Identity struggles

*LGBT activism in Morocco*

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Summary

This thesis searches to understand the role of identity in lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) movements in repressive contexts. The issues of identity in LGBT activism is studied through the Group in Defense of Minorities (GDM), which is one of the few groups that fight to improve the rights of LGBT and gender minorities in Morocco. The thesis is based on explorative research conducted through fieldwork in Morocco and in-depth qualitative interviews with activists from GDM. Several different theoretical approaches from the field of social movement studies are applied in the analysis. I have used perspectives and concepts from political process theory, new social movements’ theory, and network theory in order to understand how GDM work for the legal rights of LGBT and gender minorities in Morocco. The analysis was drawn out in three parts. (1) I have looked at how GDMs collective identity affects the members’ activism, (2) how do the members construct mobilization strategies in a repressive context, and (3) how the members strategically work with the visibility of LGBT activism. My analysis shows that the activists of GDM construct a space of solidarity and experience within the group that helps them to sustain and reinforce their activism. Further, the analysis gives insights into the group’s strategies, which are primarily aimed at at the state through the documentation and denunciation of LGBT arrests and the violence against the LGBT population. The analysis also shows that the group is dependent of contributions and assistance from fellow activists and allies. The group’s dependency is primarily explained by the constraining context it works in. Lastly, the analysis maps out the different dimensions of the group’s visibility. Here, I draw on Johnston’s (2015) perspective on covert and overt collective protest in authoritarian settings as I expand the traditional political opportunity structure to include GDMs multiple audiences. The issues related to the group’s visibility is drawn out through Jasper and McGarry’s (2015) concept of the identity dilemma. The finding of the thesis challenge the traditional assumption within social movement theory that collective protest is manifested publicly, arguing instead that covert activism is a necessity in a context where the political rights one is fighting for are criminalized.
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# Table of Contents

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

2 Mapping out the political context in Morocco ............................................................... 6

   Formal politics in Morocco ......................................................................................... 6

   Political engagement in Morocco ............................................................................... 8

   The 20<sup>th</sup> February Movement ........................................................................... 9

   State repression ......................................................................................................... 11

   The socio-political context of sexual minorities in Morocco ....................................... 12

3 Theoretical perspectives on structure, networks and identity ....................................... 14

   Political process theory ............................................................................................ 15

   Networks in social movements .................................................................................. 17

   New social movements and identity politics ............................................................... 20

   Collective identity and strategic choices .................................................................... 22

   Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 24

4 Data and methods ......................................................................................................... 26

   Research strategy ...................................................................................................... 26

   Recruitment and access ............................................................................................. 28

   Interview guide .......................................................................................................... 29

   In the field ................................................................................................................... 30

      Linguistic barriers .................................................................................................. 33

   The steps of analyzing data ....................................................................................... 34

   Ethical reflections and considerations ....................................................................... 36

5 Reinforcing activism through spaces of experience and solidarity ............................. 38

   Activist identification ............................................................................................... 38

   Coming together ....................................................................................................... 43

   Friendship and a space of solidarity ........................................................................... 49

   Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 52

6 Mobilizing in a constraining context .......................................................................... 53

   Constraining factors ................................................................................................. 53

   Allies of convenience ............................................................................................... 56

   Information and documentation ................................................................................ 58

   Dimensions of denunciation ..................................................................................... 62
1 Introduction

What role does identity play in lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) movements in repressive contexts? In social movement studies, LGBT movements are an understudied subject. Research on these kinds of movements is largely restricted to particular geographical areas, generally in Western Europe and North America (Adam et al. 1999; Currier 2007; Ayoub 2014). According to Currier (2007), the majority of the research stemming from these regions suggests that the fight for the rights of sexual minorities depends on a certain mode of economic development. To allow for a broader understanding of identity-based protest in different contexts, it is important to expand the scope of research. A body of literature has emerged the last years, which looks at how LGBT activists mobilize in the face of repression (Nagle 2016). Much of this literature stems from studies of organizations in Lebanon (Nagle 2016; Hamdan 2015; Moussawi 2015), and South Africa (Currier 2007; Oswin 2007). Further empirical studies are necessary in order to understand how activists organize in a context where homosexuality is illegal, and to question “the assumption that LGBT movement ideologies, identities, and organizational forms travel from a ‘more developed’ global North to an ‘underdeveloped’ global South” (Currier 2007: 1). This thesis focuses on issues of identity in LGBT activism, as it searches to understand how activists work to improve the rights of sexual and gender minorities in Morocco. Research on movements in Morocco will broaden the general understanding of the different dynamics of strategies, mobilization, and collective identity formation and contestation in LGBT activism.

