysis, because “diagnosing a problem always entails identifying the actors who are entitled to have [an] opinion on it... It is through symbolic conflict that certain actors succeed in being recognized as entitled to speak in the name of certain interests and tendencies” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 75). In the same vein, Benford and Snow (2000) claim that “it is a well-established fact in the social psychology of communication that speakers who are regarded as more credible are generally more persuasive” (p. 621). Similarly, Wathen and Burkell (2002) maintain that the factors influencing credibility at the level of the source are the authors’ and sources’ expertise and knowledge, their trustworthiness, credentials, attractiveness, and homogeneity with the receiver’s beliefs and context.

An assessment of the credibility of frame makers, however, must take into consideration the specificity of the medium and the way users interact with it. The Internet is often described as challenging established authorship conventions constructed around the notion of an individual author or writer. The Internet is “largely composed of texts produced through corporate authorship, constantly revised, often borrowed, and frequently parasitic on other texts to which they are linked,” and that is why “the Web text is more like an organism than like a work” (Warnick, 2004, p. 258). A number of studies have concluded that in the absence of filtering and gate-keeping systems

guaranteeing credibility, as in other media, Web users tend to resort to other markers, such as Web design, the website's domain, and the author's credentials and institutional affiliations (Rieh & Belkin, 1998; Rieh, 2002; Taraborelli, 2008). Equally important, in his study of how users evaluate credibility on the Web, Rieh (2002) advances that determining authority on the Internet can be based on "whether two parties belong to the same, or different reference groups" (pp. 155–56), since credibility is based not only on characteristics of information and sources, but also on users' expectations.

To study frame entrepreneurs, 10 categories were coded and the authors of the textual items in the data observed accordingly:

- (1) the organization: text units that are signed either by a collective title/name of a group or by the group's leader(s); or, in the case of a collective website, by the webmaster;
- (2) activists: individual authors were considered to be "activists" of the group itself unless information is provided otherwise;
- (3) affiliated groups (aff.): SMOs that belong to the social movement of the group under study;
- (4) mainstream media (MSM);
- (5) alternative media (AM);
- (6) national civil society (nat.);
- (7) regional civil society (reg.): NGOs and social movements in the Middle East and North Africa;
- (8) international civil society (int.);
- (9) anonymous (ano.);

(10) official (off.): includes governmental and semi-governmental institutions and agencies, as well as international financial institutions, such as the IMF.

Analysis was performed by identifying and counting the authors in each category. The results were first turned into percentage values that were afterwards coded using a scale from 0 (absent) to 3 (high). Results (see table 17 below) reflect distinct communication patterns that run along ideological, organizational, and collective action strategy variations.

First, websites belonging to leftist SMOs are the most downward-oriented, with the majority of posts authored by central committees or SMO leaders. The hierarchical flow of communication on these websites is mitigated only by the significant number of anonymous posts on them that “suggests an aversion to the professionalization of intellectual activity based on personality and reputation” (Atton, 2001, p. 120). In comparison, Islamic-oriented ones are among the least downward-oriented, with a significant number of posts either signed by individual activists or derived from alternative media websites. While the results show that women-oriented websites feature a high number of articles signed by individual activists too, this characteristic applies chiefly to the website of Justice and Charity’s Women’s section, rather than to that of secular ADFM.

Unity and Reconstruction’s website, for instance, draws heavily on alternative sources that belong to Islamic-oriented websites, such as the very popular “Islam online,” “Islam today,” “Ikhwan online,” and the personal website of Yusuf Qaradawi, the charismatic and popular religious scholar. In addition to Islamic-oriented websites, U&R’s website draws heavily on alternative news websites, such as Al-Jazeera online

and other online Arabic newspapers. Thus, U&R's Website demonstrates how the Internet is used to create networks of meanings and fields of discourse through heavy borrowing, cutting and pasting, and exchanging, while at the same time keeping discourse and authorship under control by not using direct links to external sources, and limiting borrowing to those sources with which the movement shares the same ideology or worldview. It also demonstrates an effort on U&R's part to enhance the credibility of its discourse on the Gaza issue by drawing on highly popular and influential figures and organizations.

These results largely support those obtained through the feature analysis of the websites (see the previous chapter)—mainly, that Islamic-oriented websites allow greater user-to-user and user-to-system types of interactivity, thus enhancing horizontal information and communication flow without relinquishing control over discourse itself. Correlation between the results of both website feature and frame analyses is very important, as it highlights their mutual validity and reliability.

Second, the alter-globalization movement's websites, specifically E-Joussour's wikis, feature a large number of articles posted by SMOs from several countries in the region, especially Egypt. On the one hand, the results reflect the strategy of Moroccan and international alternative groups that aim to enhance the interlinking between social movements in the region. On the other, the dominance of Moroccan and Egyptian SMOs in the wikis shows that the project is far from achieving its objectives.

Third, the overwhelming majority of authors on Amazigh cultural movement blogs belong to groups and SMOs that are members of the movement itself, at the national, regional, and international levels. Among the 152 posts on the Ageddim blog, for

instance, almost 70% are authored by local Amazigh groups, and 10% by Amazigh groups in the diaspora. Many of those who post on the blog are affiliated with other movements too, particularly the Unemployed Graduates movement. All of them, however, are located in Amazigh majority regions in the north and south of the country. Given the geographic dispersion of the movement and its lack of resources, sharing “symbolic resources” through participatory structures helps various groups address these disadvantages. Moreover, the distribution of authorship on the Amazigh blogs confirms Weitzman’s (2006) remark about the important role the Internet now plays in constructing collective identity among activists in the Amazigh cultural movement:

[The Internet] has become an additional important tool in the construction of a “landscape of group identity,” i.e., the building of an “imagined” Amazigh community worldwide ... making possible the dissemination of information and images, often in real time, as well as stimulating discussion and contacts between activists worldwide. (p. 72)

Finally, articles taken directly from mainstream media constitute more than a third of the content found on the blog belonging to the Unemployed Graduates movement. This corroborates the results of feature analysis (see previous chapter), which demonstrated the dominance of linking to MSM in these websites. With a limited agenda that focuses on getting jobs for members, the collective action strategy of the movement concentrates on getting media and policy makers’ attention for their demands. Staging protests in front of highly symbolic sites, such as Parliament, serves to galvanize the attention of MSM, both nationally and internationally. Collective action can thus be seen as involving public “performance” tactics (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 1998),

in which both online and offline tactics complement one another. The need for MSM spotlights to amplify their voices and increase the visibility of their struggles is best illustrated by the main top banner of the Youthful blog (see figure 14 below) that features a clichéd picture of a group of photographers scrambling for a shot of a celebrity. Posting MSM articles covering the movement’s actions serves both to further disseminate this information and to encourage members to continue their support and action.



Figure 14. UG-Youth’s homepage: Craving for mainstream media attention.

Type of authors	Org.	Act.	Aff.	Ano.	MSM	AM	Nat.	Reg.	Int.	Gov.
Islamic	32.6	31.2	3.14	13	8.5	21.5	0	0	0	1
Radical left	55.1	22.4	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0
Human rights	66.6	27.27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alter-globalization	29.1	4	12.5	0	4	0	27.6	25.6	6	0
Amazigh	0	7.98	63.1	0	1.14	1.14	14.4	1.52	7.22	0
Feminist/women	6.45	32.2	0	3.48	3.22	5	16.1	0	3.22	0
Unemployed graduates	44	0	0	0	36	12	0	0	0	4.34
Development	0	0	0	0	0	0	58.7	4.76	7.93	28.5
Median	28.1	15.63	9.84	4.81	6.60	39.64	14.6	8	18.37	4.23

Notes: Org.: Organization; Act.: Activists; Aff.: Affiliated; MSM: Mainstream media; AM: Alternative media; Nat.: National civil society; Reg.: Regional civil society; Int.: International civil society; Gov.: Government and official institutions.

To sum up, analysis of frame entrepreneurs or authorship on the websites has highlighted many differences between social movements in terms of the communication practices and tactics they use to construct the credibility of their collective action frames. However, existing differences and variations affect more the style and format than the substance of the framing process, as all the studied organizations and groups rely primarily on sources from within their groups or movements, thus reflecting the “preaching to the converted” function of political websites noted by various analysts (Norris, 2001b). A summary of the distribution of frame makers and sources on the websites shows that, in addition to alternative media, the two other major sources of content are the social movement organization

itself and international civil society NGOs (see figure 15). This finding strongly corroborates the conclusions reached through feature analysis in Chapter Six, and which underscore the appropriation of web platforms to enhance liaison with international civil actors at the expense of building networks with national and regional civil society. Indeed, despite the potential and promises of the Internet as a medium that can promote dialogical discourse and an agonistic public sphere, the appropriation of the medium is shaped primarily by social movements' need to address the expectations of their constituencies. This is because “message sources chosen to match audience attitudes and context lead to higher perceived credibility and better recall of the information” (Wathen & Burkell, 2002, p. 136). Some SMOs, mainly those that are Islamic-oriented, attempt to achieve this objective more effectively by conveying a sense of diversity and employing a less top-down communication, without compromising the homogeneity of their discourse.

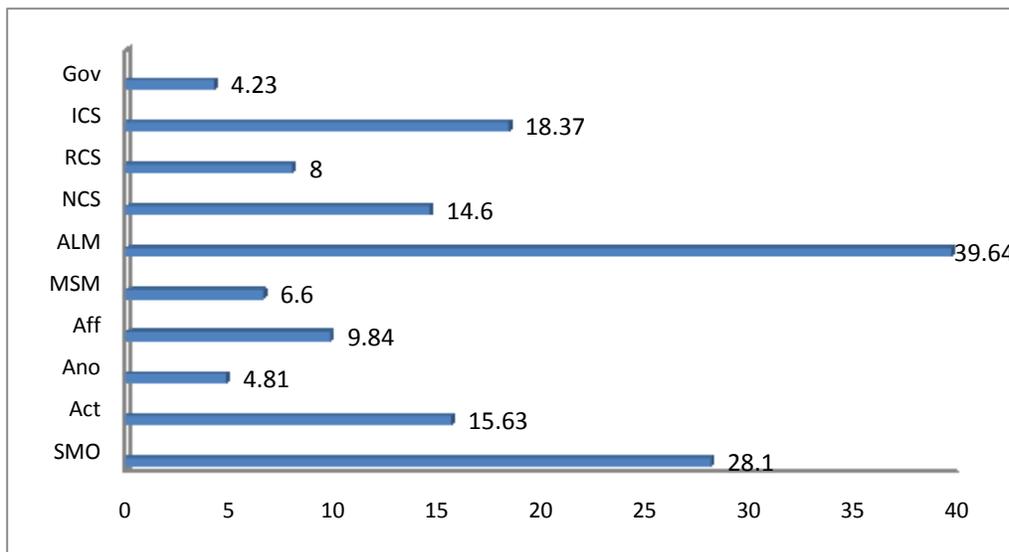


Figure 15. Frame entrepreneurs: A summary.

Note. The values in the chart are built on the median results displayed in table 17.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has examined the role of the studied websites in conveying collective action frames. Analysis has demonstrated that the Internet has become an alternative platform and public sphere for oppositional and competing discourses and views. It has shown that most websites convey, albeit with important variations, the three main framing tasks of injustice, identity, and agency. Because “the story of movements is ... the story of their members’ ability to impose certain images of themselves, and counter attempts by dominant groups to denigrate their aspirations to be recognized as different,” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 106), the Internet has become in this sense one medium, among many others, that has enhanced the capacity of Moroccan social movements to tell their stories.

Furthermore, several forms of mobilization have been identified in the studied websites:

- (1) Providing relevant information about a conflict or social struggle, namely by distinguishing between victims and adversaries/villains, and pinpointing the problem/conflict;
- (2) Supporting offline collective action by providing information on strikes and meetings, and by coordinating various collective action efforts;
- (3) Highlighting past actions to expand the repertoire of collective action by encouraging constituencies to join, defining tactics, and inspiring other groups to continue the struggle;
- (4) Building collective action and consciousness, both a precondition for the development of the social movement and a collective action objective;
- (5) Serving as platforms for online-based action, such as online campaigns.

Analysis of the framing of the Gaza conflict has shown that the majority of the websites contribute, in differing degrees, to the last four forms of mobilization, and only minimally to online-based action. This last conclusion corroborates other similar ones confirmed by feature analysis in the previous chapter, and reflects the many limitations on the appropriation of the Internet in collective action that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Direct action, however, is only one type of mobilization conveyed by collective action frames. A central role of the injustice and identity frames communicated on the studied websites is not to encourage actual and potential constituents to participate in street demonstrations and protests, but rather to provide them with interpretations, symbols, and meanings that help them connect to a common cause, a group, and an identity, all of which forms the basis of social movements. Without a shared identity, and a vision of society and the world, collective action cannot become a socially embedded movement capable of sustaining oppositional action over time. It is true that social movements draw on diverse forms of communication, including interpersonal ones (see in-depth interviewing in Chapter Seven below) to build collective consciousness and identity. However, for many social movements that are geographically dispersed, politically persecuted, or/and socially and economically disadvantaged, the Internet is increasingly playing a central role in constructing the necessary bonds and affiliations at the local and translocal levels, and thus contributing to their survival and ability to affect dominant orders in society. In the words of Diani (2000), computer-mediated communication makes it easier “to transform sets of geographically dispersed aggrieved

individuals into a densely connected aggrieved population, thus solving one key problem of mobilisation” (p. 388).

In addition to the restricted use of the websites for Web-based mobilization, the chapter has highlighted two other limitations related to gender and ICT4DEV. Analysis has confirmed that the majority of these websites give short shrift to gender issues. This holds true even when the website is by women and for women, as in the case of the Sisters of Afterlife’s website. These sites, instead of contesting prevalent patriarchal values and traditional gender roles, ground these values and traditions in a religious discourse in order to imbue them with more legitimacy. However, instead of being a characteristic of religious movements’ online communication practices, as Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai (2005) claim, frame analysis has revealed that the patriarchy is reinforced by both Islamic-oriented and secular/leftist movements, either by reinforcing the invisibility of women’s and gender issues or by reproducing gender power relations. Finally, the chapter has shed light on the self-limitedness of the “Tanmia” development portal and of ICT4DEV’s interpretation of the notion of “civil society” and its role in development.

The insights gained by applying framing analysis to the websites will be further enriched through interview analysis in the next chapter. As argued above, because of the embeddedness of the Internet and its mediation through multiple social and cultural practices and structures, the use of in-depth interviewing is necessary to go beyond text-based analysis towards probing deeper into various articulatory connections between technology, social actors, and their environments.

Chapter Seven: In-depth Interview Analysis

The Narratives of Technology and Social Change: Empowerment Through Divides

Introduction

The last two chapters addressed the use of the Internet by Moroccan social movements and examined the extent to which these groups appropriate the potential of the web in their mobilization activities. Limiting the study to online platforms, however, cannot provide sufficient insight into all aspects of the Internet's role in collective action and its social embeddedness as a technology and a media practice. Online practices are only the tip of the iceberg of a much more complex interaction and interrelatedness between technologies and media, on the one hand, and their social context and the communication practices of social actors, on the other. Using in-depth interview analysis, the current chapter examines various levels of interconnectedness between the technological and the social, and how the multilevel articulations between the two condition and shape the impact of the Internet on social movements.

Corroborating as well as complementing many key findings in the previous chapters, this chapter underlines, first, the many communication practices and forms through which the Internet is empowering Moroccan social movements. It demonstrates how various groups are using the medium to surmount different structural barriers marking Moroccan civil society—notably, the scarcity of material resources, the difficulty of accessing public media, and state restrictions on basic freedoms. In doing so, the chapter emphasizes the interrelatedness and complementariness of the Internet and diverse forms of communication, as well as of professional and radical journalism. Second, the current

chapter demonstrates that the empowering role of the Internet is marked by serious limitations resulting from multiple types of divides, which significantly restrict the impact SM groups have when using the medium to protest the dominant political and social orders. While the roles of the divides regarding access, skill, and usage are highlighted, the chapter places more emphasis on gender and motivational divides as the most complex and enduring forms of divide hindering the political role of the Internet in the country. Finally, by comparing two distinct ICT4DEV projects targeting Moroccan civil society, the chapter sheds light on the limitations of the dominant discourse regarding the role of technology in development, particularly in terms of how to achieve sustainability, and points out possible ways whereby these projects can learn from existing experiences in the field.

2. Doing In-depth Interviews: Concepts and Contexts

2.1 Responsive interviewing.

This research draws on “responsive interviewing” as a general guide for the planning, execution, and analysis of interviews. Responsive interviewing is a model that is based on interpretive constructionist philosophy and “emphasizes that the interviewer and interviewee are human beings, not recording machines, and that they form a relationship during the interview that generates ethical obligations for the interviewer” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30). It also highlights reflexivity as a key element in orienting the work of researchers by inducing them “to continually examine and question their biases, understandings, and reactions during various stages of their research” (p. 31). Accordingly, discussing the macro- and micro-social settings of the interviews—and trying to understand interviewees’ and interviewer’s reactions, expectations, and

behavior—must be an integral part of the research itself and its findings, that not only sheds light on the circumstances in which the interviews were conducted, but also contributes to answering the research questions stated above.

2.2 Participatory interviewing.

Interviewing is generally viewed as an asymmetrical process whereby an interviewer seeks to obtain information from an “informant” who passively responds to the interviewer’s questions. However, as Gubrium and Holstein (2002) argue, “from the time a researcher identifies a research topic, through respondent selection, questioning and answering, and finally the interpretation of responses, interviewing is a concerted interactional project” (p. 15). A case in point is my attempt to convince members of the Islamic-oriented SMO, Unity and Reconstruction, and its newspaper Attajdid (Renewal)³⁸, to participate in the research. Despite the many promises made by some senior members in the movement and the newspaper, the interviews were always postponed. In order to overcome their reluctance and resistance, I sent my questions in advance, met with a potential interviewee several times over a few weeks. Still, I was asked to allow the intervention of a prominent intellectual and writer to assure them of my good intentions. I was “interviewed,” in turn, though informally of course, by my potential interviewee, who was trying to probe my ideological sympathies. Eventually, I obtained an appointment with my interviewee, but when I was on my way to meet him in his office, he contacted me and asked me to join him in the big tent that the Justice and Development party³⁹ set up in downtown Rabat, where he was participating in a political rally publicizing the party’s next general congress. There, I was introduced to other party

³⁸ For background information about this SMO, see Chapter Five.

³⁹ The party acts as the political arm of the Unity and Reconstruction SMO. See Chapter Five for more details.

members, and given membership brochures and an invitation to attend the opening session of the congress. This experience taught me that preparing an interview and conducting it is never a one-way process in which the interviewer is in full control; rather, it is a cooperative task that usually involves negotiation and interaction between equal participants (interviewer and interviewee), during which interviewees may try to impose their own agendas in order to achieve specific objectives. Moreover, a number of my requests to conduct interviews with activists in Islamic SMOs were refused or remained unanswered.

Compared to Islamic-oriented SMOs, those that are leftist were generally more open and willing to participate in interviews. For instance, one contact in the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH) willingly and unhesitatingly introduced me to many other members and activists in the association and allowed me to join the association's e-mail list. Rooted in the long experience of the radical left movement that marked the country's politics for decades, the openness of the association reflects the strong traditions and practices of networking alliances both within and outside the country, as well as the self-confidence the association has in dealing with people from outside its immediate circles. For instance, activists at the AMDH are accustomed to cooperating closely with INGOs and development agencies, and often deal with Western media. I had little trouble establishing a closer relationship with them because they assumed from the beginning that I would sympathize with their activities and share their "global" human rights discourse, and so they engaged with me in a more forthcoming way. This, however, created a problem of a different kind: since I felt I could identify with the members of this group more than with the Islamic-oriented SMOs, I had to

ensure I kept a necessary distance. Describing the situation in which a researcher has to tread carefully between personal involvement and bias, Rubin and Rubin (2005) point out:

Personal involvement is a great strength of the responsive interviewing model, because empathy encourages people to talk, and yet active involvement in the interview can also create problems, as your own emotions and biases can influence what you ask and how your interviewee responds. (p. 31)

Taking a reflexive and critical stance on interview questions and doing preliminary analysis of interview transcripts are some of the strategies I used to reduce personal bias while conducting interviews. Since I had the opportunity to meet and interview members of these SMOs several times during my stay in Morocco, I was able to reflect upon my list of questions, and cover points and areas I thought I had overlooked in the initial interviews, as well as adopt a more critical stance toward participants' interpretations and explanations. Thus, after finishing interviews that I had deemed not very successful, I listened to their recordings and reflected upon the points I had covered and the ones I had missed, as well as upon the questions that needed refocusing and structuring, which allowed me to refine my interviewing techniques. Despite this diligence, the fact that I was able to interview only two activists who are members of Islamic-oriented SMOs is bound to produce a level of bias toward secular social movements in the study. I tried to address this quantitative imbalance by emphasizing the testimonies of the latter category of participants and comparing them with those produced by other groups' members.

A number of commentators have argued that the interviewer has to share power with participants by encouraging them, for instance, to ask questions and direct the interview

(Gubrium & Holsten, 2002, p. 20). It has also been observed that interviewing can be “wonderfully unpredictable” when interviewees “take control of the interview and change the subject, guide the tempo, or indicate the interviewer was asking the wrong questions” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 12). This certainly applies to my interview with activists from the AMDH’s chapter in the small town of Al-Hoceima on Morocco’s north coast. When I went to their office, I was expecting to meet the person I contacted for the interview, who was the chapter’s president. To my surprise, I found that all the section’s bureau members were there. Apparently, knowing that I was doing research at a Canadian university, they considered the interview an opportunity to talk about their activities and bring their voices to an international audience. I tried to keep the interview under control and within the scope of my research, but I failed because their numbers were large and I was not prepared to deal with a group of activists who were more determined to talk about their experiences than to answer my questions. Eventually, I had to abandon my prepared list of questions and, instead, discuss with them the issues they deemed most urgent for our conversation. Though anecdotal, this example illustrates how power relations between interviewer and interviewees are neither stable nor linear, but can constantly shift at any stage of the interviewing process.

2.3 Time and resource constraints.

In-depth interviewing is an effective methodology, but it is also time-consuming. Because of time and resource constraints, I had to conduct most of the interviews in a period of 10 weeks between June and September 2008. One of the most difficult parts of this type of research is to find suitable participants willing to share their experiences and thoughts, although the degree of difficulty varies considerably from one case to another.

In some cases, it took me almost two months to convince and arrange for an interview with a politician or a member of parliament; in some others, it took only a short conversation, a phone call, or a single e-mail to do so. Initially, I tried to arrange all interviews prior to traveling to Morocco, by using mainly e-mail. However, to the more than 25 e-mails I sent, I only received three replies. Once I arrived in Morocco, I was able to schedule some preliminary meetings with potential interviewees through personal networks of family and friends. Afterwards, the whole process became easier thanks to a “snowballing” effect, whereby the first interviewees either recommended me to or provided me with contacts of other possible interviewees. Moreover, I realized that people trusted me more when I contacted them directly or called them from inside the country than when I contacted them from Montreal by e-mail or telephone. Furthermore, because the key SMOs I wanted to cover in the study were located in various cities, particularly in Rabat and Casablanca (the political and the economic capitals respectively), I had to shuttle frequently between the two, which was time-consuming. In some cases, I had to travel to other cities—for example, when I attended the First Maghreb Social Forum held in the city of El-Jadida in July 2008. A large number of associations and movements participated in the event, making it an excellent opportunity for me to have direct contact with many activists.

2.4 Gendered interviewing.

Like the other variables of class, ethnicity, age, and religion—among others—gender is an important factor with a strong bearing on interviewing and research, in general. Only one third of my interviewees were women. This was due to a number of factors, the most important of which is that civil society groups and organizations are male-

dominated, despite the huge progress Moroccan women have achieved in the last few decades. The number of female interviewees reflects, thus, the gendered power relations still generally dominant in society. Moreover, the mere fact that I am a male interviewer imposed several limitations on the number of female participants I was able to approach. First, there were strong constraints on the times and places where I could meet female interviewees. The clientele of coffee shops, for instance, is still largely male-dominated.⁴⁰ It is also unconventional to call at the house of a woman to whom one is not related; and because not all female activists have access to offices where they can receive a researcher, the matter is complicated further. In one case, for instance, I had to meet a participant in the office of a relative who offered help. In another case, I was able to meet a female party member at my friends' house because she knew them well. However, two interviews were cancelled because interviewees declined to meet me at coffee shops. These constraints illustrate how qualitative or in-depth interviewing needs to "develop and build on intimacy" in order to be effective and useful (Johnson, 2002, p. 104), and how the gender of participants can significantly affect the amount of intimacy that can be built between the interviewer and interviewee. As a male researcher, building intimacy or even a close trust with potential female interviewees was not always easy, and affected the amount and depth of experience these participants were ready to share with me, especially in regard to issues related to gender and technology. Moreover, I was not able to arrange interviews with any female members of Islamic-oriented SMOs; the difficulty of approaching this type of group was further complicated by the gender factor.

⁴⁰ This should not be understood as an umbrella statement. The degree of freedom that Moroccan women enjoy varies according to several factors, including social status, educational level and even the geographical location. Professional women in Casablanca and Rabat, for instance, go to such public places in rich neighborhoods more frequently than their counterparts in small towns or in poor neighborhoods.

2.5 Cultural barriers: Trust and face-saving.

Getting interviewees to share openly their experiences can be shaped not only by the gender identity of participants, but also by general cultural and social dynamics. In high-context cultures like that of Morocco, “people try to avoid direct confrontation to maintain social harmony and intimate bonds between people” (Kim, Pang, & Park, 1998, p. 511). In such cultures, face-saving is an important mechanism through which people try to maintain social harmony; self-expression is relatively restricted, and people find it very difficult to speak about themselves on a personal level or avoid it altogether. That is why I encountered difficulties either convincing some people to sit for interviews or making them respond to my questions spontaneously. In fact, many participants reflected a high level of “computer anxiety” and felt intimidated by the topics of the interviews, as the majority of them have limited or basic computer skills. Though I often tried to address their anxieties by providing them with examples of the questions I would ask, and by assuring them that no special knowledge was needed to participate in the interview, many of them, even during interviews, were continually apologetic about their computer and Internet skills and knowledge, and offered to recommend me to more experienced people.

