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## **Interstitial Spaces and Controlled Participation:**

### **The Youth Center of Hay Mohammadi during the Years of Lead in Morocco**

**Yasmine Berriane**

Studies of the dynamics of political participation in North Africa and the Middle East (and beyond) tend to be dominated by a dichotomous approach that separates and opposes the state from civil-society actors and spaces: the street versus the parliament, the palace, or public administration buildings; civic associations or social movements versus political parties and government institutions. But, as this chapter will illustrate, these dichotomies and clear-cut distinctions obscure the tensions, negotiations, and reconfigurations that can happen in between, where these various categories of political (state and non-state) spaces intertwine. This seems all the more important today, since “many mechanisms aimed at enhancing participation create new kinds of spaces between, within and beyond the domains of ‘state’ and ‘civil society’, reconfiguring their boundaries and intersections” (Cornwall 2002, 4).

To analyze how participation is being co-produced by the complex interactions and fluid boundaries between what are generally categorized as ‘state’ and ‘non-state’ actors,<sup>1</sup> this chapter will therefore focus on a type of space in which such interactions are especially visible: youth

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<sup>1</sup> As Lund’s discussion of the production of these categories contends, “Socially constructed does not necessarily mean ephemeral or weak . . . While fluidity may characterize institutions and authority, it may not be the lowest possible viscosity. Certain settlements, rights and authorities may ‘stick.’ Once successfully constructed, institutions of authority become markers for the future negotiation of society” (Lund 2006, 679).

centers in Morocco. The youth center of Hay Mohammadi,<sup>2</sup> a working-class neighborhood in Casablanca<sup>3</sup> is an illustrative example.

I will qualify these spaces as interstitial, showing that this term—developed mainly in the fields of architecture, urban studies, and psychology to analyze spaces as varied as streets, shopping malls, cars, and staircases—is also of heuristic value when studying the making of spaces of political participation. Depending on the discipline, the concept of interstitial space is used to study very different kind of spaces. Nevertheless, beyond their many differences, these spaces do share some common features. They are usually defined as ambiguous social spaces situated between and within boundaries that separate categories such as “private” and “public” (Hertzberger 2000), “work” and “leisure” (Fustier 2012), or “center” and “periphery” (Mubi Brighenti 2013). They therefore entail something other than the “closed either-or-situation” (Hussenius et al. 2016, 13) that tends to dominate the study of political participation, and they provide us, as researchers, “with an opportunity to re-imagine contemporary social multiplicities beyond the classic categories of crowd, mass, nation, population, social group and social actor” (Mubi Brighenti 2013, xxi). They are also accessible to and usable by a variety of actors who co-produce the space (Chakravarty and Negi 2016, 8). Consequently, the interstices are often analyzed as being the outcome of the interactions between actors (Mubi Brighenti 2013, xviii). According to this literature, interstitial spaces are also “spaces of struggle” that are conducive to making change possible: transgressive social agents can use interstitial spaces to resist or modify the dominant context (Hussenius et al. 2016, 13–14). But, at the same time, they are also spaces that contribute to producing or even reinforcing forms of domination and control (Chakravarty and Negi 2016, 12).

These characteristics apply to Moroccan youth centers in that these establishments are public institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, but entrusted to non-state actors organized in clubs or civic associations.<sup>4</sup> The official missions of youth centers are to promote education, to offer spaces for cultural activities, leisure, and sports, and to help young

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<sup>2</sup> For place names such as Hay Mohammadi or the surnames of my interlocutors, I will follow the customary French spelling used in Morocco. For the other Arabic words, I will use a transliterated form.

<sup>3</sup> In 2010, there were 510 youth centers in Morocco, including 294 in urban and 216 in rural areas. Today, Casablanca has forty-two youth centers. Among the other historical establishments that have played a similar role are the Bouchentouf, Derb Ghellaf, and Bourgogne youth centers.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this particular form of delegation of public service, see for instance Berriane 2016.

people learn “the basics of democracy” and consultation.<sup>5</sup> Within an enclosed space that is guarded and protected by a high wall, personnel, and rules of access, intermediary private actors and organizations propose and implement actions that fall within these official missions. Club and civic association representatives further contribute to managing the establishment through their involvement in the House Counsel. This consultative body brings together civil servants supervising the center, local delegates of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, and representatives of civic associations and clubs.

At the same time, the term used for these centers, *dar* (house), links these establishments to the private domain. Indeed, *dar* designates not only a dwelling in its concrete sense but also, and especially, a construction linked to a family and by extension often the family itself. This reinforces the idea that youth centers are simultaneously anchored in the private and public domains, blurring the common distinction between the two.

Youth centers are thus located in multiple interstices: they are both public and private, state-controlled institutions and spaces used by civil-society actors, spaces for leisure, but also for education, cultural activities, and—as will be shown in this chapter—for both subversion and control. More particularly, the youth center of Hay Mohammadi is also interstitial because of its geographical location, as it is situated between more ‘privileged’ low-income houses and apartment buildings on the one side and, on the other, by the Carrières Centrales (or *karyan central*), one of Casablanca’s oldest and biggest slums. Throughout its history, this center has therefore also been the meeting point for inhabitants of the two parts of the neighborhood.

Although a number of authors attribute to youth centers a role in the socialization and production of today’s associative elites in Morocco (Tozy 2004, 102; Bennani-Chraïbi 2003, 348; Berriane, 2013, 131–161), they have never been the focus of an in-depth research study.<sup>6</sup> The youth center of Hay Mohammadi, like many other interstitial spaces, is indeed an “inconspicuous space” that has not drawn much public or scholarly attention (Chakravarty and Negi 2006). In Morocco—as well as in other parts of the region (see for instance Bayat 2010, 130)—youth

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<sup>5</sup> Website of the Ministry of Youth and Sport: [www.mjs.gov.ma/fr/Page-86/espaces-des-jeunes-enfants-et-femmes](http://www.mjs.gov.ma/fr/Page-86/espaces-des-jeunes-enfants-et-femmes), accessed December 12, 2016

<sup>6</sup> This observation applies also to other parts of North Africa and the Middle East. One prominent example is most certainly Asef Bayat’s *Life as Politics*, in which the author focuses on the street as the “ultimate arena to communicate discontent” (2010, 11). Youth centers or similar civil institutions are mentioned here and there as spaces in which collective identities and solidarities are forged and expressed and within which “activism was pushed as the Arab states exercised surveillance over the streets” (ibid., 217). Yet, very little information is given on the way such spaces actually function or how they contribute to the making of political participation.

centers are seen as state institutions in “crisis,” degraded, abandoned by the public authorities, and frowned upon by the public (Samie 1997). They are therefore ignored both by researchers working on the making of public administration and governance and by researchers working on civic activism. This chapter challenges this trend by showing that interstitial spaces such as youth centers do matter when studying, for instance, the making of political participation.

I will argue that in authoritarian or hybrid regimes such as Morocco,<sup>7</sup> interstitial spaces similar to the youth center of Hay Mohammadi are particularly well suited to produce forms of participation that are both subversive and controlled. They enable us to show that institutions that are officially placed under the supervision of the state but whose institutional status is ambiguous can also function as alternative meeting spaces and spaces of political expression; this challenges the notion that government supervision in authoritarian regimes always means complete top-down control. Hay Mohammadi’s youth center’s history illustrates in particular the numerous interactions that linked and still link non-governmental actors to representatives of the state. We will show how, depending on the historical context, these interactions contributed to the development of what Mohamed Tozy (1999, 63) has called a “controlled” or “normalized dissidence.”

To illustrate this idea, I will start with the context in which youth centers first appeared in Morocco. I will then focus on one important period of the history of the youth center of Hay Mohammadi: the Years of Lead that stretch from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s. I will show how, during this period, a variety of state and non-state actors negotiated the limits of the possible. These negotiations had a clear impact on the further development of the participatory sphere in Morocco, as they contributed to the socialization of actors who are active today in political parties and civic associations. My analysis is based on data collected in several stages: research carried out since 2006 on the transformation of the associative sphere in Casablanca (Berriane 2013) and observations and interviews conducted between 2012 and 2014 with actors who attended the Hay Mohammadi neighborhood’s youth center at various periods in its