I also encountered difficulties in getting participants to talk spontaneously about their specific experiences with Internet usage, since they usually preferred to focus on general statements about the technology and its use in society. In other cases, respondents often claimed first that they knew a great deal about the technology, but when more trust was built between us, they became more open about their limited knowledge and skills. To overcome these types of barriers, I tried to make the interviews as informal as possible;

and, before starting them, I engaged participants in informal discussions about broad issues to show them I understood their experiences and background without making them believe I necessarily shared their views and ideological stances. Treading this zone between building confidence and sympathizing on one hand, and avoiding full connivance and identification on the other, involves sensitivity—a position that is difficult, though necessary, to maintain. Despite my initial difficulties at establishing a trusting relationship between interviewer and participants, my efforts to overcome their reticence and cautiousness were fruitful, since most of the interviews were very successful and engaging. The fact that all participants agreed to my using their real names instead of pseudonyms as I had expected at the start testifies to the level of trust that emerged out of this cooperative project.

3. Method

3.1 Sampling.

A combination of sampling methods was employed to locate respondents, namely representative, purposive, and snowball sampling. First, representative sampling was used to identify respondents who were members in the various studied social movements outlined in Chapter Five. The representative aspect of the population sample remains relative, given that respondents were not evenly distributed amongst all movements due to the various constraints outlined above. The quantitative imbalances between the studied movements in terms of the number of members interviewed were, however, compensated for through qualitative accentuation of the testimonies from groups underrepresented in the population sample. Second, purposive sampling was employed to locate, as much as possible, activists who act as webmasters or supervise online

projects of the SMOs to which they belong. Finally, snowball sampling was used to overcome various difficulties linked to locating appropriate respondents and convincing them to sit for interviews. Thus, the initial list of potential participants included some of the most visible civil society groups in the country, such as the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH), and the Islamic-oriented organization Unity and Reconstruction. Because of the difficulties I encountered in pre-arranging interviews from Montreal, I eventually decided to wait until I was in Morocco to start arranging interviews by means of a snowball process—i.e., a sampling method that is suitable “when working with populations that are not easily identified or accessed” (O’Leary, 2004, p. 110).

As I proceeded with the interviews, I became aware of the need to expand my enquiry beyond SMOs in order to include social actors and groups whose activities are closely linked to and often interlinked with SMOs, such as independent newspapers and development institutions, namely the Tanmia association (see Chapter Five above and section 3.6 below for more information about the association). In total, 38 individuals were interviewed, of whom only 31 are cited in thesis⁴¹. Most of the respondents are members in 16 social movement organizations or institutions (see table 18). 35 of them were interviewed face-to-face in Morocco, while two were interviewed in Montreal and one online.

3.2 Semi-structured interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured; that is, though the interviews covered broadly similar themes, the questions were not structured nor worded in an identical way. This provided participants with a great deal of freedom to engage in a conversation-like form

⁴¹ See appendix A for a complete list of interviewees.

of speech, and to contribute to defining the boundaries of interviews themselves, by raising issues and questions they deemed more relevant to the topic at hand. It also allowed the researcher to adapt the set of questions to various participants with diverse educational, ideological, and professional backgrounds. Finally, using semi-structured interviews permitted the researcher, particularly during the first interviews, to test preliminary hypotheses, as well as questions and their usefulness in generating rich conversations, on the basis of which question plans were refined for subsequent interviews.

Table 18. Distribution of respondents over the studied SMs.		
Movement/category	SMO/institution	Number of respondents
Feminist	Union d'action feminine	4
	Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc	2
	Ligue démocratique des droits des Femmes	3
Islamic oriented	Justice and Charity	1
	Unity and Reconstruction	1
Unemployed graduates	La ligue nationale des cadres supérieures au chômage	1
Amazigh cultural movement	-	1
Human rights	Association Marocain des droits humains	4
	Organisation Marocain des droits humains	1
Alter-globalization	Action Jeunesse	1
	Forum des alternatives Maroc	2
	ATTAC-Maroc	3
Development association	Tanmia.ma	2
Left parties	Partie socialite unifié	1
Independent newspapers	Almassae	2
	Le Journal Hebdomadaire	2
Total		31
Men		20
Women		11

3.3 Recording interviews and consent of participants.

In accordance with Concordia University's code of ethics, all interviewees were duly notified of the goal and purpose of the research, first by being read the Oral Consent Script⁴², then by asking them to state orally if they agreed to it. At the end of each interview, participants were asked again if they still wanted to proceed with their participation and whether they preferred if I assigned pseudonyms to them instead of using their real names. All these procedures were recorded in my digital recorder as a part of the interview files.

3.3 Analyzing interview transcripts.

Analyzing in-depth interviews is an “ongoing process ... [that] requires researchers to begin analyzing data as it is being collected, and these initial analyses may provoke changes in the study” (Blee & Taylor, 2002, p. 110). The same holds true for this study, as the preliminary interpretation of the first interviews helped refine the questions and focus more on the issues discussed with other participants in subsequent interviews. Interviews were, first, translated from Arabic and French into English. Afterwards, open coding was used to analyze the data. In open coding, events/actions/interactions are compared with others for similarities and differences. They are also given conceptual labels. In this way, conceptually similar events/actions/interactions are grouped together to form categories and subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 12). They were then categorized into semantic excerpts or passages, which were then given preliminary labels or concepts that identified their main ideas and linked them provisionally to key concepts in the theoretical framework. As analysis proceeded, emerging excerpts were organized into preliminary threads and patterns in order to constitute main themes. At this stage, it

⁴² See appendix B.

is always important to “keep labels tentative. Locking in categories too early can lead to dead ends” (Seidman, 1998, p. 108). The coding and categorization had to be repeated to situate specific themes within interviews and their contexts. This is necessary in order to avoid the over-categorization of data or what Morse and Mitcham (2002) call “conceptual tunnel vision”—i.e., “assigning more data to one category than actually belongs, or seeing or justifying most things as being related to, or considered examples of, the concept being investigated” (p. 30). Keeping one’s mind open to the interpretive relationship between data and the concepts used to describe the data is a key component of qualitative analysis, even if it entails refining the research hypotheses and conceptual premises.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 From civil society to social movement: A self-reflexive perspective.

Before analyzing the implications of the Internet for social movements in Morocco, it is necessary first to examine how members in these groups conceptualize and interpret civil society in the country. While an important body of literature exists that documents various aspects of Moroccan civil society, no study has tried to examine how activists themselves conceptualize and understand such a society. To fill in this gap, I tried to solicit the opinion of my interviewees regarding their own interpretations of the notion of “civil society” and how they situate themselves and their struggles within it. A principal issue emphasized by a large number of respondents is the distinction between several categories of collective action groups and organizations distinguished by four key factors: the degree of independence from the state and its networks; the link to political parties; the organization’s internal structure; and collective action strategies employed by a

group. As Hamouda Soubhi, an activist of the Alternative Social Forums (FMAS) and the coordinator of the E-Joussour portal project points out:

In Morocco, there are two civil societies.... There is the society that is supported by the state. The state creates associations, for instance. What we see in Morocco is that there are 40,000 associations registered with [official] receipts, and many are created every day.... When we speak about civil society, we have to go to Marxism and its stance on civil society that [includes] political parties, trade unions, and associations. Civil society is used to refer to associations, while political parties and unions are excluded. We include all these groups; others don't want to hear about political parties.... It is not clear. [The term] social movement is vague. What is a social movement? There are too many terms.⁴³

Soubhi's understanding of "civil society" corroborates many commentators' interpretation of this notion in the context of Morocco, where the term has a strong normative meaning, since it is associated with civil organizations that oppose the state's hegemony over politics (see Chapter Three above). Moreover, unlike dominant interpretations that exclude political parties, Moroccan civil society has always been marked by the central role of political parties in creating parallel associations and trade unions, and in playing the main opposition against the monarchy and its network of power, or the Makhzen. The participation of the main former opposition parties in the government of Alternance⁴⁴ since 1998, and the appearance of new forms of collective action have led to much confusion about the definition of "civil society" and its boundaries.

⁴³ The interview was conducted on July 21st, 2008.

⁴⁴ See Chapter Two for more details on this issue.

In fact, some participants questioned a simple distinction between state versus independent civil societies by highlighting the distinction between institutionalized organizations on one hand and, on the other, non-institutionalized collective action or social movements that operate at the grassroots level and employ radical forms of protest and civil obedience. In an interview during the first Maghreb Social Forum in the city of El-Jadida held between 25 and 27 July, 2008, in which his SMO, ATTAC–Maroc, participated, Jawad Mostaqbal, a civil engineer and ATTAC-Maroc’s webmaster, explained that he was glad the forum could be organized. He was not, however, satisfied with its representatives, since organizers failed to invite the “real” representatives of civil society, the social movements:

Mostaqbal: The first social movement was that of Puerto Alegre in 2000. We were fascinated by the idea. Finally, we adopted it; we wanted to do something here in Morocco and we backed the idea.... We told ourselves that things would continue to retain their militant and real social character. Because when you have a social forum, real social movements should participate in it.... If I had to organise a forum now, I would invite the people of Bouarfa, the people of Sidi Ifni, and the people of Talsint.⁴⁵ What is the objective of a social forum? It is to gather these movements so they can speak about their experiences and their perspectives of cooperation.... If not, what’s the use of forums. It is a civil movement that is filtered by us, the social movements.

Ben Moussa: How do you distinguish between a civil movement and a social movement?

⁴⁵ These are towns and regions in Morocco where ordinary citizens, miners, and unemployed students protested against various forms of injustices and witnessed serious violations of human rights.

Mostaqbal: Social movements are the ones that are very close to the populations and their problems; [civil ones] are elitist.... The problem is when a term is overused by the media and so you have to change in order to distinguish yourself. It is not a problem of terms.⁴⁶

Mostaqbal's understanding of "civil society" further confirms the normative interpretation of the concept that is shared by all participants. It is an interpretation that can become an ideological stance when it is used to exclude groups who are deemed too accommodating of state cooptation. Mostaqbal's perception draws attention to the need to distinguish between "traditional" civil society associations and organizations that are based on formal organizations, structure, and small elite constituencies on one hand and, on the other, newer forms of collective action involving large but loosely connected groups of citizens and activists who are mobilized around specific social issues rather than around ideologies, and use mainly direct forms of action such as protests and civil obedience. This type of SM action has intensified in the last few years, sometimes taking the form of quasi-spontaneous civil disobedience; in some other cases, it took the form of well-organized protests against unemployment, marginalization, and social injustices. Talking to the veteran journalist Khaled Jamaï⁴⁷ at his home in Rabat,⁴⁸ I asked him about the future of Moroccan civil society in light of the continuing weakening of traditional political opposition. Jamaï affirms:

The first thing to note is that there is a new thing taking place at the national level.

Political protest and action comes no longer from the center, but from the

⁴⁶ Interview conducted on July 27th, 2008.

⁴⁷ Khalid Jamaï was for a long time the editor-in-chief of the *Opinion*, the Francophone mouthpiece of the nationalist Independence party, before he became the editor of *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, co-founded by his son Aboubaker Jamaï.

⁴⁸ The interview was conducted on July 1st, 2008.

periphery. It's not Rabat that is moving, not Casablanca, not Marrakesh. It is Sefrou that is moving, it is Sidi Ifni that is acting, it is Bouarfa that is acting, it is Larashe—it is the periphery. The center is not moving. It is the periphery that's leading contestation against power now. This is something new. The second thing: this contestation of the periphery is a popular one. It is not partisan, it is the people who take control into their hands. I am not sure if you watched those CDs on the movement in Tata; it is the people who protest in the streets. Women with their children drumming saucepans and marching with candles at 3:00 am; it is the people who decided to take control of the situation, given that political parties are not playing their roles, unions are not playing their roles—they don't trust them, they don't trust the Makhzan.

Concurring with many interviewed activists who pointed out the important role that oppositional SMOs play to support spontaneous popular protests and workers' strikes, Jamaï adds:

Inside these movements, we find groups like ATTAC, PADS, and AMDH that provide them with activists to organize these protests, so that they don't get out of hand. For instance, during the events of Ifni, there were confrontations with the police, but no protester smashed the window of a store, set a fire, or destroyed a telephone cable or booth, which is extraordinary. It was the police and gendarmerie who vandalized, ransacked, etc. Things were reversed, you understand. Why? Because the activists of PADS, ATTAC, and AMDH were able to make sure that things didn't get out of hand. This is something new,

something we have never witnessed—what I call, when I write about it, Intifada.⁴⁹

Morocco has become a country of “Intifadas.”

In fact, in the face of the rapidly ebbing political clout of historical political parties such as Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP), oppositional collective action is carried out by new social movements, particularly Islamic-oriented, Amazigh, feminist, and alter-globalization movements, in addition to small radical Left parties such as La voie démocratique, Le parti de l'avant-garde démocratique et socialiste (PADS), and Parti socialiste unifié (PSU). With the exception of the Islamic-oriented SMOs, however, most of these groups are based on small constituencies, and their impact on internal policy remains limited, unless they enter into large coalitions⁵⁰ or their action becomes embedded within popular, informal social collective action, as in the cases described by Jamaï above. These SMOs often have members who belong to local communities in peripheral regions, and can provide the support needed to turn spontaneous protests into organized and non-violent collective action.

Thus, the participants agree on that the field of collective action has metamorphosed in recent years: from institutionalized action to informal organization, from coalitions based on ideological affiliations to broad ones grouped around specific issues and goals, and from organizational structures based on large constituencies to professional and small groups of activists embedded in local communities. These new forms of collective action can be broadly subsumed under the term “new social movements” to distinguish them

⁴⁹ The term means “uprising” or “rebellion” in Arabic. The word, however, has become synonymous with Palestinian uprisings, namely the two ones that broke out in late 1980s and early 1990s, and its use here makes reference to this heavily loaded expression.

⁵⁰ The most important example of such a coalition in recent years was the one formed around the Equality Spring (Printemps de l'égalité) campaigns that successfully lobbied for the amendment of the family law (Moudawana) in 2004, and that comprised a large number of associations, political parties, and NGOs in the country.

from “older” forms of collective action. But while new social movements in post-industrial societies mark “a shift from conflicts over material well-being to conflicts over cultural fulfillment” (Habermas, 2008, p. 193), conflict in Moroccan society has shifted from being predominantly class-related to one in which material and cultural fulfillments are increasingly seen as intrinsically interconnected and fused, and in which the achievement of one does not occur without the attainment of the other. This can be clearly discerned in the discourse generated around the social protests of Sidi Ifni, Sefrou, and the Amazigh cultural movement, in which slogans and demands clearly link economic marginalization and class exploitation to cultural and ethnic identities.⁵¹

Equally important, most of the participants from the leftist SMOs whom I talked to indicated that they either categorically refuse to cooperate with Islamic-oriented SMOs, or said that these groups cannot be considered as a part of civil society itself. In Morocco, like most Muslim-majority countries, there is a sharp polarization over the issue of whether or not to legalize and include Islamic-oriented groups in formal political life. The participation of the Islamic-oriented Justice and Development party in the last legislative elections in 2007 was seen by many as a landmark in Moroccan political history. Controversy remains very strong over whether it is possible to accommodate the more radical Justice and Charity SMO, or even to consider it as part of civil society. Commenting on why Islamic-oriented SMOs were not invited to the Maghreb Social Forum, Michel Lambert, the General Director of Montreal-based Alternatives International, argues:

You have to be inclusive, but you have to know what to include. Many issues are at stake here in the case of Morocco with fundamentalists. There are those who

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Chapter Six on framing analysis.

say that there are moderate fundamentalists, and there are those who say there are not. There is a whole debate on the issue in North Africa. We allowed in Nairoubi's social forum for Christians—not fundamentalists, because there are no Christian fundamentalists [in Morocco], of course—to participate.... There was a debate, because you have to talk with these people. Here, it is not the same issue; there is a need for a debate, but we cannot summarize the issue now.⁵²

Lambert's opinion clearly reflects a strong bias against Islamic-oriented groups that dominates not only in the West, but also within leftist and secular circles in Muslim-dominated countries. This radical stance often lumps together all types of Islamic-oriented discourses and groups, which benefit the state and the monarchy more than any other group. While the continuation of polarization inside civil society is a guarantee that the "enemies" of the state will not unite against it, the monarchy presents itself as a guarantor of a delicate balance between traditions and modernism, and the protector of moderate Islam against radical Left and Islamic groups alike. In contrast with this view, Aboubakre Jamaï,⁵³ co-founder of the francophone *Journal* magazine and outspoken critic of the monarchy, asserts:

The problem is not in the Islamists, but in the progressive people in the country. They are socially and politically weak and their weakness comes from the contradictions within their discourse. You cannot tell me that you are fighting for democracy, openness, and the rights of women and [then] when the state kidnaps Islamists on accusations of terrorism and tortures them in Temara, you applaud it or you keep silent and look elsewhere. Your credibility ends there and you

⁵² The interview was conducted on October 10th, 2008 in Montreal.

⁵³ He is Khalid Jamaï's son.

become inaudible. We tried to say that you must be coherent—your discourse must be coherent.... I think that part of the Islamists’ discourse, like that of the PJD, is a modernist one. I don’t call it an Islamist party, I call it a conservative party.... When you find an “Islamic” party that works closely with people and tries to provide them with social services ... [and] publishes reports on what they achieved—when they try to be honest, and although I don’t share their vision of society, I call this political modernism. I don’t agree with their vision of society that remains conservative, but I agree with their political style. The main argument used against them is that if you open the door of democracy for them and they accede, they will turn against democracy itself. There is some legitimacy for this argument, but we don’t know, of course. My experience with “Islamists⁵⁴”, through my interaction with them, not only PJD but also Justice and Charity, is that when these groups operate in an open context, it leads to the reinforcement of moderate elements inside them. When there is an attitude of rejection and marginalization, we end by encouraging the radicals inside them.⁵⁵

Thus, the definition and boundaries of civil society remain a very controversial issue. Regardless of how they may define it, the majority of interviewees have expressed a firm conviction that civil society, and new social movements in particular, have become key political problems in society that are increasingly taking an active part in shaping governance and public life in the country. In the words of Soubhi:

I am sure it is an irresistible force. I don’t want to compare, but people are increasingly listening. Before, they said, it’s just an association. Now they no

⁵⁴ Jamaï indicates in the interview that he is using the term “between quotes.”

⁵⁵ The interview was conducted on July 28th, 2008.

longer say this, because associations mobilize people. When people died from cold in this village near Khenifra, if the associations hadn't mobilized people, the king would have never visited the region. If the associations had not mobilized after the earthquake of El-Hoceima, people would have been left to suffer there for a long time.... If we take the example of the women's movement, for instance, and their campaign to amend the personal status law—everybody was laughing at them first. [But] they were able to form a coalition of 260 associations and collect one million signatures throughout the country that were submitted to the king.... If women had never started this process, there would have never been a change.

4.2 Impact of the Internet on social movements.

4.2.1 An economic tool of communication.

Commentators have argued that the success of collective action in mobilizing support and countering hegemonic discourses and orders depends largely on the size and the type of resources that groups can mobilize at various levels. According to this view, mobilization itself can be defined as “the process by which a group secures collective control over the resources needed for collective action” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 121). Moreover, Marwell and Oliver (1993) argue that “the most prominent and convincing evidence of a group's efficacy is probably the group's size and command over resources” (p. 10). More importantly, it has been pointed out that with the advance of network and information society, mobilization and conflict are increasingly contingent upon the production of information (Melucci, 1994; 1996).

In Morocco, however, civil society groups—especially those who strive to remain independent from the state—have little access to public funds, media, and other

resources. In the neo-patrimonial regime of the country, the Makhzan uses the patronage system whereby it tries to keep all political actors, including civil society, inside its patron-client networks. In addition to creating its own set of associations to counter the weight of “independent” civil society and recruit elites into its sphere, the state also tries to use its material resources and coercive power to neutralize groups and SMOs that may challenge its hegemony. Describing how public funds are allocated in this system, Halima Bennaoui, the coordinator of the Rabat chapter of La ligue démocratique des droits des femmes (LDDF), explains:

The state does not help us. It helps only those associations that rotate around it, but not the independent ones.... They don't tell you anything; but if you don't have cliental relations with them and you have no means by which to protest or to speak about it, [you get nothing]. Associative work in Morocco is very difficult, especially if you want to be independent.⁵⁶

In the same vein, Mohamed Lakjiri, an activist in the Amazigh cultural movement (ACM) and the webmaster of the collective Amazigh blog “Ageddim,” argues:

There is a dialectic relationship between the [Amazigh] movement and its use of the media. [The movement] relies on voluntary work and self-funding, since it does not receive any type of support, especially from the state. It suffers from scarcity of material and human resources; there are only a few [Amazigh] print publications and only three in print that work in very harsh conditions.... It is a very difficult situation⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ The interview was conducted on July 17th, 2008.

⁵⁷ The interview was conducted online on March 7th, 2009.

In an environment where oppositional social movements find it extremely difficult to compete with state and mainstream media over the production of information and the frames necessary to build and sustain collective action, ICTs are providing new possibilities that are empowering these groups at many levels. In fact, most interviewees pointed out that one of the central contributions of the Internet to collective action is that it is a far cheaper and more efficient tool for mobilization and information dissemination. Many respondents have therefore indicated that the Internet is being used as an alternative to the telephone or the fax, especially to communicate with chapters and activists belonging to the same NGO. The Internet is also being used to reduce the costs of transportation when it is necessary to coordinate action or hold meetings between members who live in towns and cities far from one another. Naima Tirerovine and Jamila Garmouma, activists at LDDP, discussing the Injad centres (Injad means “rescuing” in Arabic)—a network operated by the NGO that documents cases of violence against women and provides victims with legal and psychological assistance—stated that

[The League’s Injad centers] use the Internet for filing and distributing reports. For instance, all centers hold monthly meetings and do reports and training. Now these centers hold fewer meetings because they can use the Internet to communicate. So the Internet saves you the cost of the telephone and also of the meetings. For instance, somebody who would have had to come from Ouerzazate to headquarters in Casablanca to discuss certain points can now [attend the meeting] via the Internet.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The interview was conducted on July 17th, 2008.

Similarly, Abderrezak Idrissi, the webmaster and editor of the AMDH website and print newspaper, explains how this medium radically transformed the way AMDH activists share information nationally and internationally:

The Internet is economical, it is fast, it enables you to do comprehensive coverage, and it is easy to use. Before, we used to write a statement and send it by post, which would take 15 days to reach its destination. Then came the fax. It was marvelous. I used to walk by [the association's office] and find an activist or employee sending faxes to many numbers one after another. But it was very costly at all levels. With the Internet, you send a message with one click on Press-Maroc and it is received by some 4,000 members that include journalists and politicians in Morocco and outside it, in the countryside and in cities. We could not imagine that we could do something like that.⁵⁹

Indeed, by using free and easy to use tools such as e-mail and e-mail listserves, SMOs are now able to share information and coordinate action in ways only the state, corporate institutions, and mainstream media could afford before. In the words of Jawad Mostaqbal:

[sending] information to everyone in Morocco was not possible. Only the state had the luxury to do so through television, radio, and other media. Now, we have this extraordinary tool of the Internet. It is true that sometimes it is abused, but I prefer this situation, though. We use e-mails, but there are other tools such as Facebook and blogs.

Many commentators have warned against growing corporate dominance over the Internet that jeopardizes its use as a free tool of communication and civic participation

⁵⁹ The interview was conducted on July 13th, 2008.

(Barratt & Shade, 2007; Frischmann, 2001; Grimes & Shade, 2005; Simpson, 2004). As a response to this threat, various activists and groups have developed free and open-source software that allows users and civil society organizations to both reduce communication costs and establish democratic and participatory forms of communication. Jawad Mostaqbal, for instance, explains how ATTAC's use of open-source software developed through time:

We developed alongside the progress of the technology. In the beginning, we used JavaScript. Then, we added effects so our website would be active and attractive. Recently, we switched to a version of Joomla for many reasons: to facilitate updating the website, as it enables other comrades to intervene to add information; and because it is open-source, which perfectly fits our ideas and our [approach to] action.

Similarly, Caroline Tagny, project officer of youth programs at Alternative International, explains the choice of open-source software in the design of the E-Joussour website:

The tools we use in general are open software ... because they allow websites to be updated by people who are not experts in computer programming ... and because of the values behind these software [tools] that correspond to our organizational values and those of the organizations with whom we work—that is, transparency, openness, sharing, etc. In the case of E-Joussour, the tool we used was “drupal⁶⁰”; it was chosen, especially in the Maghreb context, because it is a tool that allows translation or the option of having a multilingual website, which is easy to program, especially with Arabic.

⁶⁰ An open and free content management system (CMS) written in hypertext preprocessor (PHP).

4.2.2 Participatory communication.

In parallel with their use of open software tools, most SMOs rely on Web 2.0 platforms, such as wikis, blogs, and e-lists, because they are free and easy to maintain and use. In fact, the majority of respondents stated that their groups are facing problems with properly setting up or regularly updating conventional websites because they require significant material and human resources. In comparison, respondents stressed the central role of e-mail lists in facilitating internal communication, as well as interaction with other SMOs. There are two major e-lists used by leftist associations and groups, namely PAD-Maroc and Press-Maroc, both of which are based on Yahoo Group e-mail software and service thousands of subscribers. Any person can subscribe to the two lists, but approval of the automatic subscription is required from the lists' moderators. In my interview with Idrissi, who is also one of three moderators of the Press-Maroc e-list, he shared numerous insights into the potential and limits of e-lists to the civil groups using them:

Idrissi: [The list] is considered like a press agency, and a free one. It takes little of your time to organize things, to have an eye for important messages that you acquire through time, to sort out the messages that you won't read, those you will delete—these things are necessary.

Ben Moussa: Are you the only person supervising Press-Maroc?

Idrissi: No, four of us are doing it.

Ben Moussa: And they belong all to AMDH?

Idrissi: They belong to various associations and bodies, but they are all linked to AMDH in one way or another. One of them lives in a remote place near Tawnat,

but in reality he does not work much on it; two of us are in Rabat and the other in Khmissat⁶¹.... The moderators have the right to refuse any contribution and have the right to reconsider the posting of contributions—for instance, double postings.

As Idrissi contends above, the use of e-lists not only allows for the horizontal networking of civil society groups, but also contributes to redressing the imbalance between big, central urban centres and marginal regions in the country. Indeed, because within a network, the “distance between nodes tends to be zero” (Castells, 2004, p. 4), the use of social network technologies like the e-list leads to the elimination, at least online, of the distance between centres and margins, thus sometimes permitting activists in remote places to take the initiative and be at the centre of a local and transnational collective action network. This observation is further confirmed in the following conversation with Abdelilah Mansouri, a teacher of philosophy and member of the central committee of the Unified Socialist Party (PSU):

A militant from our party was the one to launch Pad-Maroc. [The list] is supervised by Mohamed Awni and Mohamed Khoya, both of whom are militants at the PSU, although they both live in remote parts far from the centers in Ouerzazate⁶².... PAD played a principal role in communication between the political elites in our country, particularly those from the Left, and also in covering a large number of events. It has now become one of the main sources of news for Moroccan newspapers, and also for communicating with militants outside the country.... PAD played a very important role in many events and created problems for the state, either in Sefrou or Sidi Ifni, by mobilizing support

⁶¹ A city in the Middle Atlas Mountains in Morocco.

⁶² A city in the south of Morocco.

and solidarity; an event that happens in Rabat will draw solidarity in remote places in marginalized Morocco. We can say that it has greater influence than many daily newspapers in Morocco and is a source of national and international news. It also presents coverage of national newspapers, Algerian newspapers, as well as Spanish and French ones.⁶³

In addition to these two national lists, many SMOs have their own internal lists. Because shared membership is a key characteristic of Moroccan civil society, many activists who are members in various groups end up receiving a huge number of e-mails that may have repetitive content. A key problem with e-lists that many participants have identified is that they significantly augment the workload because of the time needed to process the huge numbers of e-mail received. Consequently, SMOs try to exercise control over this tool by setting restrictions on the subscription to internal lists in order to maximize their utility and the quality of the discussion that takes place on them. Jawad Moustaqbal explains the case for ATTAC:

Our internal list functions well, but we limit the number of adherents—not everybody can join, which allows us to concentrate on our struggles and discussions and not get diverted by other issues.

This testimony reflects the limitations of participatory media and the notion of direct democracy and universal public sphere. In theory, the Internet has the potential—more than any other electronic medium—to sustain the development of a truly participative and egalitarian public sphere. However, open participation produces a lot of “noise” that affects the quality of discussion and communication because of the time and cognitive capabilities needed to process a huge number of messages. Yet, e-lists are amongst the

⁶³ The interview was conducted on June 6th, 2008.

most important online applications used by social movements. In parallel with their ability to disseminate information widely and effectively, they play a major role in linking SMOs together and creating quasi-permanent networks of solidarity between them. Feature analysis above has demonstrated the low rate of the use of SMOs' websites in interlinking at the national level. E-lists, thus, help address this gap—further demonstrating that diverse online platforms are used to perform various goals that complement one another.

4.2.3 The networking role of the Internet.

The interlinking potential of the Internet is often described as the most defining characteristic of the medium, since it is inscribed into how the technology was built and is used (see a more detailed discussion in Chapter Six, section 2.6). This potential has immense implications for collective action because it can enable individuals and groups to build alliances that are crucial to the success and effectiveness of mobilization, resistance, and contestation. The regional and international networking potential of the Internet is transforming the nature of collective action itself, by multiplying the capacity of SMOs to disseminate information and mobilize support. According to Castells (2001), the Internet “fits with the basic features of the kind of social movements emerging in the Information Age The Internet is not simply a technology: it is a communication media, and it is the material infrastructure of a given organizational form: the network” (pp. 135–6). Moroccan social movements have become more sensible to this potential, as they have started to adapt collective action tactics to it. Journalist and activist Khaled Jamaï argues:

Civil society has progressed along the development of the strategy of struggle.

It's no longer about writing an article. It's the system of the network, and it is functioning incredibly. We have relay points in Paris, London—everywhere. Any time we write something, it is redistributed by our activists, which gives it another dimension as a snowball.

Jamaï's remark draws attention to the dialectic between collective action and repertoires as they shape one another and define their mutual limits. As Tilly and Tarrow (2007) discuss, “[r]epertoires vary from place to place, time to time, and pair to pair. But on the whole, when people make collective claims, they innovate within limits set by the repertoire already established for their place, time, and pair” (p. 16). By boosting the capacity of social movements to construct networks of solidarity across national borders, the Internet has not only empowered them to act against injustices, but transformed their own perceptions and interpretations of collective action as well.

This is especially important in issues and causes that require consolidated effort and a higher level of coordination transnationally, as is the case with the campaign aiming to lobby Arab governments to lift all reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW). Explaining her role in the campaign, Wafaa Amdaw, a volunteer activist at the Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc (ADFM), points out:

I work on the regional campaign for the Convention on the Elimination of all Discriminations Against Women [CEDAW]; I supervise the electronic campaign.... We at the ADFM coordinate the campaign. That is, we have here the “tansikiya” or the coordination [committee]. We have an online petition and a

blog. This is the electronic campaign that I help with. Why do we call this a regional campaign? Because at the level of each country, there is a national campaign where civil societies try to convince governments to withdraw their reservations about the convention; the regional campaign is at the level of the Arab World. We went to all the most visited websites in the Arab World and we sent them our communiqué. We explained our mission and what we wanted to do about this issue. They published it on their websites. That is how many people became aware of our work. Otherwise, there are people among us who participate in forums and meetings, and take with them reports we did on the subject. We target all the people who visit these websites. We explain to them what the convention is, the reservations Arab countries have in regard to it, our campaign, the URL address of our blog, and the petition if they want to sign it. We send all this information by e-mail to these websites that are the most visited in the Arab World. And of course we focus on those who defend human rights and the rights of women.⁶⁴

Faced with stiff resistance from powerful conservative circles in Arab societies over the issue of CEDAW, many feminist NGOs in these countries, including Morocco, found themselves isolated and politically vulnerable. In this context, ADFM spearheaded a regional campaign about the issue, which succeeded in drawing media and public attention, as well as in soliciting international support to the cause. As a result, the king of Morocco stated his support for lifting, albeit partially, some of the reservations on the convention. The Internet, thus, is allowing diverse groups to form national and transnational networks, which has enhanced the efficiency of their lobbying and

⁶⁴ The interview was conducted on September 5, 2008.

pressurizing tactics. Jawad Mostaqbal, for instance, explains the role of the Internet in a national campaign to free political prisoners:

We use the Internet to gather support and do petitions ... and in the case of the first of May prisoners⁶⁵ and of Mohamed Bougrine⁶⁶, [the petitions] worked well. We had between 2,000 and 2,500 signatures, and we sent [the petitions] to embassies etc.... People recognize the effort of our network to free the prisoners. There is direct action and there is pressure. When you have a petition that is signed by thousands of militants from around the world, it is also a form of pressure on the regime and its image, because the state spends thousands and thousands of Dirhams to enhance its international image.

The liberalization of the Moroccan economy and its integration in global capitalism has made the Moroccan state keener to project an image of modernity and stability in order to attract international capital; as a consequence, it has become susceptible to the global flow of negative representations of and news about the country. Various SM groups try to exploit this relative vulnerability by using the Internet to circulate pictures, videos, and articles on human rights violations and social injustices that can mobilize INGOs and other associations for their causes. Invoking this strategy, Said Rahmouni, an activist of La ligue nationale des cadres supérieures au chômage—a member group of the Unemployed Graduates movement—states that

[o]ne of the objectives of the blog is to communicate with human rights organizations to provide information about our case and to make known the

⁶⁵ They are activists belonging to various Moroccan SMOs who were arrested following their participation in rallies celebrating the International Workers' Day on May 1st, 2007.

⁶⁶ A veteran activist nicknamed the “prisoner of three kings” because he was imprisoned during the reign of the present King Mohamed VI, his father Hassan II, and his grandfather Mohamed V in early 1960s.

human rights violations we are subjected to.... They read [the blog] and I have e-mail contacts on it, so they can use them. We receive solidarity statements and letters, etc. Thanks to the blog, our movement has become known worldwide. If you go to France, for instance, and you mention the unemployed graduates, they will tell you they are protesting in the streets of Rabat.... Media pressure constitutes a pressure on and embarrassment for the state.⁶⁷

Lending credence to Rahmouni, Abderrezak Idrissi explains how the role of INGOs and other international bodies are crucial to successfully pressuring the Moroccan state, though this success is contingent on various other factors:

As a human rights association, we cannot put pressure on the state alone without international bodies, especially that state officials sometimes—and I say sometimes because it is not systematic—take into consideration Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, or some other body concerned with human rights, such as the European Union or the UN. You find then that there is an effect.

These testimonies corroborate the findings of the feature analysis above that proved that most of the hyperlinks found on the majority of the studied websites link to INGOs. However, while the role of technology in establishing these forms of transnational solidarity networks is significant, it is not the sole factor, nor is it sufficient to guarantee positive outcomes. First, not all issues receive equal attention from INGOs and civil society in Western countries. The widespread silence within international civil society over the arrests of thousands of people after the Casablanca bombing in 2003, for instance, shows how ideological stances and biases can define the boundaries and

⁶⁷ The interview was conducted on August 20, 2008.

possibilities of solidarity. Moreover, as Idrissi remarked, the Moroccan state is not easily amenable to international criticism and bad publicity, since forcing policy change requires prolonged pressure, which may not always be possible due to competition among a large number of issues on the media's agenda.

4.2.4 The local and global dynamics of online public spheres.

The testimonies above provide strong support for the findings discussed in Chapter Five about the tendency of SMOs—especially professional leftist-oriented ones—to link to INGOs and institutions. These findings illustrate what Samhat and Payne (2006) define as a “global public sphere” (p. 252), which is distinguished from a domestic and international public sphere by virtue of its trans-boundary network of communication and organization, and by the nature of its membership.

Although forming transnational networks of solidarity and activism is not a recent phenomenon, the diffusion of new media, particularly the Internet, has phenomenally boosted the capacity of social movements in Morocco to draw on them through global “micro public spheres” (Volkmer, 2003, p. 13), that arise around single issues, as is the case in the campaign aiming to free the political prisoners described above. The intensification of linkages between local and global spheres manifests itself in diverse articulations characterizing social movements and their use of the Internet. In the case of the alter-globalization movement, translocal interconnectedness informs not only collective action tactics, but also the movement's own identity and objectives, as Michel Lambert, Alternative International's General Director, explains:

Without going into all the details, we think that this region is the epicentre of a global war. It is important for progressive people to militate for a better society,

one that has the capacity to resist the war. We are struggling now to hold the next social forum in Palestine, and we want activists from around the world that are concerned about a number of issues, like the environment, to pay attention to this region that needs to live in peace. The other thing is that problems are becoming global and international. But they affect everyone in a different way; and for the solutions to be efficient, they have to be globalized and internationalized too. This is the real challenge.

This vision underlies the project of the E-Joussour portal launched by Alternatives International and Forum des Alternatives Maroc (FMAS) to act as an online hub to connect the eastern and western parts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It is a project that is based on both existing social networks, as well as on collective action strategies adopted by Moroccan and international alter-globalization SMOs. As Hammouda, the portal's coordinator, points out:

It's a virtual network, but the basis of the project is to support the dynamic that exists in the region.... We work with trade unions in the region and E-Joussour has permitted unions in Morocco, Algeria, and Palestine to see one another and to participate in social forums—not necessarily virtually, but physically. They all militate for social rights in the Maghreb-Mashreq region.

Similar to the E-Joussour project, the Internet also plays a central role in linking ATTAC–Maroc with ATTAC–International and the rest of the alter-globalization movement. In the words of Jawad Mostaqbal:

I think ATTAC-International does not exist like an international institution or organization. There is an ATTAC network. We do not have an international

congress, as in the case of Transparency International. We are not a chapter of ATTAC. We are ATTAC–Morocco, and we are part of the alter-globalization movement. At the organizational level, the only thing that links ATTAC associations is the website of ATTAC–International.

The articulation between local and translocal public spheres operates on various levels other than solidarity and common objectives. A number of participants, particularly those belonging to leftist-oriented SMOs, have indicated that significant portions of users who visit their websites are located outside the country. ATTAC is a telling example: only 3% of visitors to its website are located in Morocco, according to Jawad Mostaqbal:

Ben Moussa: Can you tell me where users of your website come from?

Mostaqbal: Yes, of course. I will surprise you by telling you that 97% of visitors come from outside Morocco. France comes out on top, with 60 to 87% . The rest come from Canada, Saudi Arabia, and from all over the world.

Ben Moussa: Just 3% from Morocco. Don't you think this is too little for a Moroccan association?

Mostaqbal: You have to link the number to that of Internet users, too. In France, I don't know how many users there are, [but] certainly over 40 million. Everybody uses it. This is not the case in Morocco.... But of course, we have to exert more effort to make the website known, because [now] it is limited to the closed circle of militants.... It is not the circle of young people, of employees, etc. But ATTAC is not a mass popular SMO. We aspire to become one, but we are not thousands. We are a minority; we cannot pretend the contrary.

The case of ATTAC applies to many leftist SMOs that rely on limited constituencies formed from hardcore members and sympathizers. Moreover, because they rely on extensive cross-membership, their constituencies expand or shrink according to the type of struggle or issue at a particular moment, and the category of alliances and coalitions formed during a period of visible mobilization. Furthermore, while quantitative data shows that the number of Internet users in the country is relatively high, most of these users, however, have very limited and irregular access to the Internet (for more details, see Chapter Two). In addition, it is normal that most visitors of SMOs' website are located in France and other European countries, given the size of the Moroccan diasporas, which are more affluent and have better access to the Internet. This is particularly important for Islamic-oriented SMOs that have a great number of followers among Moroccan diasporas in Europe. As Hassan Bennajah, secretary general of Justice and Charity's youth section, and former webmaster of the SMO's website, said:

There is a daily increase in the number of people who consider the Internet their main source of information; the number in Morocco is not satisfactory, but it is much greater than before. If we consider the number of visitors to the website, we should be more than satisfied ... [but] I can't give you their number. We receive visitors from inside and outside the country; and this is important, because we have a great number of members outside the country in various [other] countries. But we are satisfied if we speak with numbers.⁶⁸

Virtual networks and representations are inseparable from the physical hardware upon which they are based and the offline existence of the users who produce and are affected by them. That is why "virtual networks operate at their best when they are

⁶⁸ The interview was conducted on July 22, 2008.

backed by real social linkages in specifically localized communities” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 133).

4.2.5 Online and off-line networks.

While the Internet is a relatively cheap, flexible, and effective tool of communication, it is largely insufficient in a country where almost half of the population, most of which are women, are illiterate and live where access to the Internet is very limited. This is illustrated by the case of the Democratic League of Women’s Rights (LDDF), whose members have to use, in addition to the Internet, different tools in their information and mobilization campaigns (especially for interpersonal communication), in order to reach the largest possible number of women. As Halima Bennaoui explains:

So our work developed greatly and we used the caravans as we moved to remote regions in Morocco in order to work in close contact, to listen to women, to know their problems and not be elitist women speaking just from our own perspectives. So this enabled us to develop other forms of work, but from the start we have always worked as a movement, and we act in various spaces.... We could not cover all of the country and so we had to cooperate with teachers in schools—so we cooperated with the Ministry of National Education to provide training for teachers on these themes so that they, in turn, can teach them to others.

Though the feminist SMO has significantly benefited from the Internet, which is used to coordinate work, reduce communication costs, and create an accessible online database, the LDDF has to rely on interpersonal communication and offline social networks—namely schools and teachers—to deliver their messages and get through to women in remote or poor regions and neighborhoods. Preexisting social networks thus

play a central role in mobilization and in securing the continuation of collective action over time, for “embeddedness in social networks not only matters for recruitment; it also works as an antidote to leaving, and as a support to continued participation” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 118). The experience of Youth Action (Action Jeunesse), an association supported by Alternative International concentrating on the empowerment of young people, best illustrates this idea. Ghassan Garmouni, a student and activist in the association, explains in the following exchange:

Ghassan Carmouni⁶⁹: At the national level, we have been able to organize six regional forums since 2005, and one general forum. We were able to organize these forums through the assistance of local associations like “Intilaqua,” “Ashoala,” “Amish,” and the local chapters of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights. In these forums, militants of Youth Action were able to meet other young people, to explain our projects [and] provide analysis of the situation. And so we were able to mobilize other young people who are active in other regional and national associations, and who constituted regional chapters of Youth Action.

Ben Moussa: What are the communication tools you use most to coordinate these activities? Do you use ICTs in your work?

Carmouni: The first tool of communication is interpersonal contacts. Each member of Youth Action is a member in a network that he can try to mobilize. It is this informal level that plays an important role in our mobilization capacity. Then, there is a second level that is more formal; it is all our organizational

⁶⁹ The interview was conducted on June 18, 2008.

communication made up of two forms: the semester bulletins we publish and our website. Our site is our façade and our window on the world.

For Carmouni, the use of the Youth Action's website is limited to a supporting role, i.e. communicating and sharing the outcome of a long process of mobilization that draws mainly on interpersonal communication and existing offline networks.

The embeddedness of online networks within those that are offline is manifest in the case of grassroots movements that rely on dense social networks and cultural bonds, such as the Islamicones. Benefitting from a wide network of disciplined and dedicated members and sympathizers, the Justice and Charity SMO, for instance, combines the use of alternative media, particularly the Internet; small media, such as cassettes and CDs; and interpersonal communication to customize its discourse for various types of members and potential adherents, and to cover the remotest parts of the country. In the words of Hassan Bennajah:

There is something that we are disciplined about: the fact that everyone of us should be an individual, mobile medium of information. Every member in the movement has to become a media body in which there is communication, politics, exhortation, and everything.... This is the most widespread means, since everyone has a number of people with whom he meets on a daily and regular basis—his family, his neighbors—and so because the movement is present in most of the country's regions, and it can reach regions that even the state is unable to reach. We reach people in these regions that are forgotten and left out of state policies—and in many cases, you will find that they know news about J&C through these alternative tools.

Communication becomes, therefore, a religious duty as much as political activism. Moreover, the case of J&C shows that networks are the outcome of the participation and work occurring at the micro or individual level, before they are the result of interactions between individuals. To build efficient networks, movements need much more than technical and organizational infrastructure, for the motivation of individuals using/forming networks is a precondition to the networks themselves. Consequently, grassroots movements that are identity-oriented are better placed to form more solid and effective networks. This allows them to customize their communication tactics according to the category of audiences they target.

4.2.6 Synergy between online platforms and media.

The synergy between online and offline networks highlighted above is further enhanced by the complex interplay between various online platforms on the one hand, and between the Internet and other media on the other. Though the majority of interviewees stressed the centrality of the e-mail list as a tool of mobilization and information dissemination, many indicated that websites possess greater potential for collective action. E-mail-listserves are a fast and effective means of sharing and disseminating information; however, their diffusion is limited to their members, which limits their impact and reach, as Idrissi discussed in the following interview:

Ben Moussa: In comparison to your website, there is a great deal of dynamism in your use of the e-mail-lists—do they make up for the weakness of the site?

Idrissi: They complement one another, I think. [But] the website has a greater importance than the group e-mail. The website is visited by people that are not on those lists. That's why it should be dynamic and active similarly to what you see

on the e-mail list. The e-mail list is an easy thing—anyone can send a message through it. Updating the site needs a lot of editing and so on. There is complementarity; but in my opinion, the website is better.

In fact, despite their effectiveness, e-mail-lists can reinforce the isolation of “radical ghettos” (Downey & Fenton, 2003, p. 190), leading to more fragmentation of the public sphere. In comparison, websites have the potential to reach actual and potential constituents, as well as the large public constituted of the “bystanders.” A website helps situate a group in the national and international shared arena, providing it with social capital and recognition, as Bennaoui explains in the case of La Ligue démocratique pour les droits des femmes (LDDF):

Ben Moussa: But do you really need the website? What will it add to your work?

Bennaoui: So that many other people know about our experience. We don’t want our experience to remain only for us, we want other associations to know about it and benefit from it, both inside and outside of Morocco. We want our publication to reach people and our experiences to reach people. More than that, OXFAM is undertaking a project to learn more about experiences like ours. Many associations that are in the project want to know the details of our work and to publish it so other associations can benefit from it.

It is worth noting here that Bennaoui defines recognition mainly in an international context rather than a national one, which further illustrates the asymmetrical relationship between local and global NGOs and civil society actors. Moreover, the LDDF engages in both lobbying and development activities, as the organization seeks to improve women’s economic and social conditions through awareness and training campaigns. The

organization uses multiple sets of media, such as print material, including brochures, books and pamphlets, CDs, and cassette tapes, in addition to collective visits (caravans) to remote villages in the country and to diasporic communities in Europe.

A common problem facing these SMOs is the daunting obstacle of illiteracy that pushes them to find alternative media that rely on oral and visual communication, such as tapes and CDs. Naima Tirerovine and Jamila Garmouma, two volunteers at the LDDP, pointed out to me:

We issue a lot of print materials, such as books. We use various means to get to different types of people. But we cannot give these things to an illiterate woman. “Read it and you will understand violence.” We used audio tapes, and we were the first ones to use them, after the new Personal Status Code⁷⁰ was adopted, during the 2000 caravan, I think, so that women could understand it. We did a simplified recording on the Personal Status Code in Moroccan Arabic dialect; we did it in Berber, French, and Spanish, too, so as to get to people. So when we went to Spain, we took [the Spanish] ones for women and girls there.

However, because these media are destined for individual consumption, they have limited publicity and visibility beyond the people who use them. Indeed, Halima Bennaoui and other activists in the LDDF explained to me when I visited their offices, that many of these materials are lost especially because the Union has limited space to store them. An online platform is one possible solution, since it can be used to archive materials online, provide easy access to them, and share them on a large scale. Despite the effectiveness of other media as tools of communication and mobilization, the majority of respondents, like Bennaoui above, highlighted the uniqueness of the Internet as a

⁷⁰ See Chapter Five for more information.

medium that can give greater visibility. Soufiane Ladham, from the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, shares this opinion:

We concentrate on lobbying. It involves a lot of communication and images.

When we send faxes and e-mails to journalists and newspapers, it does not lead to great publicity.... But when we post information on the website, it is visited by more people and each day the number will increase. If you search for information on Google, it will lead you to our website. We need more visibility, and using the Internet helps us a lot in this [goal].... Now, we can say that if you don't have a website, it is as if you don't exist.

Ladham's statement reflects some exaggeration about the impact of the website, most probably because ADFM was just launching its new website at the time, and was hoping it would greatly help to achieve the group's mission. Nonetheless, his testimony shows how social actors understand the role of the medium and situate it in relation to other tools of communication, including web-based ones. In most cases, different platforms can be used simultaneously or consecutively, as Mohamed Lakjiri explains:

When I joined the Amazigh cultural movement, I was receiving a lot of e-mail that concerned issues and new events in the movement. Each day, I was receiving between 15 and 20 statements, communiqués, [or] ads concerning ACM. I wanted to make those e-mails public.... I received some through PAD–Maroc and Press–Maroc, but I also received e-mail through my personal address. I have a relationship with many activists in the ACM who send me their statements and communiqués. I wanted everybody to benefit from them. Through these e-mail messages, I received [information about] many issues I didn't find in local

newspapers, Amazigh websites, or national ones. So, I thought of setting up a website for this purpose.

Lakjiri's media intervention sheds light on the confluence between mobilization processes at the micro and meso levels as the blog project draws on material borrowed from personal e-mail and collective e-lists, as well as on private connections and collective action networks (see Chapter Five for a definition of micromobilization). The project further illustrates how Web-based platforms can provide a higher level of "publicity" that cannot be attained through other interfaces. Sharing the same data on various platforms serves a number of purposes beyond their immediate informative functions. While a statement shared through an e-mail list provides information for other activists upon which they can further act, its posting on a blog acquires an added value—namely, accessibility; at least theoretically, it is available to members and adversaries alike, contributing to building a dynamic public sphere where opposing frames and interpretations counterbalance and sometimes integrate one another.

Moreover, as a technology, the Internet is based upon and incorporated into an extensive range of ICTs, such as computers, mobile phones, and digital cameras, which are increasingly being used seamlessly. For instance, mobile phones are used to capture photos and videos that are made available for downloading and sharing on the Internet, while PCs have made it easy to share multimedia information not just on the Internet, but also on DVDs and CDs. Upon attending the First Maghreb Social Forum in the city of El-Jadida, for instance, I noticed that most participant groups were distributing and displaying video CDs featuring street actions, protests, and documentations of police brutality against members, which helps them mobilize sympathizers and receive

donations and contributions. This observation confirms many commentators' assertions that new media like the Internet are unlikely to render older ones obsolete, since "digital networks will be increasingly interwoven with other networks in complex and mutually redefining ways" (Clement & Shade, 2000, p. 34).

Furthermore, as the case of the Unified Socialist Party below illustrates, during events that require quick mobilization, some SMOs may use the Internet to post detailed information and action calendars. However, mobile phones are often more convenient, as they allow faster mobilization, especially because not all members and adherents have easy access to the Internet:

Manssouri: We use the Internet and we send faxes to the offices that have [fax machines]. We use [short message service] SMS [to mobilize] protest and marches. For instance, during events protesting some crime related to the war in Iraq or to Palestine, we were able to mobilize militants and the general public to protest in front of the American consulate here in Casablanca [and] the embassy in Rabat. The incident happened in the morning and we were able to mobilize the protest in the afternoon, in which hundreds of militants and the general public were able to participate.

Ben Moussa: How do you reach all these people at once?

Manssouri: We ask every militant to send the message to five or ten people he knows, and thus it spreads quickly. Sometimes SMS is quicker; and when there is something urgent, we send messages to militants here in Casablanca. And so SMS plays an important role in this domain.

The Internet is, therefore, used alongside other media to deliver information to and to mobilize various types of users (horizontal integration), or to share information and materials that are retransmitted and redistributed through other media (vertical integration).

4.2.7 The organizational role of the Internet.

Analysts who studied the political appropriation of the Internet by SMOs have overwhelmingly concentrated on its use for direct mobilization, networking, and dissemination of alternative information, and only very little on its use for internal organizational purposes. Our data, however, confirm that this function is a central aspect of these groups' use of the Internet, and is even sometimes the main one.