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<sup>7</sup> The term “hybrid regimes” refers to political systems situated in the grey zone in which the implementation of both democratic practices, such as elections, and the reinforcement of the central power can be observed (Diamond, 2002, 21–35; Desrues, 2013). As a constitutional monarchy, Morocco is ruled, on the one hand, by a king with extensive powers and his team of state officials and, on the other by an elected parliament and government led by a head of government who is appointed by the monarch following legislative elections. The relationship between the monarchy and the representatives of the political parties rests on an implicit political pact and a political culture of compromise and negotiation that has evolved over time (Tozy 2010, 2008).

history.<sup>8</sup> These data were supplemented by reading press articles and archives.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Service of Youth and Sports and Morocco's Working Class during the Protectorate**

Since its creation, the youth center of Hay Mohammadi has been used simultaneously by different kinds of actors and with various objectives. It was built in the 1950s, during the final phase of the French protectorate (1912–1956). It was created within the framework of a large urbanist project that sought to adapt the urban space to meet the needs of a massive immigrant population that came from the countryside to look for work in Casablanca and settled in *Carrières Centrales*, a slum (or *bidonville*) located in today's Hay Mohammadi. The rapid development of slums in the city worried the European inhabitants, who felt increasingly encircled and outnumbered (House 2012, 82). Within the framework of the urbanist project led by Michel Ecochard, the *Carrières Centrales* were therefore to give way to a factory-worker town that consisted of multiple blocks of housing and was equipped with educational, cultural, sports, and socio-medical infrastructure in line with the norms of the “functional city” that was popular at the time (Taqi 2012, 86–162). The youth center was part of this basic arrangement, alongside two schools, a health facility, a cinema, and a sports field.

According to most of my interviewees and to the historian Najib Taqi (2012), this urbanist project was the result of the riots that shook the city in 1952, which developed mainly out of the slum of *Carrières Centrales*.<sup>10</sup> These events led to fierce repression by the French colonial administration and to many deaths among the demonstrators, a repression that was criticized by several groups in France and that led to the conclusion that “cooperation” and “social reforms” should also be implemented (House 2012, 96–97). Against the backdrop of this general context, the construction of a workers' city therefore aimed both at pacifying the population of the

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<sup>8</sup> To protect the identities of my interview subjects, I have changed their names.

<sup>9</sup> The data compiled since 2012 are the product of a research project funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Training (BMBF) that I conducted as a researcher at the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin. This work was then completed thanks to the support of the University Research Priority Program Asia and Europe at the University of Zurich and to exchanges with members of the Centre de recherche économie, société et culture (CRESC, Rabat) and with members of the research program “Spaces of Participation: Topographies of political and social change in Morocco, Egypt and Palestine” (ZMO, Berlin).

<sup>10</sup> These riots were triggered by the assassination of the Tunisian unionist Ferhad Hached. After his death, the Union Générale des Syndicats Confédérés Marocains (UGSCM) and the Istiqlal, Morocco's main nationalist party at that time, announced a general strike. When forbidden, the strike led to riots. These riots developed mainly out of the shantytown of *Carrières Centrales*, which was mainly inhabited by workers and in which the Istiqlal party was particularly active (House 2012).

Carrières Centrales and at better controlling this part of the population.

The exact date of the construction of the youth center is unclear. While most interviewees set the date in 1953, it seems much more probable that the construction started only after September 1955, which is the date set for the opening of letters related to a call for bids for the construction of the Carrières Centrales youth center (Taqi 2012, 132). As the French Protectorate ended six months later, we can assume that the center was active only for a very short time, if at all, during French rule. Yet, almost all my local interviewees assign to the youth center an important role as a meeting place for militants of the nationalist movement and as a space that allowed the latter to prepare theatrical performances with a nationalist message. While it is highly unlikely that the current center ever played this role during the Protectorate, it is conceivable that a precursor to the youth center that was also under the responsibility of the Service of Youth and Sports did so.