As stated above, a major factor in the Internet's growing adoption by Moroccan civil society groups is its low cost as a tool of communication. With chapters and centers dispersed over a vast geographical area, and with meager financial resources, many associations and NGOs are relying on the Internet to reduce the costs associated with communicating by telephone, as well as with transportation when face-to-face communication is needed. Tirerovine and Garmouma point out that this is true of LDDF's help centers for women:

The league's Injad centers⁷¹ use the Internet to file and distribute reports. For instance, all centers hold monthly meetings and do reports and training. Now these centers hold fewer meetings because they can use the Internet to communicate. So the Internet saves you the cost of the telephone and also of the meetings. For instance, [it's no longer necessary] for somebody to come from

⁷¹ "Injad" means "rescuing" in Arabic. As to Injad centers, it is a network of centers that document cases of violence against women and provide victims with legal and psychological help.

Ouerzazate to headquarters in Casablanca to discuss certain points—they can do it via the Internet.... So if we have to meet, we will only discuss the main issues and results; we will not meet every month or every two weeks to discuss all the points—especially [because] we receive large numbers of women, and the centers have to file monthly reports. So the Internet can alleviate the work load and reduce the costs for us.

In addition to using e-mail to communicate and intranet networks to link databases and sections, civil society groups post information and action calendars online to keep militants—particularly those living in remote areas—informed and updated, which contributes to the cohesion and effectiveness of both organization and action.

Furthermore, social movements' collective action alternates between short and ephemeral periods of high visibility, as they “become visible only where a field of public conflict arises,” and long period of “latency” (Melucci, 1989, p. 71). The Internet can play a significant role in maintaining the continuation of mobilization and action through online communication and interaction. In some cases, the Internet, and website interfaces in particular, plays a big role in imparting a sense of unity, cohesion, and continuity to movements or groups that are threatened either by internal divisions or external repression. This applies specifically to groups that lack strong organizational structures, are geographically dispersed, and/or lack other media outlets, as Jawad Moustaqbal points out in the case of ATTAC–Maroc:

The website plays this role of internal communication between ATTAC militants from various countries and between sympathisers. It is the only platform that guarantees the continuation of information sharing at the level of ATTAC,

because print edition and bulletins are not sufficient.... There are some moments when we are very active and we issue a lot of brochures ... and there are other moments where activity is low, when we don't do many things. The website does not cost us a lot and we can do the updating. You don't need to print things to do it. In fact, one of the reasons for the continuation of ATTAC in Morocco is the Internet. It has allowed us to stay in contact with one another, to have a tool of communication that link us with sympathisers even during the most difficult moments—because when we were not able to walk in the street, we were still able to post our ideas on the website. I am convinced that this is important [in regard to] all the organizational problems I talked about—the fact that there are two factions of ATTAC, the problems after the first congress: the continuity was the website.

Rodriguez (2001) reminds us that alternative or citizen media may function through “short life cycles,” which does not mean that they are inconsequential, but simply that they contract and expand according to their “own very vital rhythms” (p. 22). In the same vein, Garcia (1992) argues that

the submerged network (that is, the “latent” part of the movement) becomes manifest in localized and ephemeral periods of mobilization. But it must be emphasized that the network itself is constructed day-by-day, through solidarity and new social practices that attempt to open up spaces for cultural innovation and the creation of new ecological understandings. (p. 162)

The dialectic between the “visibility” and “latency” of social movements and their use of the Internet also has important implications for the visibility of the websites themselves,

as the latter receive more attention during periods of crisis or high mobilization. In the words of Jawad Mostaqbal:

If you do nothing, what are you going to post on your website? When I said we receive 2,600 visits per day, it is not consistent. There are peak moments, like during the Rosamor⁷² fires, for instance. We went there immediately when it happened; and in Morocco, there is a need for information, and there is [media] opacity of tragedies like these, so we had the chance to transmit the information via our website. Like in the case of Sidi Ifni [and] Rosamor—people searched for information and did not find it anywhere. In the case of Sidi Ifni, we sent a fact-finding committee to the scene and we [posted] a report with pictures, and this raised sharply the number of visitors to our website. We did not do it to augment the number of visitors on our website, but it was an opportunity where we could express our solidarity.

While social movements' websites receive less attention during “latency” periods, these platforms continue to play an important role for these groups and their core members, providing them with the resources needed to enhance their collective consciousness, and sustaining their readiness and potential for collective action until the next mobilization opportunity arises.

Many respondents indicated that the organizational value and effectiveness of the Internet is mostly evident during special events such as elections and conventions, when it is used to reduce costs and time, and to enhance the transparency of transactions and the distribution of tasks and benefits, as is the case with the Unemployed Graduates

⁷² Rosamor is the name of a factory in Casablanca where 55 workers died in a fire in 2007, because they were locked inside the factory in rooms that had no exits when the fire broke out. They all died as they could not escape.

movement. Each group within the movement has a point system, whereby militants are ranked according to their contribution to and participation in protests and other forms of action. This system is used to identify a list of members who will be first to benefit from employment openings once opportunities arise through negotiation with the government and with regional state institutions. Explaining the role of the Internet in the functioning of the movement, Said Rahmouni, of the Unemployed Graduates movement, asserts:

We use e-mail and other means. The Internet is the means that provides members with new information, changes on some course of action, or paper contributions. We do it for the sake of credibility and transparency with regard to the unemployed graduates who elected us in the executive council. Before we launch anything, we post the new information online.... Before you can hold a general assembly, you need to provide people with the program and agenda so that you can have a constructive discussion and come out with conclusions.

Zakaria Sahnoun, a journalist supervising the online version of the newspaper “Attajdid” (Renewal), the mouthpiece of the SMO Unity and Reconstruction (U&R) and an activist in the Justice and Development Party (PJD, the political arm of the U&R), too stresses the value of websites in providing the necessary information and documents for members during elections and congresses. Discussing the last national congress of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), the political arm of the Unity and Reconstruction movement, he states:

Websites have two functions: communication and archiving. But there is also the financial factor, since running a website demands only one or two people.... I will give you a vivid example of this: the sixth National Congress of the party will be

held on July 19th, and you are invited to attend the opening session or some other sessions to get an idea of the election campaign. In terms of what concerns the congress, all the documents have been posted online, so the members and the general public can access them.

By facilitating access to these documents, the Internet contributes to the enhancement of the quality of political participation and discussions, as well as to the development of transparency and accountability within SMOs.

4.2.8 Professionalism versus volunteerism.

Social movements in this study differ significantly in terms of their organizational structure, size, political influence, and access to resources. These differences affect considerably the degree to which they rely on professional staff or volunteerism to carry out a variety of tasks, including using information technology and the Internet. Interview participants distinguished between two types of voluntary work: the first one is based on the participation of activists who are members of the SMOs themselves; the second one involves non-member volunteers. Moreover, by analyzing the data, it was possible to discern a significant discrepancy between SMOs that are able to mobilize adequate numbers of qualified volunteers from among their constituencies, and those who have had to rely on help from outside the group. In the first category, we find mainly Islamic-oriented SMOs that have a large number of adherents and sympathizers inside and outside the country, particularly from the younger generation, and can rely on the voluntary services of a significant number of them who are motivated, and well disciplined and educated. I asked Bennajah whether Justice and Spirituality has recourse

to a private company to design the SMO's numerous websites. He replied in the following words:

The main work on the website is done by volunteers from the movement—by its IT professionals inside or outside the country. It is rare that there is recourse to parties outside the movement.... We are different from the other groups. The reason is clear—for the majority of these websites do not address the needs of the Moroccan citizen; they are not professional; they don't have dedicated staff; the majority are not updated frequently, [either] daily or more [often] than daily—and it is natural, as there is competition from other Websites that cover news instantly.

It is important to note that the term “dedicated staff” used by Bennajah does not mean that the SMO employs full-time staff, but rather that these volunteers work on a regular basis. Islamic movement organizations were among the first to adopt new media and ICTs for political ends within Islamic countries (see Chapter Five for a discussion of this issue). They have also been the ones to use these technologies more effectively and seamlessly with other forms of activism, since many of their adherents are IT experts and because of the high level of militant culture among their members, which explains why a movement like J&S finds it much easier than other groups to recruit a sufficient number of qualified volunteers to assist in various e-projects. Zakaria Sahnoun, from Islamic-oriented Unity and Reconstruction, further elaborates on this idea:

The one thing that distinguishes our work is the militant culture. This sense of militant culture had an impact on the normal life of the movement, and therefore militants undertake many initiatives that do not necessarily stem from clear

communication strategies. This explains why we have benefited more from new technologies and not just the Internet.

The majority of institutionalized SMOs, however, combine volunteerism with professionalism by employing fulltime staff and outsourcing many tasks to private companies. However, a lack of sufficient funding limits the capacity of these organizations to employ adequate staff. At the same time, many of them are unable to mobilize sufficient numbers of qualified volunteers to perform tasks that require some kind of special training, such as designing or maintaining a website. Ladham relates the experience of the Democratic Association for Moroccan Women (ADFM) with relying on volunteerism to design a website for the association:

The current website is the most recent one. We started with a trial version before that was set up by a trainee student. We were disappointed because the final product was not satisfying. You have to work with professionals, and you need money to do that. After that, we received some funds from an international donor and put out a call for tender in which the best-known IT companies in the country participated. We chose a company and it started to work on [the website].

While the majority of respondents from professional and leftist SMOs indicated they have a shortage of qualified volunteers, those belonging to feminist SMOs stress more the difficulties they are encountering in trying to secure high enough numbers of professionals and volunteers in their action. As Halima Bennoui explains in the case of LLDP:

We have a big workload; and most of those who work for us are volunteers. But here we still don't have this tradition of volunteerism. Just in Rabat, we have a

big project, but we have only two employees, while what we do requires the work of thirty people. We don't have enough human resources, and our volunteers are starting to get tired.

The scarcity of both material and qualified human resources is a daunting obstacle shaping the appropriation of the Internet for collective action in the country.

Nonetheless, as the example of the Islamic movement testifies, it is a problem that can be mitigated through the use of radical forms of communication and media, and from the availability of sufficient numbers of dedicated and qualified volunteers. In some cases, individual activists with very little means can bypass many of the hurdles facing professional SMOs; one example is the Amazigh blog Ageddim, which is maintained by one person—Mohamed Lakjiri. However, relying completely on voluntary work has its limits, since after three years of existence, the Ageddim blog stopped being updated. I asked Lakjiri about the reasons for this, and he explained in the following words:

I am a student at the university and have a thesis to finish, which takes much time from me. And there are other problems, tpp.... I have other responsibilities. The blog sometimes takes five hours a day, and sometimes I stay up late in the night working on it. This is done at the expense of communication with my family, my friends, because you want to publish new things on the blog. My mind is always busy with that, and my thoughts are always hooked into the virtual world. Even when I am with friends, I am thinking about the blog and what I am going to do with it. How I am going to divide my time between studies and that? Even when I go to the university, I try to work the afternoon on the letters to be published at night. The main problem is time.

The comparison between institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of collective action and appropriation of the Internet illustrates the dilemma facing social movements. They have to strike a balance between organized and structured action, and flexibility and resourcefulness of radical activism and media, as Tarrow (1998) argues:

The dilemma of hierarchical movement organizations is that when they permanently internalize their base, they lose their capacity for disruption; but when they move in the opposite direction, they lack the infrastructure to maintain a sustained interaction with allies, authorities, and supporters. This suggests a delicate balance between formal organization and autonomy—one that can only be bridged by strong, informal, and non-hierarchical connective structures. (p. 137)

One reason explaining Islamic-oriented SMOs' effective appropriation of the potential of the Internet is their success in maintaining this balance between institutionalized collective action and loose networking, a balance that other social movements have failed to achieve.

4.2.9 Professional versus radical journalism.

Though the bulk of the testimonies above lead us to perceive volunteerism and professionalism as dichotomous notions, other examples from the data question any easy division between the two. In fact, social movements hold a complex and asymmetrical relationship with mainstream media (MSM). On the one hand, social movements have to use alternative media to challenge more powerful and resourceful competitors whose framing of issues and struggles can shape public opinion and influence decision-making. Paradoxically, however, social movements also need MSM to disseminate their mandates beyond the closed circles of their constituencies.

In the context of Morocco, the distinction between professional journalism and militancy can become blurred; this is especially the case for the publishers of independent newspapers and magazines, who often find themselves at the front line of the long struggle between the state and civil society. Because they are actively engaged in transgressing “permissible” limits of free speech and are constantly challenging hegemonic discourses and static political and social orders, they defy conventional definitions of “alternative media,” as well as any boundary between political activism and professional journalism. Describing the pioneering experience of the weekly francophone magazine *Le Journal* and how it tried to strike a balance between activism and professional journalism, Aboubaker Jamaï states that

the regime adapted by sophisticating its method of repression and by launching economic attacks on independent media.... We knew that by our editorial line we were going to antagonize a party of the businessmen, but we could survive through the remaining part.... We did not want to [be involved in] militant journalism on all levels. Because, before us, there were good newspapers and journalists who had credibility ... but the problem was the economic structure ... because this journalist has to do this job and was paid a meagre salary, because the company that employs him didn't have the means and survived only because of contributions from militants. We wanted to break down this model. You need to have a journalist who is well paid ... etc. It was necessary to find the right economic model. *Le Journal* was created on this hope that Morocco has evolved enough to allow a press company to prosper while doing its task of journalism.

However, the experience of *Le Journal*, which had pioneered a very audacious and critical type of journalism in the country since 1997, ended in January 2010 after it was pushed into bankruptcy by denying it advertising revenues and successive “legal” persecutions—thus signaling the end of another cycle of openness initiated by King Hassan II in the last years of his reign and continued, albeit with a lot of hesitation, by his son Mohamed VI in the first years of his reign. Many journalists have been held in prison, banned from writing, intimidated into silence, or compelled to tone down their criticisms for fear of reprisals. Describing the Makhzen’s treatment of the press, Khaled Jamaï asserts:

We are trying to do what we can with the small means we have. It is between activism and journalism; it’s not clear. Now in this press called independent, we have become compelled to do something that is not our business, since we have become the opposition. Because of the void, the space is empty, there are no [oppositional] parties—we have become the opposition.... There are four or five [independent] newspapers and magazines in the country and the state considers them as though they were the radical leftist opposition. We are just journalists.

The boundary between journalism and activism is flouted and transgressed, not only by professional journalists and newspapers, but also by human rights association activists who often play the role of professional reporters. Most newspapers and magazines, particularly independent ones, do not have the resources to employ full-time reporters or dispatch them to every corner of the country, particularly in times of crisis when fast and reliable information is urgently needed. On the other hand, some SMOs, like the AMDH,

have a wide network of activists operating in local sections throughout the country—from which many print newspapers try to benefit, as Idrissi testifies in the following passage:

Idrissi: An event can happen anywhere in Morocco, in Rabat, Bouarfa or in Tiznit; we will receive a call from a journalist asking for information about what happened in the mountains of Anfkou near Khnifra. We tell him to contact the AMDH section in Khnifra so he can get information from the field. It is like you have a network [of reporters] belonging to the AMDH. So the network of reporters get news that are precise and have credibility.

Ben Moussa: Do you train your people in journalism, since they are mainly political activists?

Idrissi: We give the training—I mean it is journalistic, but at the AMDH we don't call it so. It is training in learning how to monitor violations of human rights. Any activist has to cover the violations that happen in the region where he lives, so [on a practical level], he has to know what notes to take, to collect information from the victims, [and] from those who caused it. He should normally have a camera, a voice recorder. It is field work.

Recently, however, with the popularization of social media like blogs and YouTube, more radical forms of journalism have appeared, practiced by ordinary citizens who are not necessarily members in any civil society group and are using various strategies, from quasi-spontaneous resistance action during social protests and civil obedience, to insurgency tactics involving “camera-snipers” who carefully plan and take enormous risks to film security agents carrying out human rights violations or “routine” acts of corruption. This is best illustrated by “the sniper of Targist,” the pseudonym of an

anonymous individual who posted a series of video clips on YouTube showing Gendarmerie Royale agents taking bribes from merchandise traffickers in the region of Targist, a small town in the mountainous Rif region of Morocco. The videos became very popular inside and outside Morocco and received considerable attention from national and international media. Describing the impact of this type of “journalism,” and how independent media may use it as an important source of news, Taoufik Bouashrine⁷³, co-founder and former editor of the Arabic daily Al-Massae says:

You have heard of the sniper of Targist. This is a person who used his camera to record gendarmerie officers taking bribes, [which he then] broadcast. We put this piece of news on our front page immediately after he put it on YouTube and it raised a widespread discussion in the country. We all knew that gendarmerie officers were taking bribes; but it is a different thing to document it with an image. The Royal Gendarmerie opened an investigation with the people who appeared in the videos and it made a big impact, and all the newspapers reported it. If YouTube were not available, it wouldn't have been possible ... to the degree that it now terrifies the gendarmerie, at a time [when] they always terrified people. They became afraid⁷⁴.

In the same vein, Khalid Jamaï contends that this type of radical media and political activism has achieved more results in terms of resisting and provoking hegemonic orders than the rest of civil society could achieve over many years:

Now, the state or any other person cannot stop the Internet. The definition of a journalist has changed today. You just have to own a mobile phone and have

⁷³ Bouashrine resigned from Al-Massae in December 2008 to launch another Arabic daily, Akbar AlYoum.

⁷⁴ The interview was conducted in Bouashrine's Al-Massae office on June 15, 2008.

access to the Internet to publish on YouTube. This is what I call [being] a citizen journalist. Take for instance the issue of corruption and bribing. We got tired of talking about it, until that sniper of Targist took us all by surprise. The impact of what he did was better than the entire civil society's action. The way our activists in Sidi Ifni used YouTube makes our work, in comparison, appear insignificant. This is the real fundamental revolution.

Radical journalism as a form of political action and media resistance has gained unprecedented importance, both in the media and popular awareness due in no small part to the events of Sidi Ifni. Over a few days, activists and citizens alike used their mobile phones to document the offenses committed by security forces and post hundreds of video clips on social sharing interfaces like YouTube and Dailymotion, thus contributing decisively to countering official media and government discourse on these events and compelling them to make a U-turn on their previous positions. A large number of participants, in fact, identified the events in Sidi Ifni as a landmark in the development of collective action in Morocco, and an instance of when spontaneous and informal social protest drew on organized collective action and radical journalism to stage effective offline and online resistance. Telling the story of the interplay between these three forms of collective action, Manssouri points out:

Compared to the distorted coverage of the official media YouTube played a central role in the events when they just started, when the state was closing Sidi-Ifni—and before the state allowed even Al Jazeera to cover it because of existing conflict between the channel and the government⁷⁵. YouTube was the first to tell

⁷⁵ The government has repeatedly accused the channel of deliberately buffing up its reports on social and political problems in the country, and refused to renew the license for its Rabat bureau.

the truth about what happened.... We were among the main people who created this intifada of Ifni either by participating in the protests, organizing them, or providing logistic support to them; and our office there was used by everybody because two parties were pressured to leave town. So the meetings of the local secretariat of Tansikiat were all held in the local office of the PSU. All the associations like ATTAC, AMDH, etc., held their meetings in our office.

There are, however, drawbacks linked to radical journalism. As the boundaries between activism and journalism are blurred, there are always risks that the principles of authenticity and veracity of reported fact may be sacrificed by militants who seek to mobilize support for a cause or an issue. A case in point is that of Al-Jazeera's Arabic channel quoting local activists in Sidi Ifni who claimed that six people died during the confrontations between local citizens and police forces. However, the information could not be verified afterwards, and the Moroccan state took it as an opportunity to defame the news channel and sue its office manager in Rabat. Recognizing the nuances of radical journalism and its implications for professional journalism, Bouashrine contends:

The Internet is the open space that reveals society as it is. However—and I don't have statistics but am talking from my experience—I can tell that young people are the ones who use the new technologies the most, [those] between 15 and 32 years ... they are a very important segment of society. They are the majority and the future. Many times, we take subjects from blogs and forums and rewrite them in a more professional way. You know there are things on the Internet we cannot do. These people don't respect laws, sometimes they cite names, and talk about the personal life of people, [make] accusations. But apart from these things, we

try to filter. These sites give you an idea of Moroccan society. What interactions, thoughts, what problems and trends in music, in clothes, their positions on power, even their opinion on symbols of the state; they write about the king, things they cannot say openly. We benefit from these things.

Attacks against freedom of speech have intensified in the country in the last few years, and it has become very clear that the Moroccan regime is determined to tighten its grip over the public sphere, as it has been doing for decades. As the model of an independent and professional journalism in the country—heralded by the publication of *Le Journal*—came to an end, the Internet is becoming more than ever a vital tool for free speech and expression. Framing analysis of many websites used by various SMs has demonstrated that the Internet is indeed used to disseminate oppositional discourse and frames, particularly by grassroots groups. Corroborating these findings, interview analysis, too, has revealed that the Internet is playing a critical role in the promulgation of free speech.

4.2.10 Alternative public spheres.

A number of commentators have indicated that freedom of expression in Morocco is neither stable nor clearly defined or institutionalized, since its boundaries, definitions, and laws are intentionally kept broad and contingent upon the state's interpretation and interests (see Chapters Two and Three). The degree of tolerance the state permits fluctuates and depends on the identity and medium of the speakers. After subscribing to the national mail-list, Press-Maroc, which is used by thousands of members from various leftist movements and groups in the country, I noticed that some of the messages circulating on it advocate armed insurgency, which prompted me to ask Idrissi about it:

Ben Moussa: I noticed that some messages on the list are very radical—for instance, calling for the secession of certain regions and armed revolution. Does this not place responsibility on you in case the state decides to pursue you?

Idrissi: I prefer that messages of this type and statements of this type get posted and seen, and that it be known that a citizen who lives in El Hoceima calls for a republic in the Rif region. Whether he is right or wrong, people have the right to know about his opinion, because there are citizens who think like him. This is information—maybe not good [information], but it has to reach people.

Ben Moussa: In accordance with freedom of expression?

Idrissi: Yes, maybe it can be seen from that angle, but it is also a case of people's right to get information. As a citizen, I have the right to know how people in some regions think. And I can agree with them or not. So it is the right to [free] expression, but also the right to get information and news. Why should we prevent somebody who thinks that the problems facing the country can only be faced in this way? Why prevent the message from getting through?

Compared to other media, access to and use of the Internet in Morocco has benefitted from a considerable margin of freedom, although in the last few years, the state has tried to control access to particular websites. Many observers have, in fact, noted that the Internet enjoys a level of freedom that is relatively unmatched in most Arab countries (Open Net Initiative, 2009). It is doubtful, however, that the country's relative leniency towards online expression stems from a liberal policy towards basic freedoms.

Goldsmith and Wu (2006) argue that “governments can indeed control the Internet at three levels: the level of users or recipients, the level of websites, and the level of

intermediaries or transmitters” (p. 49). The Moroccan state has tried repeatedly to control expression and information on the Internet by selectively blocking undesired sites or Internet provider (IP) addresses, but it has failed since users can usually access the same content on other websites. Instead of direct censorship, the Moroccan state has recently resorted to persecuting Internet users and bloggers deemed to have transgressed the “red lines,” in what seems to be a bid not to silence all criticism online, but to increase self-censorship.

Self-censorship remains more widespread among civil society groups, particularly those striving to operate in the boundaries of existing regulations and laws. In fact, the state uses its enormous resources to try to co-opt oppositional groups by granting them privileges and linking them to its network of satellite organizations and institutions. The Internet, however, has permitted more radical groups to defy state control and to play the role of watchdog over other civil groups that may be tempted to transgress rules of independence and integrity required from militants within a social movement. Mohamed Lakjiri, a blogger and activist, discusses this in regard to the Amazigh cultural movement (ACM):

I think since 2006 or 2007 [the blog] has contributed to raising awareness about the Amazigh cause, about human rights. It has made known issues [that are] absent from national, official, and even independent media, in newspapers and even on those websites that claim they are independent. They don't publish them. I don't know why.... It contributed to revealing many measures taken by the state against the Amazigh movement, and it also pushed many Amazigh associations and groups to be more transparent for fear of being revealed on the Internet—

because in print newspapers, there is no such criticism or close watch over the Amazigh movement. These blogs have made militants and groups abide by collective action conventions and rules because they fear being exposed; and I noticed in many cases that this is effective in many places.

Ben Moussa: Can you give an example of this?

Lakjiri: There are many examples. [One is] the alliance which the Amazigh league formed with the PAM party movement's action for all democrats.⁷⁶ This was against the movement's principles. There are other examples like this that can be called acts of treason—those suspicious relationships. They do it [even if] they have to do it in secrecy.

Equally important, in a society where women have to fight against many forms of discrimination and injustice that prevent them from fully fulfilling their roles as citizens, ICTs, including the Internet, can empower them to challenge restrictions on accessing the public sphere and making their voices heard. In many of the testimonies of the women I interviewed, personal experiences of empowerment are linked to the use of various ICT media such as mobile phones, computers, and the Internet. A number of female respondents have indicated that ICTs have empowered them as individuals to express themselves more freely and independently in a male-dominated public sphere. The story of Amina el-Rbou, a volunteer at the Women's Labor Action, is very telling; she was a victim of conjugal violence for a long time and had to give up her job to concentrate on

⁷⁶ Authenticity and Modernity Party (Parti d'authenticité et modernité, or PAM) is the new political party established by Ali Himma, a former minister of the Interior and close aid to King Mohamed VI. In the last communal elections held in 2009, the party won the largest number of seats and is now bracing to win the next legislative elections in 2012.

her struggle to get a divorce from her abusive husband. Later on, she decided to publish a newspaper in order to share her experience and her view of the world:

The time I thought about divorcing him, I hated my job and everything, and left [it] all.... I lost 18 years of my life to him and did not benefit from the experience.... When I resigned [from my job], I tried to publish a newspaper and I called it *Moroccan Resistance*. I meant resistance in its general sense, resistance in everyday life, what happens to us, to survive. And I struggled to print one issue in Arabic and French. I told myself, I have to tell people about my experience, but if I started talking about it myself, people will say I am a mad person. I told myself, perhaps through this newspaper. But after the first issue, I was overwhelmed—because you know the difficulty in Morocco.