In districts populated by workers from the countryside who had come to work in Casablanca, the Department of Youth and Sport had indeed started creating social centers and foster homes in the 1940s for disadvantaged young Muslims with the aim of promoting “the education of the indigenous masses.”<sup>11</sup> In Hay Mohammadi, the Department of Youth and Sports opened a similar center in 1951, most probably within walking distance from today’s youth center. The establishment was dedicated to the supervision of delinquent youth and was managed by a civil servant in the Department of Youth and Sports. It included, among other things, a vocational school, a placement office, a popular restaurant, and the neighborhood sports team’s headquarters (Taqi 2012, 127–30). It is most likely that my interlocutors meant this social center when mentioning the role played by the youth center within the anti-colonial movement.

Accounts of the multiple and often ambiguous roles played by such centers and, more generally, by the Department of Youth and Sports indicate that these were spaces of education and state control, but also of nationalist activism. Describing the measures introduced in the 1947 municipal reform and then during the last phase of the Protectorate, Roger Gruner, for instance, states that the Department of Youth and Sport and the establishments that it ran played a central role in arrangements put into place to achieve what he calls “collective discipline” in new urban neighborhoods (Gruner 1984, 183). The author, a civil controller during the Protectorate, describes the contribution of these departments as supporting the activities of (European) youth

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<sup>11</sup> “Vie des délégations – Casablanca. Les mouvements de jeunesse et le centre d’accueil musulman,” quoted from the Bulletin de quinzaine du service de la Jeunesse et des Sports, March 10, 1946, 10–11.

movements, but also the education of Moroccan children and the promotion of cultural activities such as the theater. These activities comprised a way for civil controllers to get close to local populations and keep them under surveillance (Gruner 1984, 182–85). As a matter of fact, one could read in the colonial press of that period that “of all Services, that of Youth and Sports is the one that penetrates most deeply the Muslim layers [of the population]” (Hantzberg 1953, 2).

Yet, according to my interviewees and to the press coverage of the time, certain activities that the Department of Youth and Sports supported tended to also offer a platform of expression to dissident groups. This was notably the case for the activities of theater troupes that were supported by cultural advisors in the Department (Hantzberg 1953, 2). Rachid, a retired school teacher who was born in the *Carrières Centrales* in 1948 and whose father, a factory worker, was a member of the nationalist *Istiqlal* party, insists on the importance played by the youth center (or more likely the social center that preceded it) as a space of nationalist activism.

“In the neighborhood, we had theater groups like *al-Hilal al-Dhahabi*, for instance. Its initial objective was of political nature, it played a role in the movement for independence. They were active during the 1950s. During the time of colonization. They organized performances to sensitize the inhabitants against the colonizers. In the beginning, they were organizing their activities in a shack. People would come in secret. (...) Its members were active in the nationalist movement. When the youth center opened its doors in 1953 or 1954, they were domiciled within the center. From that time on, they started organizing their activities within the youth center.” (Rachid, interview, May 2012)

The theater definitely experienced a certain amount of growth from the end of the 1940s on with the increase in the number of amateur Moroccan troupes putting on plays in Arabic that often had “the allure of a small nationalist protest” (Adam 1968, 523). In a context in which the Moroccan population did not have the right to create associations, establishments directed by the Department of Youth and Sports seemed to have been an alternative meeting and mobilization space for the nationalist movement. This trend indicates some core characteristics of interstitial spaces, such as youth centers, that combine educational, vocational, and political objectives. These aspects would become even more apparent after independence, during the *Years of Lead*, a period characterized both by increased repression and control and by the



development of new forms of resistance and opposition.

### **The ‘Years of Glory:’ An Alternative Space of Participation during Morocco’s Years of Repression**

At the time of independence in 1956, the centers built by the French administration changed hands to the Moroccan Secretary of Youth and Sports (which later became a ministry). At each youth center, various actors are involved in managing and maintaining the establishment and in offering different kinds of activities to the neighborhood’s youth. A team of civil servants consisting of a director and sometimes one or two official facilitators oversees the activities of the center, maintains the centers, and makes sure that the regulations set out by the Ministry of Youth and Sports are respected. Unofficial actors, such as the gatekeeper and custodian, also contribute to the day-to-day management of the center, ensuring security, control, and mediation when necessary (Berriane 2016). The activities of the center are designed and offered by non-state actors (mainly inhabitants of the neighborhood) who are organized in clubs or civic associations. These activities take place in the large complex of the youth center, which comprises several one- or two-story buildings that include the director’s office, a theater, classrooms, a small library, a sports hall with cloakroom, and a medium-sized sports field.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the people interviewed agreed to speak about the ‘years of glory’ of Hay Mohammadi’s youth center. Abdallah, who started frequenting the center at the beginning of the 1960s, remembers these years as follows:

“It was the beginning of independence. . . . We young people would join together. We had meetings there. There was a great library there. We could find a lot of books there. Read. Debate. We were in clubs. It was a humble place, but, at the time, all that was new for us.”  
(Abdallah, interview, May 2012)

This period stands out for its significant amount of artistic, literary, and athletic output through the emergence of several groups of musicians, writers, actors, and athletes who would later go onto the national artistic and athletic stage. The music band Nas al-Ghiwan that was formed in the early 1970s by four young musicians who used to meet and practice their music in the youth center of Hay Mohammadi is one of the most famous examples of the establishment’s artistic

production. This musical group that “voiced common concerns of average Moroccans” as well as indirect forms of political critique is “still viewed as a pillar of Moroccan culture” and as a central reference for today’s politically critical musical groups in Morocco (Aadnani 2006, 25). To better understand the making of these ‘years of glory,’ one has to first look at the general political context of that time. In harmony with the developmental conceptions then popular, the Moroccan state adopted a voluntary policy seeking to reinforce and expand the educational system after independence. In this context, youth centers functioned as counterparts to school, offering support, professional training, music and singing courses, theater workshops, and sports training. Yet, the ministry’s budget for carrying out all these missions was (and still is) very limited, never exceeding one percent of the general government budget. As in other neighborhoods, too, the small team of civil servants supervising the center therefore had to rely on volunteers taking over the activities of the center. Educational activities were delegated to intermediate clubs and associations, in which volunteers became involved because of the lack of alternative spaces for meetings and extracurricular activities.

“Before, when you wanted to propose an artistic activity, for example, and went to see the director of the youth center, he would tell you to set up a club. Once you showed the slightest interest, he would keep insisting—so a great number of clubs sprang up”. (Interview with Ali, 41, Chair of a visual arts association, interview, Casablanca, May 2012.)

These volunteers were first ordinary inhabitants of the neighborhood, such as a factory worker, a fried-beignets maker, and a tailor. As recalled by Samir, a 56-year-old teacher who frequented the youth center from the beginning of the 1960s, they participated in offering all kind of activities within the youth center, including theater, wrestling, and boxing classes.

“There was a man named Thami Jamraqan. He was one of the few theater people in Casablanca. . . . He was a guy from the neighborhood . . . He put on plays. He was the one who chose the actors. He took care of all the hard work. From beginning to end. . . . He worked in a factory, I believe. At 4 pm, when he left work, he came to the youth center. . . . A lot of athletes emerged out of this center. . . . There was a guy who made fried-beignets (sfenj) who came to wrestle there at night. He trained a lot of people. . . . There was also Zrougi. He’s the one who trained all the boxers. He was a dressmaker by trade. He sewed dresses

for women during the day and trained boxers at night”. (Samir, interview, May 2012).

The implementation of the activities proposed by youth centers with limited budgets rested also on their ability to build bridges with other establishments with the necessary staff, skills, and resources, namely schools and universities. The close links between the youth center and the school were maintained by teachers, high-school pupils, and university students, who represented the intelligentsia of the time, anxious to participate in political life by promoting an education perceived as a vehicle for awareness raising. Thus, the director of the youth center in office at the end of the 1970s emphasized his interaction with teachers from the junior high and high schools in the neighborhood:

“We must not forget that we had friends who helped us. There was H. A. and another of his colleagues who taught at the O. High School. I was with them in two associations, and they brought us their pupils. There was an important link between the O. High School and the youth center. We had links with several schools.” (Former director of the youth center, interview, April 2013).

“There were a lot of students. It was due to the tutoring offered. Young people who had to take the baccalaureate exam came beforehand and we helped them. For free. Those who wanted to study came to study. Students and teachers came voluntarily to do it”. (Abdallah, interview, May 2012).