Ben Moussa: Did you use the Internet to search for content and information for your newspaper?

Amina el-Rbou: No, at that time I was not using it. I wish I had known; it would have made my work a lot easier.... At the time, I had a little money from the settlement with my job, and I spent some of it on my divorce and the rest on this project. Before, it was very difficult to do such a thing, because it required many people and hardware. Now you can do it on a PC using a desktop publisher. I did it all with a desktop publisher.⁷⁷

El-Rbou's experience with publishing a newspaper, though a short lived one, has certainly helped her to acquire confidence in herself as a person and a woman, and regain control of her life. Sharing her experience with others, however limited their number, is an act that defies many social and cultural codes that restrict women's access to the

⁷⁷ The interview was conducted on July 8, 2008.

public sphere in the name of morality and “decorum.” El-Rbou’s story is similar to many highlighted by other studies conducted in other developing countries where scholars identified the implications of accessing and appropriating ICTs by women for the “self-esteem and renewed self-confidence to change their own lives” (Garrido & Roman, 2006, p. 170).

Publishing a newspaper, however, is a daunting task for one woman with limited means. Seen against this background, the use of the Internet as a tool of expression requires fewer resources, as is the case with creating a blog. In fact, the use of blogs by feminist activists for personal purposes and activism objectives makes it easy to develop trans-boundary realms and networks articulated on blending the personal and private with the public. For instance, Samira Kinani, a member of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights’ (AMDH) central committee and a high school teacher, points out how writing in her blog liberates her from the rigid, institutionalized, and official discourse of activism and, therefore, gives her the ability to advocate her identity as a woman and an individual person in addition to her identity as an activist. Kinani’s identity as a woman, a feminist, and a citizen are intertwined in her position as a human rights activist; her blog becomes a communicative node where these multiple “selves” and voices interact, and even fuse into the act of blogging:

It has become like this; it has become personal. I write what I like, I don’t control myself a lot. There, [on the Internet,] I am Kinani, not the militant, with my pains and drawbacks. I am what I am. Because when you are at the AMDH, you have to use your legal discourse; the other [blog] allows me to remain the person I am. You don’t want to remain the militant and [write that] International conventions

say this or that. It is my private space.... For instance, there was this Moroccan athletics champion of the year 1973, and I met her; she was living in a shantytown house, and I talked about her in my blog. What happened is there was a lot of solidarity with her. There were people who wrote to the ministry [of sport] or who proposed to help her. You see, [blogging] can serve something. I was writing only for myself, but there are people who read and become involved. Perhaps because I am an activist at the AMDH, and I am in contact with a lot of people and know about many things around us.⁷⁸

The Internet has undoubtedly enhanced Moroccan SMs' capacities for collective action at multiple levels. Indeed, various groups and SMOs have benefitted from the medium to establish alternative public spheres where critical and radical discourse are exchanged; to save communication costs; to build alliances and solidarity networks at the local and trans-local levels; to enhance internal cohesion; and to increase organizational efficiency. However, participants' narratives about the role of ICTs and the Internet in their groups' activities also reveal huge variations, as well as contradictions pertaining to the impact of the Internet and the capacity of each group to take advantage of its potential for collective action. These contradictions can be better conceptualized and analyzed by distinguishing between the multilevel divides that shape the diffusion and use of the medium in Morocco.

4.3 Multiple digital divides.

Dominant discourses on the diffusion and innovation of ICTs proclaim that digital divides will disappear over time as a result of market dynamics. Though statistics on the growth of Internet use in Morocco partly confirm this hypothesis, the respondents'

⁷⁸ The interview was conducted on June 25, 2008.

statements have revealed that material access to computers and Internet connections are far from being the only forms of digital divide affecting the diffusion of the technology, particularly in collective action. Other forms of divides, such as gender and motivational ones, are deeply intertwined with socioeconomic inequalities and cultural orders that make them more persisting even when the material access divide is bridged.

4.3.1 Access divide.

The physical access divide—i.e., disparities in accessing computers and Internet connections—is the most highlighted type of divide in the literature regarding the diffusion of the Internet worldwide, but more particularly in the developing world. As discussed in Chapter Two, the vast majority of people in Morocco are still excluded from the “information society” despite the spectacular growth in the number of Internet users over the last five years. This is bound to be reflected in the way the medium is appropriated in collective action. In fact, social movements are not homogeneous, because they often reflect contradictions and disparities existing in society. In addition to digital divides between dominant metropolises and peripheral regions, there are disparities between headquarters and chapters in small towns and villages, as well as between activists themselves in terms of their training, access to hardware, and the Internet. Responding to my question about the accessibility of the Internet for activists in the Union of Women’s Action (Union de l’action féminine), Fatima Maghnawi stated:

Yes, a small number [of activists use the Internet at the UAF]. But they cannot use it at home. For instance, I have access at the UAF office, but I don’t have Internet at home. We used to use cybercafés. We would send somebody to get the messages from there. Most of the militants are poor. We didn’t even have the

telephone or a fax [machine]. And now, all this is linked to financing. I am talking only about the main office in Rabat. Don't imagine that this is the case for other chapters. There are even those that don't have a fax [machine] or telephone. If I want to contact them, I will send a fax to [them at] the public telephone store. I will call the activist and ask her to go fetch it from there.

Maghnawi's statement illustrates the multilevel access divides between the minority of activists who have access to the Internet at home, and those, like herself, who can access it only from a semi-private place like the office; between those who have limited access and those who have no access at all, or have to use public access points like cybercafés; and finally, between those who have access to various ICTs and those who do not have a telephone. This forces us to rethink the concept of "divide" from being a "bipolar division between the haves and the have-nots, the connected and the disconnected" to an interpretation that sees it as "continuum" split with many shades to it (Warschauer, 2003, p. 297). It is true that the Internet has empowered many activists to address some of the imbalances between peripheral regions and urban centers, and between grassroots constituencies and elites. But in general, the medium has reinforced many of these inequalities and, in the process, the democratic divide (Norris, 2001a) as it has widened the gap between those who have the resources to participate actively in collective action and those lacking them.

These divisions have a direct bearing on the capacity of social movements to use the Internet in offline and online mobilization. In such a context, digital chasms at the micro and meso levels reinforce differences between activists in their capacity to access information; to connect with others within and outside the movement; to express their

views and opinions; and, consequently, to build needed social capital to acquire higher status in the movement and society. These digital chasms can only reinforce divisions and hierarchical relationships that exist offline between the haves and have-nots.

Though the access divide touches all SMOs, it affects them differently. In general, professional SMOs are more capable of bridging existing divisions between activists and chapters. There are a couple of reasons for this: their constituencies are not very large; the majority of their activists tend to be university educated and have stable jobs; and many of them receive funds from INGOs and development agencies toward the purchase of ICT equipment. Abderezzak Idrissi, for instance, points out that despite existing disparities between AMDH's chapters, most of them are getting access to the Internet:

Material equipment is available not only to headquarters, but also to the AMDH sections around Morocco, [things] like computers and other equipment; but there are also discrepancies between regions. There are some regions that don't have an office, [while] others have offices and equipment, a fact that is linked to the activities of the section.

Similarly, many participants indicated that disparities related to the access divide inside their SMOs are slowly disappearing, as computers and Internet access become more affordable, and because of growing awareness among leaders about the need to bridge the digital gap between activists to enhance the efficiency of mobilization. This applies particularly to groups that rely more on the Internet in their collective action, such as ATTAC–Morocco. In the words of Jawad Mostaqbal:

The schism between members still exists, but it has diminished because we provided training to militants. The minimum is that everyone should have an e-

mail account and know how to use it. I think that those who can't do it are illiterate and we should not remain illiterate. I think that 90% of militants master this at least. But we are [an] elite [group]. Most of [us] have a university degree.

On the other hand, the access divide within grassroots social movements that recruit from among the poorest and marginalized segments of society remains large and harder to bridge, as Zakaria Sahnoun explains in relation to the Islamic movement:

There is a shortage [in the level of access to technology] and the use of the Internet by members, [which] reflects its [diffusion] in the country in general. If we take 140 members, we will find only 50 of them use the technology, for many of them are traders and craftsmen, and this category of people seldom has access to the Internet. Students, too—they have to pay for public access, so the users are among the civil servants, teachers, and others.... You know [that] to subscribe to the Internet, you have to pay at least 300 dirhams per month.⁷⁹ This is a real challenge to all of society and not just to political parties and associations.

Moreover, unlike professional SMOs whose collective action tactics centers around lobbying and pressuring the state and government, grassroots movements such as the Islamic and Amazigh movements seek to transform or reinforce the collective identity of part or all of Moroccan society. Societal digital divides, therefore, have a greater effect on the collective action tactics of these groups, and shape their choice and use of available media to mobilize potential and actual members. Responding to a question about the impact of digital gaps among the militants of Justice and Spirituality, Hassan Bennajah explains:

⁷⁹ Since 2008, that fee has decreased significantly, now reaching 100 dirhams (around \$13 CAD), for a basic digital subscriber line (DSL) connection.

First, 50% of Moroccans are illiterate, so whether you publish a print or an electronic publication, it wouldn't matter to them. So you have to rely on other communication media. And these—we master them in the movement. We don't have only print or electronic media. There is the illiterate category or those living on top of the mountain—even if they are literate, you don't have the means to get the newspaper or the Internet to reach them. This needs a different network and organization.

Though the majority of men and women in developing countries like Morocco are still excluded from network society because of multiple forms of digital divides, women are much more affected by gendered digital divides than men. Prasad (2008), for instance, argues that “if media access in the developing world is among the lowest, women are among the most marginalized sections of the population, their media exposure is certainly low, and their role as participants or producers is even more limited” (p. 80). My data seems to corroborate this observation, since—though all participants pointed out various obstacles affecting their use of the Internet—women interviewees' testimonies in particular clearly reflect that the issue of gender is one of the most important factors shaping the diffusion of the medium in society and its use in collective action.

4.3.2 The gender divide.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the gender digital divide deeply characterizes the diffusion and use of ICTs around the world, including in the developed world (Cooper & Weaver, 2003; Prasad, 2008; Mitter & Ng, 2005; Shade, 2002a, 2003). Contrary to optimistic views about these technologies and their prospects to achieve gender equality, commentators have argued that ICTs and especially the Internet are, in

many cases, reinforcing inequalities between men and women rather than removing them. As Marcelle (2005) argues,

women, rendered invisible throughout history, have remained and seem destined to remain in anonymity most of their lives, in the different fields of family, school, university, science, and technology. By their historical and cultural position, men keep their essential image of hunters, who, in search of their prey, remain on the lookout for further opportunities. The scheme is no different with the Internet. (p. 212)

Various types of data discussed in this study have confirmed this claim. The invisibility of women is most noticeable in the scarcity of feminist or even women's websites in Morocco. Such invisibility is reinforced by the near-absence of gender-related issues in most of the analyzed websites in the current study (see Chapter Five). Likewise, feminist activists who use national e-mail lists, particularly Press–Maroc and PAD–Maroc, are also very few. This is equally true of internal e-lists such as the one belonging to the Moroccan Association of Human Rights. In fact, of the more than 600 e-mails I received during one month of my subscription to the list, only 26 messages were sent by women, the bulk of which belonged to only one person, namely blogger Samira Kinani. I raised the point to Fatima Maghnawi, a co-founder of the Democratic League for Women, who replied:

I didn't know about the Press–Maroc [mail list] before.... But don't forget [about] the burden that is on us as women. I am a mother and have children, and I am the one who has access in the office or at home; I only have time for it at night. With the hardships of life, with concerns over the education of your children, etc., I will

not sit and use it for a long time. I will access the information very quickly. I will not make that effort to enter websites and everything. You see ... with technological advances, a man can take his laptop, go to a café or a public place, and use the Wi-Fi to connect. Don't forget that there is no security in public spaces, there is violence and aggression ... etc., so even if I have these means, I don't [experience] the same conditions as a man.

Maghnawi's testimony summarizes how the adoption and appropriation of technology is deeply gender inflected even among elite groups such as feminist activists. Moreover, women constitute only 30% of users at cybercafés (Warf & Vincent, 2007), which is partly due to restrictions on their access to these places, especially in poor neighbourhoods. But the major obstacle to the use of the Internet remains related to skills and the traditional patriarchal divisions of housework and tasks. In the course of conducting these interviews, I discovered that the level of IT training and general knowledge among women activists appeared to be relatively low compared to that of men. I raised the issue with Halima Bennoui, who had this to say:

Don't forget that illiteracy is higher among women. Women spend the whole day outside working and when they get home—and I am one of them—they have to spend with the children, and cannot stay awake late. I have had Internet at home for a long time, but I can't spend time on the computer so I don't use it. But in general, women don't use it much at home because there are many constraints. Because we still have these divisions of work. When you get home, the husband goes to read a newspaper whatever his educational level, and the wife goes to the kitchen to cook, except from a minority.

Concurring with her, Rachid Benmessaoud⁸⁰, member of the national committee of the Moroccan Organization of Human Rights, and former president of Creative Women Association, highlights the gendered use of the Internet within civil society in the following statement:

The obstacles hindering communication within associative work or political parties are the same for men and women, though these constraints acquire different shapes for the two sexes.... But it is more difficult for women than men. Because to use these technologies, you need to spend time [with them]; since when you sit to work on a computer you don't feel the time passing, and since women have many other tasks, [using these communication technologies is always at the expense of these tasks]. I can tell you that this is true even for the feminist groups who have their own websites and women who use e-mail, because they [too] are governed by these constraints. These Websites are not used efficiently and many feminist activists do not open their e-mails for days or more. So there is an absence of continuity and follow up. But I also know women who have great skills in using the technology for communication; but their number is limited⁸¹.

Bennaoui's and Benmessaoud's testimonies shed light on the complexity of a gender divide that rests on access, skill, and usage digital divides. Women have more difficulties accessing the Internet either outside or inside the home. This is bound to affect their capacity to develop enough skills to use the technology even when it is available. Formal training in IT is one area where women are underprivileged all over the world. Cooper and Weaver (2003) pointed out that in the United States, "women are conspicuously

⁸⁰ She is also member of the political bureau of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces party, and a former member of the parliament.

⁸¹ The interview was conducted on September 7, 2008.

underrepresented in basic computer science education courses from a young age, and their lack of representation becomes more pronounced as they move through school” (p. 5). If this is the case in an advanced and high-tech society, the situation can only be worse in the developing world. According to one study, female students represented only 28% of the total number of students in engineering sciences between 2003 and 2004 in Morocco (Bourquia & Abdourabi, 2005, p. 25). But a lack of skills does not come from absence of formal training alone. The majority of users acquire skills through informal contacts and usage, either by learning from friends, family members, or other users, or through self-education by using the Internet on a regular basis for extended periods of time. However, women have considerably less time at home or outside compared to men.

Furthermore, the absence of sufficient content online that addresses the needs of women, offers women little incentive to use the Internet, whether for general purposes or in collective action. Indeed, as Shade (2002b) argues, “the central role of ICTs is to facilitate access to a wide range of information and communication services that people find valuable in their daily lives as citizens, producers, consumers, and caregivers” (p. 2). The lack of suitable and varied content addressing the needs of women in general and feminists in particular constitutes a key dimension defining access to the Internet and the digital divide in general (Clement & Shade 2000; Shade, 2010).

Besides, women in the country are facing multiple forms of inequalities predicated on the unequal distribution of resources and a lack of recognition of the gender divides. Women constitute the largest category of illiterate people in the country, and are economically and socially disadvantaged. These factors automatically exclude the

overwhelming majority of Moroccan women from accessing the Internet. In addition, dominant patriarchal orders governing public spaces and the public sphere put limits on the ability of women to access the Internet at public access points, such as cybercafés and in the workplace. These orders extend to the private sphere, where patriarchal housework divisions considerably limit the ability of women to use the Internet, even when access is available at home.

Finally, women are also disadvantaged in that even when they can access and use the Internet, they are far less able to optimally use it in collective action. Van Dijk (2005) distinguishes between three levels of digital skills: “(a) the skill to operate computers and network connection...; (b) the skill to search, select, process, and apply information from a superabundance of sources; and (c) the ability to strategically use this information to improve one’s position in society” (p. 21). Thus, while some women activists have managed to acquire the two first levels of skills, they are generally unable to use the Internet strategically to advance the feminist cause. As many feminist activists indicated, their appropriation of the Internet remains limited to basic usage, which prevents their voices from becoming more audible in the online public sphere.

The majority of activists in feminist organizations are middle-aged women who have been involved from a young age in the feminist cause. By publishing the first feminist newspapers in the history of the country, namely *8 March* and *Kalima*, these pioneering feminists contributed enormously to the dissemination of new frames on gender issues that challenged dominant patriarchal discourses and structures in society. Over a decade after the publication of the first feminist newspaper, the diffusion of the Internet has broadened the scope of the collective action repertoire available for the feminist

movement. But it has also required a whole new range of skills that many feminist activists lack. The majority of members in these NGOs “belong to the social intellectual sphere” as they are mainly “professors, teachers, senior executives, lawyers, doctors, and civil servants in public administration” (Belhabib, 2004, p. 2). While these activists moved on in life and took on multiple responsibilities, both in the private and professional spheres, most of them were unable to follow the rapid pace of technological innovations, particularly in the IT sector. Aicha Lekhmas’ experience exemplifies this situation. Secretary General of the Union of Women’s Action, she is also a lawyer and a leader in the political party, Union Socialite des Forces Populaires (USFP). Referring to her experience with the publication of *8 March*, Lekhmas indicates that she cannot repeat this experience now, since the conditions shaping collective action in the country have changed:

It is a period that ended and cannot be repeated. History does not repeat itself. Morocco has changed and the press has greatly evolved, too. You cannot do it now through volunteerism. This type of work needs professionalism and time. We have grown up and have other tasks to do, and I think the new generation has more skills. We are thinking in reissuing it in a new way, a more attractive way, a magazine, a newspaper and, at the same time, an electronic version. We need to find a way to communicate with people..... We want to [reach] the largest number of readers.

A key problem facing these SMOs is that most of them are professional NGOs specializing in lobbying the government and other decision-making circles, with thin or non-existing grassroots bases from which to recruit new members and volunteers. As

Lekhmas rightly observes, even the recruitment of a full-time employee to do the IT job may not be sufficient if this person has no experience in collective action or no particular interest in the feminist cause. Internet users are mostly young people who, unlike previous generations, are less politicised and much less engaged in collective action. Establishing a balance between professionalism and volunteerism is a major problem facing many social movements as they seek to reduce the financial costs while enhancing the effectiveness of their action.

Physical access, usage, and skill divides are not the sole barriers facing women activists appropriating the Internet for collective action. There is also resistance to women's intervention in the public sphere, especially when they attempt to challenge patriarchal orders and stereotypes in society. Kinani, for example, has this to say about the type of comments she receives on her blog and from her comrades inside AMDH:

There are those who insult me and tell me, "Why are you [blogging], you are just a woman"... I receive all sorts of abuses like these. But in any case, I say what I say. I don't care. I write it, and I can't take it back. There are people who say they need to express themselves, because in most cases, women in Morocco suffer from this thing—when I agree with you, I am your comrade, but when I disagree with you, you are a whore. In general, women don't express it, they suppress it. I write this and give vent to it... And even with the comrades, a woman is a woman. You are not expected to have ideas of your own. You are supposed to follow others, attach a communiqué to the wall.... A mentality does not change quickly—"We are the men and you are the women." We talk only about the

conservatives; but this is not true, it is even here [within AMDH]. You have to fight to get heard.

Kinani illuminates some of the contradictions within Moroccan society, and social movements in particular, with regard to gender. Though the feminist movement has achieved considerable progress in its struggle to establish gender equalities during the last few decades—for instance, the current president of AMDH, to which Kinani belongs, is a woman, namely Khadija Riyadi—patriarchal orders are still influential, even within the most progressive civil society groups. Kinani’s blog is being resisted, her experience shows; nonetheless, the Internet is empowering her as a woman to intervene more forcefully and actively in the public sphere. These seemingly contradictory results only confirm the many paradoxical implications of the Internet for feminist groups and women activists at many levels.

Though feminist participants provide a bleak assessment of the gendered inequalities of ICTs in society and within civil society itself, they nonetheless agree that the gender gap is not a fatality and that it is narrowing, albeit very slowly. Lekhmas, for instance, asserts that despite existing disparities between men and women, there are no restrictions on women to opt for training or education in the IT field:

The door is open for those (women) who want to learn this. I find that using the [Internet] is very suitable to their mentality. It is an enchanting world, and when I use it, I feel I am drawn into it. You are drawn little by little. It [offers] good things. It provides a democracy of information to know things and people you wouldn’t have known.

Furthermore, Kinani contends that the Internet is empowering women specifically in a patriarchal society, because they are increasingly using it to circumvent restrictions on their movement in the public sphere and space, and to challenge and disrupt dominant social and cultural codes and systems:

I have the impression that women are getting involved in great numbers because they can use avatars [and] aliases, and therefore they can express themselves more freely. The other day, my students showed me—because they're the ones to discover such things—a very bold forum where they participate. They may meet outside and never speak to one another. It is a means of expression, particularly for young girls.

Kinani's statement confirms various analysts' views that "the technology promises to [enable and empower] educated women in politically and religiously constrained environments" (Skalli, 2006, p. 51). Despite this optimism, gender inequalities in access to and use of the Internet will continue in the foreseeable future, as the new technology will reinforce existing chasms in the level of access to various resources in society.

Equally important, one of the main descriptions that has surfaced in the interviews is that Moroccan civil society is elitist because of the limited constituency many professional organizations draw on, and because of the chasms that separate the relatively advanced and rich experience of many social movement organizations (particularly secular ones) and the rest of society. This observation applies particularly to the feminist movement because of the huge economic and social divides between elite groups of feminist activists and the rest of women. Talking about the experience of the Union of

Women's Action and the feminist movement in the country, Aicha Lekhmas points out that

the changes that have been introduced by feminist organizations are badly needed by women in society; but only an elite group of women who were active in political, trade, and student movements were able to formulate those demands and establish feminist organizations that provide new services to women in society through awareness-raising, education, and health. But these very women were mobilized recently to vote for parties that worked against the involvement of women in development projects⁸². So these demands are not formulated and adopted by women in general, but by feminist organizations only through lobbying and the mobilization of active sectors in society.

Instead of empowering the feminist movement to address this situation, the Internet has in many ways exacerbated existing divides between a) the minority of women who are socioeconomically privileged in society and can use it, and the majority of women who are illiterate and poor, and b) between men and women in general. The gender digital divide illustrates perfectly what Norris (2002) has qualified as the "democratic divide" between those who do, and do not, use digital media to participate in public life (p. 4). The gender digital divide will continue to grow, unless it is addressed in the wider context of social and cultural inequalities befalling women in the country. The last report on global gender equality stated that the country's world ranking had receded from 105th place in 2006 to 127th in 2010 (Hausmaan, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2010), which shows that the situation of women in the country is, in fact, deteriorating rather than improving.

⁸² Lekhmas is referring here to the example of the Islamic-oriented Justice and Development party.

4.3.3 The motivational divide.

While access to computers and the Internet, as well as skill and usage opportunities are preconditions for the appropriation of the Internet in collective action, they do not necessarily guarantee an optimal appropriation of the medium in collective action. In fact, people can have access to the Internet or the means to do so, but still prefer not to use it, or refuse to invest money or time to acquire the necessary skills to use the technology (Van Dijk, 2006). This lack of motivation to use the technology can be linked to the psychological, social, and cultural preferences and needs of individuals and groups. According to the “uses-and-gratifications” paradigm, for instance, “people are motivated by a desire to fulfil certain needs. So rather than asking how media use influences users, a uses-and-gratifications perspective asks how users’ basic needs influence users’ media choices” (Cho, De Zuniga, Rojas, & Shah, 2003, p. 48).

Moreover, from the point of view of the diffusion of technology theory perspective,

many non-ICT users are “excluded” from the information society because they do not see that this technology is relevant to them. It is what the technology can do that makes ICT interesting to people—be it pursuing an existing hobby on the Internet, or communicating with distant family by e-mail. (Faulkner & Lie, 2007, p. 161)

In the context of social movements, a key factor that can motivate a group to use a particular medium is its cost compared to the level of benefits they will get from using it in collective action. Marwell and Oliver (2008) argue that because social movements usually operate in conditions of scarcity, “they have to make choices about how they allocate their time and money, and we believe they will somehow attempt to weigh costs

and benefits” (p. 132). Existing digital divides, particularly divides of access and skills that affect the use and diffusion of the Internet in civil society and in the country, in general, can thus have a strong bearing on the decision of many SMOs to invest important resources in the use of technology.

Media, however, fulfil diverse types of objectives and needs other than purely functional ones such as collective action mobilization. People use media for diverse purposes that Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (as cited in Cho et al., 2003, p. 49) summarize as follows:

- affective needs—for aesthetic, pleasurable, and emotional experiences;
- personal integrative needs—for credibility, confidence, stability, and personal status;
- social integrative needs—for contact with family, friends, and the world;
- and escapist needs—for escape, diversion, and tension release.

In the same vein, Van Dijk (2005, pp. 35–38) points to a number of factors underlying people’s decision to use or not use the Internet. In addition to the lack of material resources (access) and cognitive resources (skills and intelligence), there is also the role of emotional resources, such as the lack of confidence in using computers, as well as personal and cultural aptitudes, such as lifestyle, interests, affinities, and status.

The research data has shown that difficulties linked to access and skill divides are key factors shaping social movements’ use of the Internet, but it also demonstrated that the decision to invest more resources in this medium is motivated by an amalgam of other factors, such as the generation gap and cultural predisposition. When I asked Abderrezak

Idrissi why AMDH's website looked unprofessional and was not updated, for instance, he was very reluctant to answer the question. However, when pressed, he pointed out:

There isn't a great awareness about the issue. The website is a personal work.

Not a professional [one]. The website is hosted by Ittiscalat⁸³ for free. To tell you the truth, there is no rationality in the whole issue. I was discussing this with my colleagues about organizing this work and we found that the costs will rise sharply. So to answer your question about updating the website, there is a big output from AMDH at the headquarters and chapters, and so there should be a group who takes charge of it; but we don't have [one].

Though Idrissi was, in fact, trying to avoid directly criticizing his colleagues in AMDH, his answer shows that underlying the hesitation of the association to invest in more resources to improve the website, there are practical considerations such as costs and benefits; but there is also a certain bias against the medium, which he qualifies as a lack of "awareness" and "rationality." The analysis above has demonstrated that social movements use a wide range of media tools in order to be able to address various categories of people, the majority of which are still unable to use the Internet. It also highlighted how the Internet is integrated into complex media practices that are used in parallel or in synergy with each other in order to maximize their efficiency and reach. A number of respondents indicated that existing limitations on the use of the medium in collective action is also linked to reluctance on the part of older generations of activists to use the new medium. If younger generations are quick and natural adopters of the technology, older generations, who form the majority of activists within many SMOs

⁸³ The company is the major telecommunication business and main Internet service provider (ISP) in the country.

(specifically leftist and feminist ones), are more conservative in the way they view and appropriate the technology. As Samira Kinani observes,

We use the Internet more and more in the country. We have discussion forums. We provided training to the comrades. But for blogging, [activists] are more serious than I am It is rare to find a person of my age blogging. Because we have this education, and we are afraid of coming forward and expressing ourselves. We always want to give an image about ourselves. We have not been taught to express ourselves. We are not forthcoming.

In fact, Kinani explained that she became interested in the Internet and blogging mainly because of her interactions with her son and students:

I started using the Internet a little late, not until 2005 or 2006, because I did not know how to use a keyboard; I was afraid. It was my son who taught me. After that, I was working a lot with students in human rights clubs. I noticed that all students used the Internet to communicate with each another. They started chatting about MSN [and] their blogs, and they spend a lot of time on the Internet. They asked me, “Why don’t you start your own blog?”

Similarly, upon being questioned about the unprofessional design of the Unified Socialist Party’s website, Abdelilah Mansouri, a young leader in the Unified Socialist Party, blamed the older generation of leaders for the organizations’ inefficient appropriation of the Internet:

The website is being used but not in an ideal way, not to its full capacity.... This is mainly due to our current mentality, which is closer to a traditional mentality

that hasn't been able to exploit all the capacities provided to us by information and communication technologies.

A common characteristic of Moroccan civil society is the rigid hierarchical structure of most SMOs, in which leaders, like the kings and presidents in the region, seek to remain in power for life. As a result, there are wide chasms between the older generation of leaders, some of whom have been in their positions since Morocco's independence, and younger constituencies at the grassroots level; and between civil society as a whole and the rest of the people. These leaders are more accustomed and attached to print media, which were, until the early 1990s when satellite television appeared, the major source of alternative information in the country. This explains in part why new social movements, such as Islamic, Amazigh, and alter-globalization movements that recruit mainly among younger generations, are more successful at using the potential of the Internet. This conclusion is confirmed by Della Porta and Mosca (2005) who state that "organisations with a longer history would be more reluctant to adopt CMC or, even when they do, they continue to use it similarly to the old media of communication without exploiting many of its more innovative aspects such as interactivity" (p. 169).

Moreover, negative perceptions of and attitudes toward the Internet can be developed after an initial experiment with the technology: "computer anxiety is not only a precursor of computer experience but also a consequence. Computer frustration is a matter of bad experience with computers failing to do what people want them to do" (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 41). Explaining her personal preference for print media over the Internet, Rachida Benmessaoud points out:

One has to know how to exploit this tool, but also to be cautious about its negative side.... I am talking about relationships that become fixed and daily rituals, like entering [chat sites] and talking to this or that person. This process exhausts me and puts more pressure on me. I prefer face-to-face contact.... It is perhaps a cultural disposition; I feel more at ease with pen and paper, and with face-to-face contact. Perhaps, I don't have the patience to sit for a long time to talk to somebody whose general features I don't even know. There is this psychological factor.

In many cases, SMOs invest considerable resources in continuing to publish newspapers that suffer from low readership and poor circulation, as is true of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights and the Unified Socialist Party. Mansouri, for instance, denies that the issue of resources is the main reason behind the low investment in the party's website, since the party is spending much more to maintain the party's print newspaper:

The newspaper costs us a lot, around 40,000 to 45,000 dollars a year. Our resources are limited, since we don't get funding from the state. It is true that we, as militants on the Left, should think of saving the party's resources, but unfortunately a traditionalist mentality is dominating. For the electronic website, we already have three full-time employees in the main office.... So they will take charge of updating the website. It won't cost us more. So the main costs for us will be, in the beginning, in designing the website, which will cost us around 3,000 dollars.

Mansouri's analysis is shared by Ladham, an IT professional working at the Moroccan Democratic Association of Women (ADFM), who thinks that the decision to invest resources in the Internet is contingent upon a readiness and disposition to use the medium:

Awareness is more important. We say the Internet is good, but we don't have money, so there is no need for it. But when you say that it is very important, and you do a project and you say you need this tool of communication, there are funding agencies that will give you money to do it. Associations make brochures and flyers, and if you do only 3,000 to 4,000 copies, it costs you 30,000 dirhams,⁸⁴ while a website would cost you no more than 6,000 dirhams. So, it is a question of conviction.

Consequently, motivational divide is one of the most significant barriers hindering the use of the Internet in collective action in the country. Like the gender divide, it is a complex one that rests on all other types of divides—namely, access, skill, and usage—in addition to the gap between younger and older generations in general, and within civil society particularly. This type of divide is rooted in both rational and pragmatic considerations, as well as on personal and cultural predispositions. These factors are theoretically distinct, but are closely interlinked in practice, since they can feed on one another. Pragmatic considerations can dissuade leaders and activists from spending needed funds on new technology, while excessive prudence and personal bias may hamper the use of the Internet as a tool of collective action.

⁸⁴ 1.00 USD equals approximately 9 dirhams.

Arguably, the continual spread of the Internet and the decrease of its cost will reduce the motivational divide. However, as with the issue of gender, this type of divide will remain a major factor shaping the use of the Internet in the foreseeable future, mainly because the generation gap continues to define resource distribution and political participation in society. The generation gap in the context of Morocco clearly challenges a linear and mechanic conceptualization of the digital divide, whereby lack of access to the technology will necessarily result in social, political, and economic exclusion (Cammaerts, Audenhove, Nulens, & Pauwels, 2003). Although young people constitute the majority of the country's population and the bulk of its Internet users, they are, alongside women, the most disadvantaged demographic group in society. The Internet has certainly empowered young people to express themselves much more than before and enabled them to overstep much of the older generations' political, cultural, and social conservatism. However, this form of online empowerment has yet to be translated into the kind of political influence and social capital that can empower young people offline. The comparison between the implications of the Internet for women and young people confirms that the impact of the Internet, or lack thereof, is neither inevitable nor uniform. To put it simply, while the Internet opens a myriad of possibilities for collective action and political contestation, these possibilities only materialize to the extent allowed by pre-existing political and social structures. Indeed, the social embeddedness of the Internet makes its impact on the political and social orders very contextual and contingent (Sassen, 2004).

4.4 ICT4DEV: Empowerment and development of dependency.

4.4.1 The question of sustainability.

A primary issue underlying all the types of divides described above is the question of the continuity or sustainability of the online projects undertaken by SMOs and activists. The majority of the interviewed groups indicated that a principal problem affecting their efforts in using the Internet is their inability to maintain websites over time, even when they receive help from development agencies or other NGOs. The failure of Alternative International in Morocco's first attempt to help local associations acquire and use websites illustrates the difficulties that information and communication technologies for development (ICT4DEV) projects can face. Summarizing the objectives of the project and its fate, Hamouda Soubhi explains:

The project worked to a certain extent, until the day when the associations waited for us to do the updating for them. We used to call them to ask them to do it, [to] post at least something on the website. They had received some training, they had the website and were happy with it, but the site did not change for two years; [it had] the same information. So we told ourselves, [this tactic] is not working; we have to do it differently.

As this example clearly shows, Alternative International and its local partners were too optimistic about their ability to make the project succeed, relying on many assumptions dominant in the ICT4DEV discourse that often reduce the digital divide to a lack of physical access to technology and, at best, basic training to initiate users in how to use the new technology. However, many of these projects are unable to continue over time because

the underlying infrastructure does not meet end-user requirements; the community is unable to maintain a critical mass of users consistently over time; there is insufficient social capital to support significant contributions by community members; or, as typically happens with funded community computing initiatives, financial and human resources become constrained or even unavailable to adequately maintain the infrastructure. (Farooq, Schank, Harris, Fusco, & Schlage., 2007, p. 398)

Hearn et al. (2005) add other factors to this list—namely, the failure to “specify and address local and cultural impediments and opportunities;” not taking into account “the dynamics of the global ICT industry;” being “overoptimistic” about the impact of ICTs, in addition to overlooking “the importance of content per se” (p. 27). The focus on the issue of access to technology at the expense of many other factors not only results in the failure of sustainable ICT projects, but also prolongs the dependence of SMOs on foreign aid.

“Sustainability,” as Farooq et al. (2007) explain, “is centered on how people in community computing settings can best achieve their goals consistently over time” (p. 398). Sustainability is central to the success of social movements in general, because without it, the impact of mobilization and collective action will remain ephemeral and superficial. Achieving sustainability reflects the stability of a group, its organizational efficiency, and its ability to mobilize the various resources that are central to the success of collective action (McCarthy & Zald, 2003).

4.4.2 Sustainability and the development of dependence.

Sustainability is also needed to end dependence on foreign aid for survival.

However, with the exception of a few participants, particularly those belonging to Islamic SMOs, the Unemployed Graduates movement, and the Amazigh cultural movement, the majority indicated that their groups depended significantly on various donors to buy equipment and hire full-time staff. Feminist participants highlighted more than other groups their associations' total dependence on foreign funding. According to Maghnawi, for instance, the UFA was only able to prolong the life of the newspaper *8 March* and, more importantly, to acquire the necessary infrastructure to survive so far, through foreign funding:

So unfortunately, the newspaper stopped after intermittent attempts that lasted from 1983 until 1987; and from then till 1995, in the wake of the World Summit on Women in Beijing.... From 1995, we obtained financing through a French organization, which allowed us to rent an office and introduce the new technologies of communication, but it was simple financing that included the rent and a Macintosh [computer], which helped us with our effort to keep publishing the newspaper—and we were able for the first time to produce leaflets, flyers. [After that], we received financing from the Movement of Peace, Disarmament, and Liberty (MPDL) in Madrid, Spain, which enabled us to buy the office where we are now, as well as important equipment, including computers. As I told you, we were working with primitive tools; we didn't have a fax [machine] or a telephone. With foreign financing, we have been able to start as an institution ...

and thanks to this financing, we are going to make our website for the first time, because we had never been able to do it [before].

Like UAF, ADFM has been unable to set up a functioning and professional website because of the lack of funding. In August 2008, around the time when I was conducting my interview with the organization, ADFM launched its new website with the help of European donors such as Oxfam International and Comunidad de Madrid. The dependence on INGOs extends from matters of funding to technical and human resource assistance. Because they do not have trained staff to work on their website, or use other Internet tools, the LDDF was relying on volunteers provided by Oxfam who worked temporarily at the LDDF office. Responding to my question as to why the LDDF's website is not updated in spite of the volunteers, Halima Bennaoui indicated that non-member volunteers helped maintain and update the website for a limited period, but work on it stopped when they left:

They were members of Oxfam. The first one also trained our staff for a little while, and the second one stayed with us for four months. But as soon as they left, work stopped. So there is no updating, no activation on a daily basis. We don't know how to do it. The members we have cannot do it. They don't have the proper training. We do extensive work or hold a big event, and we cannot publish it online because we don't know how to do it. But in this field, this field of technology, we still need a lot of things. Not anyone can do the follow up of that work. We are doing extensive work, though.

In addition to their dependence on foreign financial and human resource help, many groups rely on foreign technological assistance and resources. Despite the phenomenal

development of Internet use in the country, IT infrastructure has not followed suit, as the speed of Internet connections remains very low, especially in comparison to the standards of Western countries (see Chapter Two for more details). When asked why the E-Joussour website is hosted by Alternatives Canada in Montreal, Sobhi explained:

If you put the server in Morocco, the bandwidth is very low and [it is] slow to download and add content. Even if you have your own server, the bandwidth remains slow. We decided to have the website in Montreal for security reasons, since they have experts who concentrate on protecting the site against hackers and things like that. We could have hosted it in Italy, or in England with Green Net; we had the choice between the three. But because we work with Alternatives Canada, we preferred to host it [with them]—and also because they are doing it for free. This is important, among the other things.... We pay for our IP here with Ittiscalat, but the server is located in Montreal.

The majority of the participants I talked to indicated that their associations' and organizations' websites are hosted by servers located either in Europe or North America, although they have domain names registered with local ISPs (see Chapter Five for more details on this issue). In addition to the problem of bandwidth, there are other factors, such as the security of servers and data, and the fear that state censorship can lead to loss of data. The reliance on foreign servers and maintenance has its price, though: in some cases, these groups lose control over the website, and the success of their projects can be severely hampered if the servers hosting their websites break down. Jawad Mostaqbal explains:

There are two people responsible for ATTAC France's website, which is very active, and hosts the websites of other ATTAC chapters.... There was a crash recently and we spent two months trying to retrieve the data—and it coincided with the time when we launched a petition to demand the freedom of the 1st of May prisoners. It was fatal for us. We had to start from the beginning and improvise something.... As a solution, I proposed that we do two images of the site, and have a domain name here using “ma”⁸⁵; and that we leave the other with ATTAC France for fear of censorship. If we leave the site with Ittitsalat, there is the possibility that it will be blocked, as has happened to other websites.

ATTAC's experience illustrates the dilemma facing many SMOs that are caught between a scarcity of resources and a hostile political environment, on one hand, and the costs originating from having to depend on foreign assistance and infrastructure, on the other. It also shows that though the Internet has enhanced the collective capacities of Moroccan SMOs, this empowerment remains very fragile and constrained by many factors, among which is the incapacity of these groups to have control over the use and appropriation of the Internet in collective action. Lack of control over the resources needed for collective action reflects the inability of these groups to mobilize support, a situation that reinforces their dependence on foreign help. Hudock (1999) rightly points out that when southern NGOs rely on northern NGOs for resources, it can lead them to “lose touch entirely with their client groups, spending all their time in the office on administrative tasks required to maintain northern NGO's support” (p. 9).

⁸⁵ Morocco's top level domain code.

4.4.3 Sustainability and ICT4DEV: The cases of Tanmia.ma and E-Joussour.

A number of commentators have maintained that if ICT4DEV projects are to succeed, groups must take into consideration various factors underlying the use of technology in a particular social context. Prasad (2000) points out, for instance, that projects that seek to empower feminist groups “without rethinking structural and social inequalities in gender relations [render] women passive agents of projects conceived by developed countries” (p. 87). Moreover, it has been noted that the sustainability of ICT4DEV projects can be achieved only if the targeted community or group has control over technology:

Control over technology involves a group’s ability to use technology to address problems that they think are important. On a broader level, control also involves a more long-term approach to managing technology use, planning, and learning, taking into account the challenges (e.g., lack of financial resources, few staff members, shifting volunteer base) inherent to community computing settings. (Merkel, 2005, p. 161)

A comparison between two online projects that aim to empower Moroccan civil society illustrates important variations in the conception, planning, and execution of ICT4DEV projects. These two projects are the most important existing Web portals targeting Moroccan civil society, namely www.tanmia.ma and www.e-Joussour.net. The association of Tanmia (meaning “development” in Arabic) and its portal are the outcome of cooperation between foreign state agencies: the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which is supervised by the US Department of State; international organizations, such as the Development Gateway Organization; and a telecommunication consulting

private firm located in Rabat, the Morocco Trade and Development Services (MTDS).⁸⁶

Explaining the origins as well as the main idea behind setting up tanmia.ma, the executive manager of the project, Mourad Gourouhi, points out:

The beginning was in 2004, but the idea and reflection started before that, within associations situated at the intermediary level. They are not associations of proximity that work directly with people and they are not donors who give money. But they are situated between the two, capable of mobilizing but mobilizing other local associations; they are capable of reinforcing the capabilities of local associations and not acting on their behalf. All this ... gave birth to the idea of Tanmia.ma that seeks to bring answers to the question of how we can reinforce the capacity [of local associations] by exploiting the potential of ICTs.⁸⁷

The Tanmia portal provides various resources for local civil society groups, such as a detailed database of associations in the country, information about associative law and regulations, a forum for discussion and information, and a large number of articles about diverse issues related to development and society. Moreover, apart from the portal, the association has two other projects. The first one aims to equip and train local activists and associations on using video cameras to produce podcasts that are posted on the Tanmia portal. The other one consists of establishing IT or “community” centers that provide access to the Internet, as well as meeting places for associations. So far, two of these centers have been opened in popular neighborhoods in the capital city Rabat and the

⁸⁶ The US Government selected MTDS to serve as a senior consultant in the implementation of the Leland Initiative, an ambitious project to assist 22 African countries in establishing Internet infrastructure and access.

⁸⁷ The interview was conducted on June 15, 2008.

nearby city of Sale. Explaining the objectives of the projects and how they can be situated within the mission of Tanmia, Gourouhi asserts:

The mission of Tanmia is not only to generalize the use of ICTs, but also to [encourage] production of content that we are going to share through ICTs; how to produce, how to encourage more liberty of expression through new technologies, how to develop community media and radio, for instance.... After all, we are just a small association and not a multinational firm that can take care of hundreds of associations; [we can] only organize some discussions on the issue, to make some content available for everyone online. What we try to do is to raise awareness about development..., it is everyone's duty. In this way, the cost will be shared by everyone.

Upon visiting and interviewing Mohamed Ait Bahlim, the supervisor⁸⁸ of the Bettana community centre in the city of Sale, I learned that all the services they provide are not free. In fact, while the fee for access to the Internet is slightly lower than that charged by commercial cybercafés, other services like using photocopiers and printers are at market price, and associations have to rent the DataShow audio-visual equipment to use in their meetings. Thus, while an hour of Internet access costs between 5 or 6 dirhams in commercial cybercafés, it costs only 4 dirhams in the centers. As for renting the room with DataShow for meetings, the cost is around \$8.00 USD. Training in the center is also offered for a fee and costs up to \$20 USD per module, or \$40 USD per month, which is lower than the cost of a similar course in professional schools. However, when I visited the center in June 2008, only one trainee was enrolled for the month, which may have been because people prefer professional schools that provide recognized certificates and

⁸⁸The interview was conducted on June, 18, 2008.

are better equipped and maintained. In fact, during my visit, only four PCs were functioning, while the meeting room where training takes place was in bad condition, with damp walls and peeling paint. According to Gourouhi, Tanmia generates up to 15% of its budget; and the objective of providing paid services in these centers is to make them financially independent.

These centres may be offering some ICT services for prices lower than those in the private sector; the difference in price, nonetheless, may not be enough to compensate for the lower quality of their services and facilities. This raises the issue of how to manage ICT4DEV projects and balance the quality of the services with their cost. The substandard maintenance and low number of clients at the center clearly illustrate how the limited involvement of the local community in the conception, implementation, and management of these projects can lead to their failure. The example also sheds light on the pitfalls of the dominant discourse in ICT4DEV that limits the digital divide to being simply a problem of physical access to the technology. As Walsham and Sahay point out, “it is one thing to set up a telecentre with subsidies from the government or various NGOs; it is quite another to create a self-sustaining long-term facility” (2006, p. 17).

Furthermore, though most of the material published on the Tanmia portal comes from the contributions of diverse organizations and individuals, all submissions are filtered by Tanmia staff before they are posted online. Framing analysis of the portal has demonstrated (see Chapter Six) that the bulk of content on the website deals with non-injustice frames and very rarely with political issues. Moreover, while the portal is supposed to act as an online platform for all civil society actors, including oppositional social movements, only associations with issues dealing purely with development have

published content on it. It is true that the portal provides some important material and resources on development that may be very helpful to local civil society. However, development cannot take place without linking to the issue of governance and the question of resource distribution in society, which cannot be seriously addressed without genuine democratization.

In addition to filtration of content, another obstacle that hinders the portal from fulfilling its objectives is its link to the United States government, with which many SMOs, especially leftist-oriented ones, refuse to deal, or with international agencies linked to it. Recognizing the sensitivity of this issue in the Moroccan context, *tanmia.ma*'s executive manager, Gourouhi points out:

There is no 100-percent innocent financing. We know very well that it is a political debate that Tanmia does not have to address. It is up to the public actors and all of the network [to do it]. It is also important to take a position and answer this question. It is sometimes a game of diplomacy, taking sides, and refusing. I remember the movement that was started sometime ago to boycott American financing when the US launched the war against Iraq. They said no, no to this schizophrenia—because there, you are killing Iraqi children and here, you are supporting the rights of children.... We can't say that all associations that are active in Morocco are aware of all the implications of these issues; and this is the responsibility of these associations.

Foreign aid remains a sensitive issue because it touches upon the image of an organization as an independent and credible group. Many respondents were keen on maintaining that they are independent from state control and co-option, as well as from

potentially compromising foreign aid, particularly from the US government and state agencies. Whenever I raised the question of foreign assistance, interviewees instantly asserted that their groups refuse any funds from the US government or its agencies, although they do not reject dealing with American independent civil society NGOs. However, a quick look at the websites of these groups shows that they do cooperate with European Union (EU) agencies, in addition to other intermediate NGOs that are funded by Western governments. For many SMOs, accepting or refusing funding or cooperation with foreign agencies is contingent upon complex conditions that are linked to the type of funding and how it is channeled, and on political circumstances at specific historical conjunctures.

The E-Joussour portal, on the other hand, is the outcome of close coordination between Forum des Alternatives Maroc (FMAS) and Montreal-based Alternatives International. Comparing the wiki to tanmia.com's portal,⁸⁹ Hamouda Soubhi asserts that

[t]he thing that separates us from Tanmia is that we allow everybody to post their messages. In Tanmia, you have to send the content to them first and they take care of it, whereas we function as open software. You can say whatever you want; but you have to be responsible about what you say. If you say something racist, something Islamist—well, fundamentalist, something like this—we are going to eliminate it. Associations can directly post their messages, but for individuals, we do it in a two-step process. It is not censorship but auto-censorship, because if you want to publish something you have to think a little so as not to go into things like racism and all that.

Caroline Tagny further explains how the editorial policy of the website was adopted:

⁸⁹ See information on this in Chapter Six.

It was important to have consultations with partners [and] have the members meet to decide upon editorial policies—who is going to regulate the content and how to do it, what do we accept and what we don't accept on the website. This has to be done through physical meetings, although you can communicate by e-mail.

Analysis of the content posted on the wiki (see Chapter Six) confirms to a large extent Soubhi's and Tagny's statements, as it demonstrated that, contrary to *tanmia.ma*, E-Joussour features mainly critical interpretations and opinions about problems facing the region—notably social injustice, violations of basic freedoms, and lack of democracy in the region. The variations between the two websites reflects different ICT4DEV approaches, since the second project was conceived and implemented in close collaboration with local associations and actors who retain a considerable level of control over its management. It also reflects a different conceptualization of development and how to achieve it, since E-Joussour is clearly associated with empowering local civil society to contest various inequalities and injustices. These differences emanate from the identity of the international actors involved in the project—i.e., governmental and semi-governmental agencies in the case of *tanmia.ma*, and an alter-globalization INGO in the case of E-Joussour's wiki.

Equally important, in the case of *tanmia.ma*, empowerment is mainly centered on technology because the portal is the main tool used to enhance civil society groups' ability to act and express themselves collectively. ICTs, in the case of the E-Joussour project, however, are used as one tool among others, in particular, direct contact through social forums⁹⁰ and meetings between actors—thus reinforcing more horizontal

⁹⁰ The first Maghreb social forum is one among a series of others organized by FMAS and supervised by Alternatives International (see Chapter Five for more details).

interaction and networking between these actors. These objectives are often formulated by local groups in coordination with the INGO. I asked Michel Lambert if their focus on empowering civil society comes from decisions made by Alternatives International. He answered in the following words:

The mission of Alternatives is to reinforce the actors and civil society in various countries, so that they can play a political role and lobby for social justice on many levels. In some countries, our partners work on the issue of education; in others, they work on environment. Our partners have priorities, and our work is to support them so they can achieve political victories—not necessarily in the sense of taking power, but in the sense of changing national policies on different themes. In Morocco—with FMAS, which is our partner there—we work with young people. We started the work by giving a budget to young people, to engage in consultations and lobby for education and integration, [and] to fight against unemployment. Our mission is to assist FMAS to become more efficient on these levels.

Similarly, Soubhi points out that FMAS and other local associations refuse to work with agencies and organizations such as USAID and NDI because they try to impose their vision and will on local associations, while these local civil groups deal selectively with other agencies depending on the issues:

We made a decision not to take money from the Americans at all costs. [Not] the American government or USAID. The National Democratic Institute (NDI)⁹¹ is comprised of people who take money from American Foreign Affairs to finance

⁹¹ The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is an INGO that works “to establish and strengthen political and civic organization worldwide” (www.ndi.org).

projects here in Morocco. They involve you without your having the capacity to decide. They bring their programs and they decide where they are going to transfer them. The Canadians are different. They set up projects in cooperation between Canada and Morocco; the Europeans, too... We have a European donor, NOVIB;⁹² [this organization is] Dutch and very flexible. You can apply for whatever you like. Not anything—but whatever you are doing, I mean. We rely on volunteer work, but you also need funding.

The E-Joussour wiki project has its own limitations, too. In fact, Hamouda Soubhi's statement above about who can be included and who should be excluded from posting on the website raises a very contentious issue: it considers racism and Islamic-oriented discourses as equally unacceptable. While censorship in the case of racism is understandable, censorship of Islamic content is based on a clear ideological stance that reflects the divisions between leftist and secular movements and Islamic-oriented ones that are polarizing Moroccan civil society. Moreover, framing analysis has demonstrated that content dealing with gender equality issues constitutes a marginal percentage on the wiki, and that no feminist associations are among those posting on it. Thus, despite its progressive orientation and its functioning as an open online platform, the use of the wiki and its appropriation in collective action are shaped by divisions and inequalities existing in society, which the wiki may only reinforce online.