Interestingly, this trend fueled an increasing politicization in youth center activities, which became privileged places of political and cultural expression in the country at a time when spaces of political expression were becoming rare (Tozy 2004, 102). The period extending between the mid-1960s and late 1980s was in fact marked by increased political repression. This very tense period is also known as the Years of Lead, during which the power struggle between the monarchy and the political parties that took part in the fight for independence contributed to the fragmentation of political forces. The period is further characterized by the state’s repression of political activists and such parties as the National Union of Popular Forces, created in 1959 and replaced in 1972 by the Socialist Union of Popular Forces. Additionally, the King

declared a state of emergency in 1965. Consequently, all parliamentary institutions were suspended and no elections took place until 1976. In 1973, the code regulating public freedoms was reformed, which led to the reinforcement of state control over civic associations.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, because of the increasingly repressive political climate, opposition movements developed mainly in high schools and universities. Consequently, the growing links between youth centers, teachers, and students facilitated political recruitment at youth centers and led to an increasing politicization in their activities. Taking his own trajectory as an example, Mohamed, who first came in contact with left-wing organizations at the youth center in the 1960s, describes this trend:

“I was about 15 or 16 years old. . . . At that time, when you came out of school you went to the youth center. . . . We were very interested in literature. . . . But the second thing that interested us was the Palestinian question. [...] Our club had a political tone. It wasn't apparent. . . . It had had it from the start, but I didn't know. The people who created it did know. . . . They were volunteers, who worked at the youth center. Students. We were still in high school at the time, but they were active in the youth wing of the National Union of Popular Forces and in trade unions, the unions that had youth sections. . . . Then in the 1970s, the members of this association went in different political directions. . . . We were all politically inclined”. (Mohammad, interview, May 2012).

In 1973, when the National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM) was dissolved and political meetings were forbidden at universities and schools, youth centers like that of Hay Mohammadi became spaces where political opposition developed further underground, notably investing in cultural clubs. Since they were recognized and controlled by the state, youth centers developed into one of the rare ‘legal’ spaces for social and political action. This is how leftist activists like Kenza, aged 58, got involved in the youth center at the end of the 1970s, offering women literacy courses coupled with sessions of political sensitization.

“During the 1970s and 1980s, we had a lot of trouble finding premises for our activities. First, we didn't have the money, but also people didn't trust us. They didn't know what an association was. It wasn't until the late 1980s that things changed. Before, spending time at the youth center was the only option we had. . . . It was the only space where we could take

advantage of cultural and sports activities to talk about politics.” (Kenza, interview, May 2012)

In the repressive context of the 1970s and 1980s, youth centers therefore provided alternative spaces where small political groups could meet under the cover of accepted activities such as reading clubs, theater workshops, or literacy classes. Mohammad was an active member of the Marxist-Leninist organization March 23. Before going into exile in the mid-1970s to avoid imprisonment, he was very active in the youth center, using its premises as a cover for political recruitment and sensitization.

“Our club was receiving a journal from abroad . . . a secret journal that was forbidden in Morocco but that reached the club by mail . . . We would have discussions about democracy, for example. What is democracy? Democracy is when we all have a right to speak. Democracy will give me the right to speak. It will give you the right to speak. . . . Other times we would discuss a book. But we would not choose just any kind of book. We would choose a book that served our purposes. . . . Let’s take for example the topic of the economic crises of 1929. Why did this crisis take place? Because a certain economic, liberal, and capitalist thought was dominating. Then we would explain that other approaches exist. For example, communist and Marxist visions. We insisted on certain things and left out others. . . . This is how we transmitted to the people what we wanted to transmit to them. The things we considered as being good”. (Mohammad, interview, May 2012)

Thus, in the context of political repression that characterized this period, the youth center that had been designed by public authorities as a space for education and extracurricular activities became also a space for developing oppositional groups and for political recruitment and socialization. Over the course of time, some of the organizations that emerged out of this context even acquired national status and built close ties to political parties. Actors who were socialized during this period are among those who contribute today to making Morocco’s political and associational sphere. Kenza, for instance, is the co-founder of one of Casablanca’s leading feminist associations; Ali chairs an association of civic arts and is an active member of the youth section of the Istiqlal party; Rachid is actively involved in the House Counsel of the youth center; and Abdallah is the co-founder of an association that advocates for the urban

enhancement and historical rehabilitation of the neighborhood.