Apart from this, a key feature distinguishing the E-Joussour and tanmia.ma projects is that the former not only addresses Moroccan civil society, but also aims to strengthen coordination and networking between social movements in the whole region of North Africa and the Middle East. Such an ambitious objective subscribes to the alter-

⁹² Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation.

globalization movement's political vision and collective action strategy defined by Michel Lambert above (see section 4.2.4). However, since the project covers a vast geographic area characterized by huge social and political heterogeneity, this a goal can be too difficult to achieve. The coordinator of the wiki, Hamouda Soubhi, denies that this strategy was imposed by Alternatives International:

[The idea] comes from us. We have accumulated work, and we started here in Morocco. In relation to what happens in the Middle East, people don't know much about what is happening in Algeria, Tunisia, or Morocco. We are like the others. This gave rise to a reflection that started in 2000. The idea of E-Joussour is to build a bridge between the Mashrek and the Maghreb, so our experiences converge.

Both Alternatives International and Forum des Alternatives Maroc-Sud (FMAS) may have contributed to setting up the strategy and objectives of the E-Joussour project. In all cases, however, this strategy remains rooted in the alter-globalization movement's vision and priorities for collective action, and may be shared by other social movements in Morocco and within each country in the region. Social movements in the region may be facing common challenges, but they are also deeply informed and shaped by political and social structures and histories at the national level. There are huge discrepancies between the structure and level of development of civil society in each country. Whereas political multiplicity has marked Moroccan polity since before its independence, such a phenomenon is only very recent in neighbouring Algeria, for instance, where a one-party system dominated the country for decades.

According to the results of framing analysis of the e-Joussour websites, most of the groups that posted content on the wiki come from Morocco, while the majority of the other groups are from Egypt. This confirms that collective action and Internet communication in the region remain strongly conducted within national borders. In this respect, Caroline Tagny, project officer of the youth programs at Alternative International, has this to say:

It is normal that those who participate come from few countries, because we have not done training in all countries. The idea is to reinforce a partnership between the two original participants in the project, which are Morocco and Egypt. We sent trainees there who have to meet with members of different organizations and train them. We are waiting for more Egyptian and Algerian organizations to participate.⁹³

Regardless of the issue of training, it is doubtful that many SMOs in the region share the alter-globalization movement's activists' strong enthusiasm for building effective regional networks to shape public policies at the national level. As the experience of the alter-globalization movement itself testifies, transnational advocacy networks also require the social actors to meet physically and sometimes join in offline forms of collective action. However, such a possibility is very difficult for the majority of SMOs in the region, either because of a lack of resources or because of political restrictions and divisions.

In addition, despite its relative success in serving as a regional online public sphere, the E-Joussour wiki is still facing formidable obstacles, since participation in it is significantly limited by the digital divides highlighted above. While Alternatives

⁹³The interview was conducted on October 8, 2008, in Montreal.

International and its partners in Morocco have certainly learned from their failed experience with the project that aimed to build separate websites for a large number of local associations, the current project is only surviving because of a concerted and continued effort to encourage the targeted groups to post content on the wiki. In the words of Tagny:

It is a project that requires a lot of training, because we ask associations and organizations to provide content for the website. Like everywhere in the world, as in Quebec, too, people in organizations with professional Web knowledge are few, so you have to provide basic training; and sometime you have to start from how you turn on a computer and start browsing the Internet.... This is a very important part of the project and if you don't do it, it does not function... Because it is often the case, these organizations do not recognize the importance of doing it and of participating in local, regional, and international forums, etc. To [secure] the updating of the website, and with the financing we have, we are paying a person who is doing the follow up by contacting organizations to remind them to add content on the site and to ask them if they have something to add, to support them to do it. She is paid to do this. She does only this job.

Tagny's last statement confirms one of the main findings of the current study—that the motivational divide is a major problem facing the appropriation of the Internet in collective action. Van Dijik (2005, p. 31) argues that “one of the biggest mistakes in digital divide research is the assumption that users of digital technology are either in or out, included or excluded”. It is possible, however, to distinguish between various categories of practices and interactions with technology. In addition to those who are

“truly unconnected,” there are intermittent users, dropouts, or “people who have more or less permanently lost connection to the Internet, voluntary or not” (Van Dijik, p. 33), and evaders, those who have access to the Internet but prefer not to use it.

The first project of Alternatives International aimed at helping civil society groups acquire and use websites failed, as Hamouda explained above; and it is clear that INGOs have tried to learn from this by setting up a wiki that can be updated collectively.

Although content analysis of the wiki shows that this project is more successful than the previous one, this relative success has not yet overcome the reticence or hesitation of civil actors to use the new medium, since a full-time employee is needed to pressure them to participate in the project. As Van Dijk (2005) pointed out above, people may develop a type of computer anxiety after a bad experience with technology, which can lead to intermittent usage or even dropping out.

That is why overcoming the motivational divide in all its dimensions is a daunting task facing development agencies and INGOs. Such an obstacle requires more than providing hardware, an Internet connection, and basic training. Merkel (2005) argues that empowering people through technology involves more than providing these basics:

The value of a training course goes beyond just teaching technical skills. A training course can help organizations think through some of the long-term costs involved in maintaining a website, like keeping the information on the site up-to-date or managing training in the organization so that they are not dependent on one person to make changes. This may also involve helping the groups make more informed choices about where to devote their efforts when putting

information online and the trade-offs involved when implementing more dynamic features on a website. (p. 168)

Such training can prepare social actors to better face inevitable problems linked to scarce resources and possible disenchantment with the technology when tangible results fail to materialize. Other issues concern how to involve the targeted communities or groups in defining their needs and controlling the implementation of ICT4DEV projects. Reflecting on his experience, Merkel (2005) concludes that developing projects around joint or shared activities yield better results:

Shared activities create a space where stakeholders can think through the ways that technology might help a group achieve its mission and how it might achieve these goals in a way that is sustainable across the lifespan of the organization. (p. 175)

The feature and framing analyses of social movements' websites above have demonstrated that collaborative platforms function better than single organization websites. A comparison of the *tanmia.ma* and *E-Joussour* projects further corroborate such results. Because it shares the same political values and objectives with the local SMOs it seeks to empower, Alternatives International often uses the *E-Joussour* wiki to post articles and statements, thus creating a space that it shares equally with local groups. Despite the importance of this project, however, it is too early to draw final conclusions. The current study needs to be supported by additional research that spans longer periods of time to examine whether this project has survived, and to what extent it has achieved its objectives.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter confirmed many of the findings of the two previous chapters, and provided deeper insights into the articulations between technology and its appropriation in the specific social and political contexts of Morocco. By and large, the Internet has undoubtedly contributed considerably to the enhancement of social movements' capacities at various levels. It has been used by various groups to save communication costs, build alliances and solidarity networks, increase organizational structures and efficiency, and disseminate alternative information and frames nationally and globally—thus challenging the monopoly that the state and mainstream media have over the public sphere.

The Internet is usually embedded in the actors' social practices and networks, and it is often used in synergy with diverse media and communication tools in ways that may mean its effect on political participation and structures is often not measurable as an independent variable. Rather than examining the impact of the Internet on the political system and social change per se, it is more interesting and rewarding to understand how the use and potential of the Internet are mediated through the diverse practices and structures shaping them. As such, the study has highlighted the role of the Internet in creating and reinforcing various levels of interconnections and amalgams between journalism and activism, local and translocal public spheres, and online and offline social networks, in addition to integration between communication tools and platforms.

The appropriation of the Internet in the sphere of collective action, however, remains shaped by multidimensional digital divides mediated through social, political, and cultural structures that significantly limit the potential of the medium to change existing

power relations, and that may, in some cases, even reinforce these power relations. Despite rapid growth rates in Internet usage and penetration over the last few years, material access and skill divides are significantly shaping the extent to which the medium can be used as a tool of mobilization. A significant part of constituencies—especially within grassroots movements—as well as the majority of the people in society are excluded from the “information” society. As such, the Internet has exacerbated existing divisions between the “haves” and “have-nots” within social movements and in society, at large. It is true that material access is bound to increase in the coming years with the decrease of hardware and connection costs. However, this will only affect those who already enjoy some level of education and income, thus reinforcing the status of millions of illiterates, poor people, and women as second- or third-class citizens.

Finally, by comparing the two ICT4DEV projects—the *tanmia.ma* portal and the E-Joussour wiki—the chapter provided much needed evidence regarding the limitations of the discourse underpinning such projects and the technology-centered conceptualization of development. The major obstacle hindering the implementation of ICT-based development programs is sustainability, which is rooted in various types of digital divides, including access, skill, usage, gender, generation, and motivation. Analysis has demonstrated that while access and skill divides can be overcome through material support and training, other types of divides are much more difficult to conquer, since they are deeply entrenched in social injustices and inequalities, as well as cultural and generational attitudes and preferences. Overcoming these divides requires a complex strategy that involves socioeconomic and human development as an integral part of technology-based projects. Such projects need to be based on participatory practices and

culture that go beyond short-term donor-recipient relationships to ones based on shared control and long-term backing and involvement.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

1. Summary

The main objective of the thesis has been to examine the implications of the Internet for social movements in Morocco, and the extent to which it has empowered them to engage in contentious collective action against multiple forms of injustice. The thesis has found inconsistent, sometimes even contradicting, data on the role of the medium. On one hand, there is some clear and strong evidence suggesting that the Internet has enhanced the capabilities of SMs and SMOs on more than one level, albeit to varying degrees. On the other hand, the research has brought out severe limitations in the appropriation of the Internet for collective action objectives.

Overall, the thesis confirmed preliminary observations (see Chapter One) about the role of the Internet in enriching and expanding the collective action repertoire available for Moroccan social movements and, in some cases, in transforming the scope and nature of their claims, particularly by facilitating linkages between dispersed constituencies and translocal public spheres. At the same time, however, data demonstrated that the Internet cannot have a radical impact on political and social orders in society because its implications and potential are shaped by and mediated through the existing power relations and structural limitations that characterize Moroccan society and social movements themselves.

Thus, Chapter Five examined the structural features of SMs' and SMOs' websites and highlighted two broad categories of usages predicated on two types of organizational structures— grassroots and/or non-institutionalized groups versus professional and institutionalized SMOs. The chapter demonstrated that SM groups and organizations that

are largely based on grassroots and dispersed constituencies, as well as on informal and non-institutionalized structures, are much more effectively drawing on the potential of the Internet as a technology and political medium. The chapter also underscored a number of limitations shared by all the studied websites, notably their failure to benefit from a range of interactive features allowed by the Internet and their low interlinking with websites belonging to other Moroccan civil society groups.

Chapter Six examined the use of the websites for framing purposes, and looked at the extent to which the web's potential was exploited to frame Israel's attack on Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009. It corroborated some of the core findings of the previous chapter, and emphasized many inconsistencies and also variations between the two types of SM group mentioned above. The chapter highlighted the use of websites as both antagonistic and agonistic public spheres to disseminate alternative frames and interpretations and, at the same time, confirmed the limited use of the Internet in direct online-based forms of mobilization. A key contribution of the chapter is that it shed light on the role of the Internet in building and sustaining translocal public spheres, collective identities, and affective bonds that benefit mainly Amazigh and Islamic social movements.

Drawing on in-depth interview analysis, Chapter Seven complemented the findings of the previous two chapters by emphasizing the role of other forms of online usages and platforms, such as e-mail lists and YouTube, while providing deeper insight into the social embeddedness of the Internet in the context of Morocco. The chapter has illuminated important aspects through which the Internet has enhanced social movements' capabilities, and highlighted the synergy and convergence between various

media, as well as the interconnection between online practices and social networks and action. One of the key contributions of the chapter to the thesis is that it provided deep insights into multiform digital divides underpinning the use of the Internet in collective action, as well as into the constraints impacting online-based development projects— notably, the problem of sustainability.

2. Answering the Research Questions

2.1 The Internet's implications for Moroccan social movements.

Whereas the thesis identified a large number of areas where the Internet has empowered Moroccan SMs and SMOs, it pinpointed three aspects as the clearest and most tangibly positive effects of the medium. First, the Internet plays a vital role in reducing the costs of communication, thus enhancing the coordination and mobilization efforts deployed by social movements. According to Marwell and Oliver (2008, p. 131), mobilization can be interpreted as the process whereby a group takes control of the resources needed for collective action, which is considered “the most prominent and convincing evidence of a group’s efficacy”. As pointed out by most commentators (see Chapters Two and Three), oppositional groups’ inability to access public funds and media is a major obstacle to their mobilization capabilities. As a multifarious medium based on multiple technologies, the Internet has allowed social movements to save the costs associated with the use of telephone, fax, regular mail and transportation, and to reduce their dependence on mainstream and print media to get access to the public sphere. In doing so, the Internet has also enabled social movements to circumvent censorship and establish radical public spheres where critical discourse and alternative interpretations and frames are circulated and shared.

Second, the Internet plays an increasingly central role in various forms of mobilization that benefit social movements, be it during periods of latency or of visibility. During periods of visible action, including street protests and strikes, the Internet is used to coordinate action, mobilize members and sympathizers to participate in offline action and pressurize the state. It is also used to demonstrate, through reports and information posted online, the capacity of SMOs to act and challenge state repression. The cycles of high visibility are very short in comparison with the long periods of latency within SMs' collective action. As argued before, the Internet plays no less important role during these periods, especially by keeping activists connected and informed, and by enhancing collective identity.

Third, the Internet has greatly enhanced the capacities of SMs to create and reinforce networks of solidarity across geographical and national borders. While the study found limited evidence on the use of hyperlinks on the studied websites, it highlighted the role of other strategies, such as the use of emails, e-mail lists, petitions, and video-sharing platforms to mobilize the support of regional and international NGOs and agencies, and attract the attention of alternative and mainstream media, alike. In addition to these strategies, the thesis brought out the heavy borrowing and exchange of information and material between groups, which generates networks of meaning and discourse in the local and translocal public spheres.

Finally, the thesis found that the Internet also favours collective identity formation and enhancement through a variety of features and platforms, such as networking, interactivity, direct mobilization, and exchange of content. This role is particularly important for SMs that are geographically dispersed and identity-oriented, such as such

as the Amazigh and the Islamic social movements. Analysis of “frame entrepreneurs” on the websites, for instance, shows how Amazigh collective blogs favour linkages and interaction between loosely connected individuals and groups at the national and transnational levels, supporting, thus, the formation of a shared Amazigh identity and furthering the common cause of an imagined unified community.

These positive effects, however, are countered by important shortcomings that significantly constraint the capacity of technology alone to alter political and social injustices. Indeed, the thesis identified three interconnected sets of problems impacting the use of the medium in collective action: fundamental differentiations in the capacity of SMs and SMOs to draw on the potential of the Internet, lack of sustainability, and the existence of multiform digital divides underlying the use of the Internet. These limitations put into question technology-centered perspectives on the role of ICTs in social change, as they testify to the social embeddedness of the medium and its mediation through local and global regimes that are particular to Morocco as a developing and semi-authoritarian country. On the surface, the above results reveal contradictory patterns that are difficult to reconcile; at a deeper level, however, they reflect the diverging and converging tendencies in the diffusion and adoption of technology across countries and social settings. Indeed, the thesis demonstrated that while the Internet has in-built characteristics and the potential to produce similar effects regardless of geographical, cultural, or political boundaries, the scale and the implications of these effects vary tremendously from one social setting to another, as they are mediated through and shaped by social actors’ practices and socio-economic structures and orders.

2.2 The appropriation of the Internet's potential in collective action.

Although the Internet has built-in potential and traits, this characteristic does not guarantee successful exploitation by different social actors and groups. One of the important contributions of the thesis is that it deconstructed the notion of empowerment that literature generally attributes to the Internet, by pinpointing the multiplicity of ways whereby the Internet's potential is appropriated for collective action purposes. The Internet's hyperlink function, for instance, is used by leftist SMOs to connect mainly with INGOs and development agencies, while it is used by identity-oriented SMs to connect with affiliated groups. The same holds true for the Internet's key feature, interactivity, which distinguishes it from other media. The thesis argues that web interactivity contributes to micromobilization, as well as to the enhancement of internal cohesion and bonding, rather than to building dialogic communication online. Moreover, the active customization of the Internet's potential shows that empowerment itself is usually the outcome of interaction between social actors' choices and practices, and structural features and processes.

The contribution of the Internet to collective action cannot be sufficiently accounted for without paying attention to various forms of synergy between multiple online platforms and usages, and to the convergence between different media. For instance, different online technologies are used to complement one another or to compensate for the limitations in the appropriation of specific platforms. Conventional websites, blogs and wikis, for instance, are often used to serve as a "window" on the world, a metaphor that was interestingly employed by many interviewees to describe the main function of their group's websites (i.e., increasing the group's visibility in the local and transnational

public spheres). E-mail and e-lists, on the other hand, are used more to share information quickly and to coordinate action within a single group or between several groups. At the same time, websites can be used to post or “display” information received via e-mail, thereby publicizing the information and making it accessible to users beyond the closed circle of the movement.

Moreover, whereas e-mail lists and social media platforms can be used for rapid mobilization, websites are used to display images and information about group action, which serves to encourage actual or potential constituencies to participate in future action. Thus, while analysis of many leftist SMOs’ websites brought out their low quality because of their failure to draw on various key Web functions, interview analysis showed that these groups use e-mail lists extensively. Although the latter do not replace the important role strong websites play, they still help compensate for the websites’ poor performance and technical standards. Besides, the Internet is rarely used separately from other media, including new media such as the mobile phone and more traditional media like satellite television. The convergence between these media has intensified in the last few years with the development of new online software and platforms that allow the uploading and sharing of multimedia files, and with the sharp decrease in the cost of electronic tools, such as digital cameras and 3G mobile phones.

Regardless of the Internet’s general potential, all social movements try to exploit it selectively to further their goals without losing control over discourse and communication flow. A case in point is the Internet’s capacity to allow for a non-linear construction of discourse and a high level of intertextuality through hyperlinks. The majority of the groups in the current study, for instance avoid using hyperlinks as a

dynamic feature because it can threaten their control over discourse. Hyperlinks are, therefore, mainly used as a strategy to mark off the boundaries of a movement and its allies, and by extension, its adversaries. Certainly, analysis of the information and the communication flow on the websites covered by this study reveals a constant competition between control and participation, which is generally a characteristic of alternative media (Atton, 2001). However, the majority of the groups fail to establish a balance between the two, and lean more often towards control rather than towards a genuine participatory communication structure.

Three levels of networking have been identified from the various online communication practices of the SMs studied. First, networking is achieved through the use of hyperlinks, specifically the use of permanent links on Web sites. Second, networking is achieved more efficiently with e-mail lists and other social networking platforms. The third aspect of networking to which the Internet contributes is the facilitation of access to and dissemination of texts, frames, and interpretations at the national and supranational levels. Through various practices, such as cutting and pasting, collage, borrowing, re-transmitting/relaying, and exchanging resources, the SMs/SMOs manage to create what White (1992) dubs “networks of meanings” online (p. 92). All three types of networking, however, arise within parochial circles that promote rather than bridge ideological and political differences.

To sum up, the Internet’s potential for collective action is built on a wide range of technical capabilities. However, the extent to which social movements can activate and benefit from this potential depends on internal as well as external factors, such as organizational structure, ideology, access to resources, political opportunity structure at

the national level, and collective action strategies and objectives. Though they do not completely determine the impact of technology, these factors strongly shape the extent to which the Internet does empower Moroccan social movements in general.

2.3 The embeddedness of the Internet and its use.

2.3.1 Organizational structure and appropriation of the Internet's potential.

The potential of the Internet for collective action is not tapped into equally by all SMs, as there are important variations within and among the groups covered by the study. These differences run along a number of variables that characterize SMs/SMOs, mainly their organizational structure, ideology, objectives, access to resources, and capacity to mobilize, among others.

Variations in organizational structures constitute one major factor shaping the use and appropriation of the Internet in collective action. One of the key findings of the research is that grassroots movements use the Internet more efficiently and effectively than professional SMOs. The appropriation of the Internet by these groups is indeed strongly marked by collaborative usage, participatory and horizontal communication flows and structures, radical content, all underlaid by dense social networks and strong voluntary resources and culture. This finding is generally shared by other commentators who have also pointed out the significant role of organizational structure in shaping the use of the Internet by and its impact on social movements. Van de Donk et al. (2004), for instance, claim that the “Internet is used particularly by two kinds of movement structures: (a) informal networks with large geographical reach, and (b) big, powerful and more centralized social movement organizations” (p. 18). In the same vein, Della Porta and Diani (2006) contend that

in some cases, computer-mediated communication simply expands the capacity to act of already solid organizations such as Greenpeace or Oxfam; in other cases, however, it brings together networks of activists with very informal organization structures, if any (...). In still other cases, specific organizations are created that would not exist without the Internet. (p. 156)

The study corroborated the above statements to a great extent, but it also brought more depth and nuance to the literature on the subject insofar as it underscored the role of other variables that better account for the particularities of SMs' and SMOs' organizational structure in the context of a developing and Muslim majority country. The study demonstrated, for instance, that Islamic-oriented SMOs are among those that draw the most extensively and the most effectively on the potential of the Internet. In addition, Islamic-oriented movements mix informal networks and centralized structure, which greatly undermines the dichotomous distinction between the two characteristics dominant in the existing literature and defies any easy and ready categorization of these groups.

Some commentators highlighted the role of SMs' ideologies in defining online communication structure and usage. Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai (2005), for instance, argued that religious-oriented groups' use of the Internet is marked by four principal dimensions: "hierarchy, patriarchy, discipline, and seclusion" (p. 26). While the thesis demonstrated that Islamic-oriented SMOs' use of the Internet is distinctly characterized by patriarchy, discipline and seclusion, it revealed that these groups' websites are among the most interactive, and, thus, less hierarchical than the majority of the websites covered by the study. Analysis also revealed that upholding patriarchal values is not limited to

Islamic SMO's websites. Leftist-oriented SMO' sites promoted very little gender equality, too.

In addition, the thesis substantiated, in part, Della Porta's and Diani's (2006) claim above; however, it accentuated different patterns that are particular to the Moroccan context. On the one hand, the study confirmed the pivotal role of the Internet in supporting the construction of collective identity in the case of the Amazigh cultural movement, whose constituencies are dispersed over many countries. On the other, it demonstrated that for the vast majority of the studied SMs and SMOs, the Internet plays a supporting rather than a central role in collective action. The nature of this role cannot be attributed solely to the strength of SMOs, as the two authors claim. Rather, the dissertation shows that Internet's appropriation by SMs in Morocco is contingent upon a large number of variables that are proper to this developing and undemocratic country—specifically, the various forms of digital divides, the degree of censorship and political persecution of particular groups, and the support and aid received from INGOs and development agencies. As an illustration, the Internet plays a greater role for the Justice and Charity Islamic SMO than it does for its rival Unity and Reconstruction. While both enjoy a strong structure and a large number of followers, the former relies much more on the Internet, as all its print media have been banned by the Moroccan state. For many other organizations, limited use of the Internet can be explained mainly by the access, skill, and motivational divides that characterize SMs' use of the Internet and the diffusion of the medium in society, rather than by issues of strength or weakness.

In addition, for the majority of SMs and SMOs, the Internet has been found to be expanding rather than supplanting the existing collective action repertoire, insofar as

social movements always rely on a combination of resources, media, networks, and action tactics. This has serious implications for understanding the “effect” of technology on society, since this effect is the result of the articulation between the in-built/inherent potential of the technology, its synergy with other media, and its mediation through social practices and processes.

2.3.2 Sustainability of use: The inconsistency of the Internet’s impact.

Sustainability is one of the biggest obstacles facing the use of the Internet in collective action in Morocco. Even during the sampling phase of the current project, preliminary observation of a large number of online social movements’ platforms revealed that the vast majority of these platforms stop being updated or used shortly after their creation. Feature and framing analyses confirmed this observation by pinpointing the shortcomings of a significant number of the studied websites resulting from their being scarcely or insufficiently updated. In-depth interviewing shed further light on the issue of sustainability by revealing that many online projects failed or are facing huge difficulties because SMOs are unable to use or maintain their websites. Sustainability is also a major issue for ICT4DEV projects, since financial and technical support, along with limited training, do not guarantee the continuation of online-based projects over long periods of time. This absence of sustainability is seriously limiting the medium’s contribution to SMs’ efforts to produce political and social change. Drawing on the findings of a triangulated study of social movements’ appropriation of the Internet, as well as of two online-based development projects, the thesis has demonstrated that sustainability is better achieved through collective and collaborative projects that pay more attention to the co-production of content, and that are based on grassroots voluntary

participation and contribution through the various stages of the project's implementation. More importantly, lack of sustainability appeared to be interlinked with multiple digital divides that are rooted in various forms of inequalities and underpinned by different demographic factors that need to be simultaneously addressed.

2.3.3 Digital divides: The limits of technological empowerment.

A major contribution of the thesis is that it has underscored the extent to which Internet's use in collective action is rooted in a multifaceted digital divide that significantly reduces its empowering potential for Moroccan SMs. Drawing on various interpretations of this notion (Clement & Shade, 2000; Shade, 2010; Norris, 2001; Van Dijk, 2005), the thesis emphasized several types of access and divide at the levels of infrastructure, content, physical access to hardware, skill, usage, and motivation that substantially limit the impact of the technology on SMs. Although access to computers and Internet connection remains a major obstacle to SMs' use of the Internet in collective action, other categories of divides emerged to have a great impact, sometimes as crippling as the unavailability of computers or of Internet connection..

Physical access to computers and the Internet continues to exclude the majority of the country's population, which significantly limits the ability of SMs to reach potential constituencies and the population at large, and to directly mobilize people through the medium. Moreover, the access divide affects SMs themselves, especially grassroots movements, albeit in varying degrees. As a consequence, the Internet has exacerbated existing divisions between the "haves" and "have-nots" within society, providing social and political elites with more tools to participate in the public sphere and acquire more material and symbolic capital. While restrictions on material access are bound to

diminish in the coming years with the decrease of hardware and connection costs; this will only affect those who already enjoy some level of education and income, which will, in fact, reinforce the status of millions of illiterates and poor people as second- or third-class citizens.