Yet, the development of oppositional groups within the youth center during the Years of Lead was not without tensions. Conflicts did emerge between the establishment's administration, the local authorities, and the organizations frequenting the center. In the last section of this chapter, we will therefore focus more particularly on the interactions between state and non-state actors in this space and on the modes of negotiation that were deployed in this context.

### **Negotiating the limits of controlled forms of dissidence**

How did these political activities develop within the restrictive and conflictual context of the 'Years of Lead'? We will argue in this last part that it was possible because of the ambivalent relations that linked state and non-state actors within the interstitial space represented by the youth center. To better understand this relationship, one has to first clarify the institutional status of the clubs that were the most common type of organization at that time.

A club is a constituent part of a youth center, and its creation and legal recognition require the agreement of the director of the center, who takes care of all the necessary formalities. Once it has been accepted, the club can organize activities at the center. It is subject to direct control by the director and has no funds of its own: income generated by its activities, such as collecting members' subscriptions and organizing a show or festival, goes to the youth center. Clubs therefore differ from civic associations (*jam'iyya*), the type of organization that has become more common today (Berriane 2013). With their own legal status defined by the 1958 Act regulating public freedoms, the existence and operations of associations depend on the Prefecture's Directorate of Social Affairs. They manage their own funds and, although they need the director's permission to use the youth center's premises, they do not need it to organize activities outside it.<sup>12</sup> While civic associations are the most common form of organization at today's youth centers, they were still rare in the 1970s, as they were much more restricted than clubs.

“At that time [the early 1970s], if you wanted to have an organization, you had to be close to the power . . . or you had a club. In that case, the [youth center] director accepted you. That way, there weren't any problems. As for someone who wanted to create a civic association, he was controlled. He was called. He was interrogated every day up to the point where

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<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed account on the current transformations of youth centers and the development of civic associations within them, see Berriane 2016.

he'd say: "It's not worth it. What's the point in an organization where there's nothing but interrogations?" . . . If you wanted to get involved in an organization, you had to know that the mqaddem would follow you, so would the sheikh, the qayd.<sup>13</sup> All of the Interior would follow you." (Samir, interview, April 2012).

The relationship that linked the directors of the youth center to the representatives of clubs active within the institution was therefore a relation of interdependence. To ensure that the youth center they had to supervise with a very limited budget was sufficiently active, directors needed private actors to create clubs and organize activities. To be able to access the youth centers and organize as a club, private actors needed the approval of the director. In this context, and depending on the particular time and situation in the history of the institution, the directors of the centers were either very present or absent, sometimes conciliatory, sometimes intransigent. Some even got involved beyond the requirements of their administrative function. Several stories circulate about directors who played a key role in the development and support of local organizations active between the 1960s and 1980s, as they themselves had been involved in cultural and sports clubs as well as political organizations before becoming civil servants.

The position assumed by the director depended not only on his or her personality, trajectory, and interests, but also on the personal relations that linked actors and organizations frequenting the youth center and the center's administration. These relationships were in fact crucial, as negotiations could become highly personalized through them.

"The officials knew what we were doing, but they turned a blind eye. You had to find someone you knew. Personal relationships with officials were very important." (Mostafa, interview, May 2012).

"As long as we did not create any problems for him [the Director], we could do whatever we wanted. He didn't care. This is how we gradually seized more and more freedoms. All we had to do was not to surpass the limits of the center." (Hamid, active member of a leftist party, frequented the youth center in the 1970s, interview, December 2013)

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<sup>13</sup> The mqaddem, sheikh and qayd are representatives of the state on the local level.

Several accounts indicate that the directors of the youth center were in fact quite aware of the political meetings taking place under the cover of cultural and educational activities. Yet, they agreed to overlook these activities as long as they remained within the walls of the center and did not become visible outside. As for the young activists, they would test these limits, trying to push them as far as possible. According to a senior official of the Ministry of Youth and Sport I interviewed in December 2014, the ministry was under increasing pressure, as it was criticized for its lenience and for allowing oppositional groups to develop in its centers. Thus, when the limits were exceeded, more direct forms of control were used to filter out undesirable organizations and individuals.

“The monitoring began in the 1970s. Why? Because they realized that certain publications and banned writings were making it into the center. . . . So it became difficult for us: “No you can’t come in. Who are you anyway?” Who gets in, who doesn’t get in.” (Abdallah, interview, May 2012).

Another, subtler way to regulate the activities of young activists was to inform their parents or relatives about their political activities, advising them to watch their offspring. The directors and facilitators of the Ministry of Youth could also use their own positions as educators and the personal ties that had developed between them and the young activists to better control their activities.

Some directors were in fact residents of Hay Mohammadi, and others used to be members of a civic association before entering civil service. As most of them were even living within the youth center, special links could therefore be established between them and local residents. Many factors further strengthened these links: teams from the Ministry of Youth and Sport often ran summer camps attended by neighborhood children and teenagers. The same applies to training sessions for summer camp leaders, which were led by senior ministry officials, often youth center directors or organizers; and many young people who frequented the youth center had attended these. The common expression “son” or “daughter” of the youth center (weld/bent dar ash-shabab) for a person who once frequented it reinforces the implicit link between this type of establishment (and by extension the staff running it) and the home or base where the person acquired part of his or her education and socialization.



The blurred lines between the private and the public domain, the use of the register of “family,” and the emergence over time of forms of sociability between the administrators and the users of the center therefore promoted the development of a “controlled” or “normalized dissidence” (Tozy 1999, 63) that has been described as being a particular tool of governance allowing “for the preservation of an internal status quo and for the exercise of authority by both division, and distant, or indirect, control” (Hibou 1999, 47). Yet, as illustrated by the case of the youth center of Hay Mohammadi, this blurring, and the type of actions and associated meanings that come with it, can also be deployed by individuals and organizations to ‘seize freedoms’ while, at the very same time, helping local authorities control any breaches of the rules within the establishment and to monitor the activities of the individuals and organizations that frequent it.



Front gate of the youth center of Hay Mohammadi, May 2013 (copyright: Yasmine Berriane)



Inside the Youth center of Hay Mohammadi: façade of the inner courtyard with the national motto of the country: ‘God, the Fatherland, the King,’ May 2013 (copyright: Yasmine Berriane)

## Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the importance of interstitial spaces such as the youth center of Hay Mohammadi when studying the making of political participation. Through this study, we see institutions emerge that, while being placed under the supervision of the state, can function as alternative meeting spaces and spaces of expression and political socialization. Depending on the context, social agents can use them to challenge the status quo while at the same time they remain spaces that contribute to producing or even reinforcing forms of domination and control. Such spaces seem particularly well suited to produce forms of participation that are both subversive and controlled. Hay Mohammadi’s youth center’s history illustrates in particular the numerous interactions between state and non-state actors, as well as the fluid frontiers between private and public space that contributed to produce this form of “controlled dissidence” during the Years of Lead in Morocco.

Today, interest in the youth center of Hay Mohammadi is resurging, which is due to development programs financed by international organizations and national rehabilitation, reorganization, and restructuring initiatives for youth centers. From 2002 to 2007, a national program was launched to rehabilitate and reactivate youth centers to make them spaces that “stimulate” young people and keep them from “delinquency, despair, or fanaticism” (Houdaifa 2004). A

few years later, youth centers were called upon to contribute to the modernization and improvement of the athletic output of the country; and after the February 20 movement demonstrations that took place in 2011, they were requested to (also) become “gateways for consultation and communication with all young people” (Loudghiri 2012).

In this context, the youth center of Hay Mohammadi struggles to assert itself in the face of increasing competition from similar establishments financed by public funds and placed at the disposal of associations that provide the public with basic social and economic services. The adaptation of this interstitial space to the new context has led to the rise of civic associations that act as new mediators within the establishment. In the course of these developments, the constellation that was common during the Years of Lead has therefore given way to a new configuration of legal and normative spaces (civic associations) in many different and interchangeable physical forms (Berriane 2016). Like in the Years of Lead, these more recent transformations of the youth center of Hay Mohammadi inform us more generally about the transformations of both Morocco’s participatory sphere and its instruments of governance.

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