However, the study revealed that even if access divides were to be bridged, there are more enduring forms of divides that strongly and negatively affect the use of the Internet by social movements. Skill and usage divides are among the most widespread forms of Internet-related inequalities affecting the use of the medium in collective action. The skill divide goes beyond the appropriation of the Internet for basic uses, to the ability of activists to use the medium strategically in the advancement of the SM's or the SMO's cause and claims. This divide largely overlaps with a gender gap. The diffusion of the Internet has only deepened the significant inequalities between men and women in Moroccan society, as the latter find themselves at the intersection of diverse forms of economic and social discrimination. The gender digital divide will continue to grow unless women manage to achieve economic, social, political, and cultural equality in both the public and the private spheres. Men's ability to accede to and use the Internet more than women strengthens their discursive power and boosts their control over the public sphere, both online and offline, which results in a democratic divide that will, in turn, further exacerbate socioeconomic disparities between men and women in the Moroccan society.

Likewise, the thesis highlighted the presence of a motivational divide as one of the main factors behind the slow and intermittent appropriation of the Internet in collective action. The motivational divide is very complex insofar as it is underpinned by multiple

variables, mainly the generation gap. According to Van Dijk (2005), the motivational divide is the first obstacle in the process of adopting new technologies in society, since disposition to use the technology paves the way for spending the necessary money and effort to do it. The thesis only partially corroborates this claim since motivation-related issues proved to surge at any stage in the process of appropriating the Internet in collective action.

The motivational divide is better explained through the notion of sustainability, as the latter provides deeper insight into the process of diffusing a technology in a developing country. Thus, many activists and groups become enthusiastic about the potential of the Internet in collective action. After overcoming access and skill divides, they attempt to use the technology strategically to advance their causes. However, in the majority of cases, the use of the Internet starts to falter or comes to a complete halt after a short time, and projects have to be redone from scratch, starting from the need to again find the motivation and incentive to justify spending already scarce resources on using the medium. Two major factors affecting sustainability are the lack of sufficient and suitable content, and the paucity of wider literacy, including digital literacy, at the societal level. Another major factor is the existence of significant discrepancies inside groups and movements that are beset with social class and generation divides.

Discussion of the motivational divide has two distinct implications. On one hand, it sheds light on the cultural, psychological, and individual factors shaping the use of the Internet in collective action. On the other, this type of divide clearly challenges a mechanic conceptualization of the digital divide, whereby lack of access to the technology will necessarily result in social, political, and economic exclusion. Some

commentators have criticized a linear understanding of the digital divide claiming that access to the technology necessarily ensures more social, political and economic power (Cammaerts & Audenhove, 2003, p. 10). Indeed, whereas younger generations are the largest and most adept users of the Internet in Morocco and within SMS, they are, aside from women, the most disadvantaged demographic groups in society. The Internet has certainly empowered young people to express themselves much more than before, and enabled them to overstep the older generations' political, cultural, and social conservatism. However, this form of online empowerment has yet to be translated into the political influence and social capital that can empower young people offline. The comparison between the implications of the Internet for women and young people confirms that the impact of the Internet or lack thereof is neither inevitable nor uniform. To put it simply, while the Internet opens a myriad of possibilities for collective action and political contestation, these possibilities only materialize if and when pre-existing political and social structures allow it. Internet's social embeddedness makes its impact on the political and social orders very contextual and contingent.

2.3.4 Can the Internet contribute to social and political change in Morocco?

The main research question of the thesis is rooted in a search for two interlinked levels of Internet's potential effects. At the first level, it is the impact of the Internet on Moroccan social movements themselves that is assessed; at the second, the thesis sought to study the implications of this impact on SMS' capacity to produce social and political change in Morocco. While the first level deals with a type of effect that can be verified by examining SMS' usages of the Internet and activists' narratives on their interaction with the technology, the latter type of effect deals with a much more difficult issue since

the assessment of “social movements’ consequences are notoriously hard to define” (Earl, 2004, p. 509).

The thesis has highlighted two principal types of impact the Internet can have on political structures and policy making. On the one hand, the Internet plays sometimes a pivotal role in confrontational and subversive forms of collective action, which can directly affect policy and decision-making processes. This is the case when the Internet is appropriated by social movements that are engaged in direct forms of mobilization such as street protests, civil disobedience, strikes and uprisings. During the Sidi Ifni events, for instance, the Internet, specifically blogs and video-sharing platforms like YouTube, played an instrumental role in forcing the state to admit police violence against the residents of the town, and in convincing opposition parties in Parliament to rally with human rights NGOs to create fact-finding committees that demand disclosure of information. However, cases like Sidi Ifni, in which the Internet has a direct impact on public policy, have been rare so far and, when they happen, have short-term effects.

On the other, the Internet’s impact on policy making and political structures is rather gradational and indirect. Giugni’s (1998) conceptualization of the process by which SMs can produce change (see Chapter Four), namely through the stages of incorporation, transformation, and democratization, provides a basis for shedding light on this issue. Sater (2007) points out that the hegemony of the Moroccan state over the public sphere is always threatened by the actions of new groups whose claims are “sensitive,” such as the women’s and Amazigh movements, or “subversive,” such as human rights and Islamic groups (p. 163). By creating divisions within the public sphere, these groups force the state—especially when there is unanimity among civil society groups—into assimilating

the disruptive discourses in order to “re-legitimize” itself in particular areas, such as human rights, or to compensate for a loss of legitimacy elsewhere, as in its inability to provide jobs for young graduates.

Thus, building on Giugni’s model and Sater’s observations on the Moroccan public sphere, we can argue that the Internet’s main contribution to political change is characterized by a transformation that is rather slow and gradational than spectacular and rapid. The Internet contributes to SMs’ efforts to resist the state’s double strategy of repression and co-optation, to keep their claims alive and vibrant, to support offline and online forms of mobilization, and to enhance internal cohesion and collective identities across geographical barriers. Both types of effects, however, are interlinked and interdependent. The development of social movements, and their capacity to become more visible and resourceful encourage them to engage in direct forms of mobilization and collective action. While direct forms of action open new possibilities for social movements and widen the scope of their claims and political environment, and, thus, empower them to play more visible and effective role in the public and political spheres.

Some commentators have questioned the capacity of the Internet to have any deep impact on existing power relations “because not only social movements but also their opponents profit from ICT’s advantages, [and therefore] we do not assume that the existing constellation of powers is fundamentally changed as long as all actors use ICTs to similar degrees” (Van de Donk et al., 2004, p. 19). The current study has corroborated this claim to some extent, but it also emphasized that this issue, too, remains context-specific. In the context of undemocratic and developing countries where SMs are facing hostile conditions of oppression and material scarcity, the notions of empowerment and

change should be interpreted in relative terms, since oppositional groups' ability to survive against the odds and to maintain public claims within local and translocal public spheres is a sign of progress and positive outcome.

Positioning the claims of a given social movement in the public sphere and resisting repression may not be enough to produce a significant change, however. In order to be incorporated in public and policy discourse, claims need to be disseminated widely beyond core constituencies. They also need to be sustained over an extensive period of time. So far, very few SMs have been able to achieve sustainability in their online projects. The current study has corroborated the findings of other studies regarding the ability of Islamic-oriented movements to draw more effectively on the potential of the Internet for collective action (Anderson, 2003; Bunt, 2004; Ibrahine, 2005). Accordingly, the Internet is only reflecting existing power relations while contributing to the consolidation of Islamism as the major cultural and political social movement in the country and the region, at the expense of secular movements. The thesis has revealed, nonetheless, that Islamic movements do not control the online public sphere, nor are they the only political groups that have extensively benefitted from the new medium, as illustrated by the examples of the Amazigh cultural movement and the alter-globalization movement.

In summary, although Moroccan SMs have made considerable gains as a result of various applications of the Internet in collective action, this appropriation has not maximized their capabilities in such a way as to significantly and clearly change dominant power relations, nor has it determined the outcome of the various struggles these movements are leading against multiple forms of injustice. Moreover, while the

Internet has empowered various SMS, it has done so unevenly, thus reflecting internal discrepancies between and within movements, as well as reinforcing existing imbalances between secular versus religious movements, and between male and female users.

3. Implications of the Research Findings

The findings of the current research have a variety of important implications and practical applications in a number of domains. Within academia, the current study contributes to a small body of research dealing with the theorization and analysis of the implications of the Internet for political communication and collective action from the perspective of social movement theory. The study underscores the value of using such a perspective as it was able to bring out the multiple articulations and inter-dependencies between the technological and social, and between structure and agency. Such a perspective also provided a multicausal explanation of the implications of the Internet for SMS by emphasizing the role of material resources, political opportunity structure, organizational structure, culture, and identity, as well as media practices at the micro/individual level. Moreover, using social movement theory allowed the study to move beyond narrow interpretations of the notion of “mobilization”, prevalent in the literature, and that narrow the meaning of this notion to the use of the Internet to coordinate and build support for offline action. From the perspective of social movement theory, the thesis emphasized a variety of practices and processes that contribute to and are even an integral part of mobilization—from micromobilization at the level of individual activists, to collective identity building.

Equally important, the current study contributes to understanding political and social realities and conflicts within Muslim-majority society, and the role of the Internet in

political and social processes. The thesis was able to foreground the dynamics, divisions, and complexity of Moroccan civil society and the challenges facing it—mainly the issues of democracy, social and cultural equality, the opposition between Islamic-oriented and secular SMs, and the extent to which new technology can play an influential role in defining the outcomes of these struggles and challenges. The information and evidence provided by this study resist dominant representations and writings both in the mainstream media and academia, according to which Islamic countries are dominated almost exclusively by religious-oriented political groups and ideologies (Said, 1981; Karim, 2003). They help better appreciate differences and commonalities between the various SMs that form Moroccan civil society, which dispels some of the stereotypes about Islamic-oriented groups that are often portrayed to be fundamentally different from and opposed to secular social movements. These insights are very useful not only for researchers, but also for civil society actors and policy makers who are interested in understanding the political and social transformations in the Arab world, in general, and in apprehending the role of new technologies in these transformations—especially their implications for increased interconnectedness between local, regional, and global public spheres.

Furthermore, the main findings of the study are of great value for local SMs, INGOs, and development agencies. First, the thesis provides Moroccan civil society actors and SMs with reflexive insights into their own actions and communication practices, and more specifically, into their appropriation of the Internet in collective action. This can assist them in develop more critical stances towards the potential and limitations of the medium, and contribute to the enhancement of their communication strategies in the

future. Second, the findings have important implications and practical applications for INGOs and agencies aiming to empower civil societies and promote democracy in developing countries through the use of ICTs. The thesis offers these international actors important background information and insights into the complexities and intricacies characterizing collective action in developing countries like Morocco. By identifying the major obstacles to the appropriation of the Internet in collective action—namely the various digital divides and the problem of sustainability—the current study can help INGOs and development institutions to reconsider their priorities and objectives, and reconstruct the planning and implementation of their projects in order to achieve better results, and to save important and much needed resources.

Finally, the study contributes to a better understanding and analysis of the role of the Internet in the uprisings, protests and revolutions that have been shaking the Arab world over the past few months. As stated above, Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions have been labelled by mainstream media pundits as “Facebook” and “Twitter” revolutions. These hyperbolic designations are more obstacles than helpful descriptions in any attempt to apprehend the full complexity of these events and the role of media in the way they are unfolding. Notwithstanding the prominent part of social media platforms in these events, the claim that they have engendered these revolutions subscribes to a clear deterministic view of technology. Criticising the overzealous praise of the role of these technologies, Harvard professor Tarak Barkawi (2011, para.1) pointed out that these grotesque claims smack of eurocentricism because they credit the revolutions to “Western” technology rather than to the peoples of Egypt and Tunisia: “To listen to the hype about social

networking websites and the Egyptian revolution, one would think it was Silicon Valley and not the Egyptian people who overthrew Mubarak”.

The new technology has indeed boosted the capacity of Arab people’s to mobilize against despotism. However, it is an amalgam of different, but interrelated, factors that has fuelled the ongoing political upheavals. That the first revolutions erupted in Tunisia and Egypt and not in other Arab countries, and that civil society and youth movements in these two countries were able to lead successful and mainly peaceful uprisings against dictatorship is no coincidence, nor is it directly linked to the surge in the use of social media. According to sociologist and historian Emmanuel Todd (2011), the revolution in Tunisia is underpinned by deep transformations within Tunisian society, mainly the sharp drop in the levels of fecundity and endogamy, high levels of literacy, and absence of petrol that favours the development of rent regimes and economies. Todd foresaw that Egypt would be the next domino piece to fall because Egyptian society has evolved in a similar way to the Tunisian one, even if literacy rates remain inferior to those in Tunisia. According to him, “there is a link between endogamy and political structure: the imperviousness of the family group leads social groups to shut on themselves and results in the rigidity of the institutions” (2011, para. 1 [my translation]).

Emanuel Todd’s observations above have been vindicated by subsequent developments in the Arab “democratic spring” uprisings. In the Gulf rich countries, mainly Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, demonstrations were quelled either by repression or massive distribution of petro-dollar subsidies, or by both. In Libya, where civil society institutions are absent and the regime and society have a clear tribal character, the uprising quickly escalated into a civil war. The Libyan model may also repeat itself in

Yemen and Syria, two countries with deep tribal, regional and sectarian divisions. Thus, societal and political structures specific to each country in the region are likely to determine the course and outcome of the uprisings, much more so than any new communication technology. In fact, that the spread of revolutions to countries where there is low level of Internet penetration, such as Yemen and Libya, rules out the Internet as the main catalyst in today's Arab revolutions.

Equally important, the role of social media in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions was limited to early stages and was not substantial throughout the events. In fact, notwithstanding the importance of their role, social media were not stand-alone tools; rather, they were only effective because they operated in synergy with other media. As a consequence, even when the Internet service in these countries was completely shut down or severely curtailed, the revolutions continued as people resorted to other more conventional media, as well as to offline societal networks and interpersonal communication. Moreover, state surveillance of social media platforms compelled activists to use alternative media and tools of communication. During the Egyptian uprising, for instance, activists resorted to distributing leaflets asking "recipients to redistribute it by email and photocopy, but not to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which are being monitored by the security forces" (The Guardian, 2011, para. 4). In addition to the role of interpersonal communication, leaflets, mobile phones and digital cameras, traditional media, mainly satellite television such as Al-Jazeera played a critical role in the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Al-Jazeera's 24 hours coverage of Tahrir Square in Egypt provided a loophole into the media blackout imposed by Mubarak's regime, and, perhaps, enabled the revolution to escape a brutal repression

by the army. More importantly, Al Jazeera's highly supportive coverage of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions has clearly galvanized Arab audiences across the region and in diaspora, and contributed to building and maintaining the dynamics behind the "Arab Spring".

Despite their preliminary nature, these observations confirm a number of key conclusions advanced by the thesis. Indeed, while not dealing specifically with the use of social media in collective action, this study has argued that communication and information technologies (ICTs) in general have significantly expanded social movements' repertoire, as well as the possibilities and horizons of their claims and action. Stressing the role of the Internet in this process, the study has also brought out the significance of other factors, including the synergy between various media and online platforms, the role of offline social networks, the intertwinement between citizen and professional journalism, the demographics of Internet access and use, and the political opportunity structures dominant in society. By highlighting various forms and levels of appropriations of the medium by social movements, the research provided strong evidence about the social embeddedness of the Internet as well as online activism in general.

One of the valuable findings of the thesis is that the appropriation of the Internet in collective action is more effective when it involves the use of collaborative online platforms. The research also pointed out that the Internet favours groups that are geographically dispersed and/or combining institutional organization and non-hierarchical mobilization strategies. In this sense, the study's results and insights shed much needed light on the social embeddedness of the Internet and the rootedness of

online activism in the social life, in general, and in social movements' offline practices and networks, in particular. Using social movement theory and perspective to analyze the role of the Internet in the current events can enhance the researchers' ability not only to understand the social and political roots of the so called "Facebook" revolutions, but also to better deal with ongoing and coming revolutions and counter-revolutions that will shape the future of the Arab world in the coming months and years.

4. Epilogue

The thesis focused on various online platforms and tools used by SMs, namely conventional websites, blogs, wikis, e-lists and, to a lesser extent, video sharing platforms such as YouTube. As with any research project, the present one has its own shortcomings, the major one being that it provided little data on the use of social media platforms, mainly Facebook. The number of Moroccan Internet users who have Facebook accounts has reached around 2.5 million (Internet World Stat, Africa, 2010). Nonetheless, the use of this platform for collective action purposes had, until very recently, remained very restricted both in number and in scope.

This situation has considerably changed in the last three months with the eruption of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions. Inspired by these events and encouraged by the dynamics they created, a number of groups appeared on Facebook calling for radical reforms that can bring the country genuine democratic transition and social justice. These groups coordinated action and called for public protests that took place all over the country on February 20th. The protests drew thousands of Moroccans, and sent clear messages to those who hold power that the country is not an exception and will not be exempt from unrest. Although the "February 20" movement was not able to maintain the

momentum of mobilization after the first round of protests, official reaction to the events did not take long to come. In a bid to respond to the demands of the protestors, King Mohamed VI delivered a speech on March 9 in which he promised vast political reforms that included the amendment of the constitution to enhance the role of the legislative, judicial and executive powers. While many have welcomed the royal speech, many others have remained sceptical, claiming that there are no real guarantees that these constitutional changes will in effect be applied. So far, other public demonstrations, albeit smaller in size, have been staged in various cities, while a major rally was scheduled for March the 20th. This last rally was equally successful as it drew thousands across the country, and was characterized by heavy use of the Internet for mobilization purposes and for sharing videos and photos of the protests. Further similar rallies are scheduled on the 20th of each month, along with local and smaller protests in between, to maintain pressure on the state

Although it is too early to draw clear conclusions from these recent developments, it is possible to make a number of preliminary observations related to key issues raised by the thesis. First, the social media platform Facebook, was one of many other media platforms and tools used to mobilize people around the February 20 movement, particularly YouTube, blogs, and news websites. Second, while in Egypt a significant segment of the youths behind the January 25 revolution were unaffiliated with any political group, Moroccan oppositional SMOs, mainly the ones studied in the current research, such as the Moroccan Association of Human Rights, the Islamic-oriented Justice and Charity, the Unified Socialist Party, and the Amazigh cultural movement have played a central role in launching the February 20 movement, preparing and participating

in the protests, and campaigning in the media to promote the protests. The state initially reacted by stepping up its repression of activists, especially those belonging to these SMOs and SMs, in a bid to crush the movement. Third, the Moroccan government was itself inspired by the Egyptian revolution in that it gained a bigger awareness of the potential role of the Internet and social media. As a consequence, the state has been leading an aggressive propaganda campaign on the Internet and through print media to discredit the February 20 movement and undermine its cause. It also stepped up its surveillance of social media, and many activists complained that their accounts were hacked, which prompted York (2011) to assert that these media have a rich potential but also carry high risks for activists and political actors. Fourth, for the first time in the modern history of the country, a movement, the 20 February movement, was able to unite under the same banners and slogans both “radical” left and Islamist SMOs. The younger Moroccan generation had learnt from Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions that it was possible to build a strong and efficient pro-democracy movement that transcends, at least in the short run, ideological differences and “animosity”. Finally, unlike the Egyptian January 25 revolution, which is rooted in a long online and offline struggle, initially pioneered by the Kifaya (meaning “enough” in Arabic) movement since 2004, and continued by the April 6 youth movement since 2008⁹⁴, Moroccan February 20 movement is very recent and has yet to mature into an indigenous political movement with its own clear identity and collective action tactics.

Equally important, many changes affected the studied websites some time after the data gathering and analysis phase was completed for the purpose of the present study.

⁹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of these two movements and their use of the Internet, see Oweidat et al., 2008 and Faris, 2008.

Three of them are not updated any longer, while six, most of which belong to Islamic-oriented SMOs, and organizations in the alter-globalization movement, have been replaced by newer versions. In addition, a number of these SMOs are trying to benefit from the surge in the popularity of social media by launching Facebook pages and allowing users to share content via these platforms. These observations lend further credence and strength to some key findings of the study—namely, the questions of sustainability, and the inequalities between social movements in their ability to appropriate the Internet’s potential. The current thesis argues that leftist-oriented SMOs’ slow and mainly inefficient appropriation of the Internet is partly due to their incapacity to mobilize young generations who constitute the majority of Internet users. So far, the February 20 movement has permitted these SMOs to move closer to “Facebookers” by supporting their demands and providing them with logistic help and training. It is, however, too early to conclude that this tactical alliance will translate into long term support for these SMOs.

In the next months and years, the Internet’s use will continue to grow, further reducing the access divide in society and within social movements themselves. The appropriation of the Internet in collective action will also gain more momentum as the various SMs are becoming more convinced of the utility and efficiency of the medium as a mobilizing tool. There is no doubt that the Internet will be increasingly present in the long struggle of Moroccan civil society and social movements to establish a democratic and egalitarian society. However, it is highly unlikely that the medium will determine the outcome of the struggle or its long-term consequences. As Schroeder (2007) asserts,

Once a certain stage is reached, science and technology will affect societies in a similar way (homogeneity and pluralization), but they will leave the preexisting patterns in the other spheres of society (cultural, political, and economic) that are unaffected by science and technology to converge or diverge according to their own logic. (pp. 124–5)

This certainly holds true for Morocco, too, since the political and social injustices and challenges that have characterized the country's past and present will continue to hold sway in the near future until they are resolved through social and political conflicts, and/or compromises and consensus between antagonists. Technology—i.e., the Internet, in this case—will certainly play a part in this process, but it will not determine its course. Going back to the Sisyphus imagery as used by Lise Garon to describe Moroccan civil society, we can safely say that the Internet may ease Sisyphus' plight while pushing the rock of change up the steep hill, but it will not necessarily prevent the rock from falling back to the bottom again.

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Appendices

Appendix A. List of respondents

Names	Affiliation	Profession/position	Contacts
Samira Kinani	Moroccan Association of Human Rights	Teacher, AMDH's Central committee member	samirakinani@gmail.com
Abderrezak Idrissi		webmaster and editor of AMDH's website & newspaper	abderrazzakdrissi@gmail.com
Mohamed Ziani		Teacher, El-Hoceima chapter's president	Journal_bades@yahoo.fr
Mohamed Ashen		Teacher, El-Hoceima chapter	Mochan_06@hotmail.com
Abdelhamid Amine (not cited in thesis)		Engineer, Vice president	
Mourad Gourouhi	Tanmia association	Association manager	Mourad@tanmia.ma
Mohamed Ait Bahlim		Community center supervisor	212-537812874
Fatima Maghnaoui	Union of Women's Action	Teacher, Union's vice president	212 577272 22
Aicha Lekhmass		Lawyer, Union's president	uafcasa@iam.net.ma
Amina el-Rbou		Volunteer-activist	Not available
Rachida Benmessaoud	Moroccan Organization of Human Rights	University professor, Feminist activist	Not available
Ghassan Ayoubi	Forum des Alternatives Maroc (FMAS)	Website developer	Ghassan.ay@gmail.com
Hamouda Soubhi		Project Coordinator	hsoubhi@alternatives.ca
Loay El Karmouni	FMAS Youth Action	Project supervisor	ajmaroc@gmail.com
Zakaria Sahnoun	Unity & Reconstruction/ Justice & Development	Webmaster, activist	zakaria@attajdid.ma
Halima Bennaoui	Democratic League of Women's Rights	Rabat chapter coordinator	212-537293495
Naima Tirerovine		Volunteer & activist	naimatik@yahoo.fr
Jamila Garmouma		Volunteer & activist	J_garmouma@yahoo.fr
Hassan Bennajah	Justice & Charity	Secretary general of J&C youth section	Not available

Jawad Mostaqbal	ATTAC-Morocco	Engineer and webmaster	Jawad.attac@gmail.com
Mohamed Aboud		Not cited in thesis	Aboud.moha@gmail.com
Mustafa Sandiya		Not cited in thesis	Chi_tro@yahoo.fr
Soufian ladham	Democratic Association of Moroccan Women	Information system supervisor	soufiane.ladham@adfm.ma
Wafaa Amdaw		Volunteer, campaign coordinator	Cabatine12@hotmail.fr
Said Rahmouni	Unemployed Graduates' movement	Unemployed graduate.	zoukris@gmail.com
Abdelilah Mansouri	Unified Socialist Party	Teacher, Party central committee member	212-661977722
Mohamed Lakjiri	Amazigh movement	Student, blogger	ageddim@gmail.com
Michel Lamber	Alternative International	President	michel@alternatives.ca
Caroline Tagny		Youth program officer	caroline@alternatives.ca
Khaled Jamaï	Le Journal Magazine	Journalist	Not available
Aboubakre Jamaï	Le Journal Magazine	Former editor	aboubakr@yahoo.fr
Toufik Bouashrine	Al Massae newspaper	(former) Chief Editor	taoufikmasae@gmail.com
Idriss Omhamed	Forum National des Droits Humains		Not available
Not cited in thesis			
Yahya Yahyawi (Not cited in thesis)	Academic Researchers	University professor	elyahyaoui@elyahyaoui.org
Mehdi Menjra (not cited in thesis)		University professor	elmandjra@elmandjra.org
Zohir Maazi (not cited in thesis)	USFP youth section	Blogger, student	Not available

Appendix B. Oral consent script

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

RESEARCH TITLE: The Use of the Internet by Social Movements in Morocco:
Implications for Collective Action and Political Change

Oral Script

You are invited to participate in a program of research being conducted by Mohamed Ben Moussa of the Department of Communication Studies of Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke Street West Montreal, Quebec Canada H4B 1R6, Phone (514) 848-2424 ext. 2555.

A. Purpose

You have been informed that the purpose of the research is to study the political role of the Internet in Morocco and that the research is part of the requirements for obtaining a PhD degree in communication studies at Concordia University.

B. Procedures

You have understood that you will participate in the project as an informant and that the interview will last from one and half to two hours, and that it will be recorded.

C. Risks and Benefits

You have understood that there are no risks involved in this interview.

D. Conditions of Participation

- You have understood that you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at anytime without negative consequences.

- You have understood that your participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose your identity).
- You have understood that the data from this study may be published.
- You have understood this agreement and that you freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- You have been provided with Concordia University Research Ethics and Compliance Officer's contact details in case you have questions about your rights as a research participant.