Very few organizations work for the rights of sexual minorities in Morocco. Still, there has been an increase in political mobilization on behalf of homosexual rights the last years (L’Economiste 2016; Al Bayane 2016; Mourad 2016; Akdim 2014). A growing number of LGBT political actors have over the last decade been able to mobilize for their rights despite limited resources. However, resistance to homosexual rights on the part of the Moroccan authorities and different social leaders remains staunch, and anti-homosexuality legislation continues to be enforced, pushing LGBT activists out in the margins where they can avoid prosecution and censorship (Christensen 2017; Dalacoura 2014). International media has increasingly reported on the conditions of sexual minorities in Morocco over the last years, and several public figures of the Moroccan diaspora have spoken up about the violence against sexual minorities in their homeland (AFP 2016c; Christensen 2017). Numerous cases of arrests of LGBT people have been reported (AFP 2016a; AFP 2016b; Brekke 2016), as
well as repeated incidents of violence against the LGBT population (White and Sénécat 2015; Bennamate 2015; Libération Maroc 2016). In addition, foreign human rights actors such as Human Rights Watch and All Out\(^1\) have increased their public condemnation of the Moroccan authorities’ treatment of the LGBT community, to the dismay of the Moroccan government and the Moroccan mainstream media (Toussay 2015; Le Monde 2015).

One of the few social movement groups that fight for the rights of the LGBT population in Morocco is Group in Defense of Minorities (hereafter referred to as GDM).\(^2\) Despite being one of the most prominent political actors working for LGBT rights in North Africa, there are few, if any, studies on GDM. In numbers, it is a small group, counting around eleven members. The group was established in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2013 in a large Moroccan city, where the majority of its members also reside. Since its establishment, the group has worked in numerous different ways, and its mobilization includes coalitions and contributions from allies and fellow activists.

Little is known about how LGBT activists work in Morocco today, and there are few available studies that focus on the dynamics of LGBT activism in the country. In order to understand how LGBT activists work for identity-based rights within an authoritarian context, I have conducted an empirical study based on fieldwork in Morocco and interviews with the members of GDM. The study is elaborated on the basis of an explorative research problematic with the overarching question: “What role does identity play in LGBT movements in repressive contexts?” This is translated into three main questions that guide the thesis: (1) How does GDMs collective identity affect the members activism? (2) How do the members construct mobilization strategies in a repressive context? (3) How do the members strategically work with the visibility of LGBT activism? By exploring identity-based activism through these questions, this thesis could contribute to the further understanding of the construction of collective identities, and the different types of strategies activists develop in a constraining context.

The field of social movement studies was long characterized by theoretical approaches largely based on studies of male-dominated movements (Taylor 2010). Taylor (2010) argues that this dominance has resulted in binary thinking of important concepts within social movement

\(^{1}\) For campaign examples, see Human Rights Watch (2016) and All Out (2015).

\(^{2}\) GDM is a pseudonym. The use of pseudonyms will be further elaborated in chapter 4.
theory (SMT), such as the dichotomy of expressive and instrumental politics, and identity and strategy. As a result, several scholars argue that more research should be done on LGBT movements; especially on the interconnections between identity, mobilization, and strategic decisions (Wulff et al. 2014; Bernstein 2002; Currier 2007; Taylor 2010). Identity has been a key concept in theories on LGBT movements, particularly in the US (Bernstein 2002). Traditionally, identity-based social movements have been perceived as engaging in essentialist politics that searches to reinforce social categories based on identities (Taylor 2010). This is because SMT has explained identity-based movements’ political gain by their fixed categories of identity, as in the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, or the lesbian and gay movement (Gamson 1995; Bernstein 2002). Notwithstanding, critics have claimed that the essentialism of these movements have had a negative impact on attempts of coalition-building and broad social change. Inherent in this critique, is the preconception that identity-based movements are primarily cultural because they do not necessarily target the state through the demand for changes in policy (Bernstein 2002).

LGBT movements have also historically been defined as cultural rather than political, because they have been situated outside the challenger-state framework (Bernstein 2002). However, this image has been nuanced by empirical studies documenting how LGBT movement actors aim at both cultural and political institutions in their claim making (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Bernstein 2002; Currier 2007; Engel 2007; Bernstein and Olsen 2009). These studies focus on understanding the movements’ mobilization strategies, and there has been particular emphasis on the strategy of LGBT public disclosure, as a means to promote acceptance "by the dominant society, demand rights, and mobilize a constituency" (Terriquez 2015: 347). Indeed, this approach has shown that political and cultural implications which involve challenges to hegemonic presumptions of masculinity, femininity, sexuality are often inherent to LGBT movements’ mobilization (Bernstein 2002). Thus, research on LGBT movements has expanded the scope of social movement targets to include a broader spectrum of state and non-state institutions, like practices, cultural norms, and knowledge systems (Wulff et al. 2014).

Literature in the social movement field that focuses on the region of North Africa has expanded rapidly the last decade, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2011. The empirical studies that have been published in Morocco over the last decade tend to focus on the relationship between insurgents and the authoritarian regime (Benchemsi 2014; Vairel
the composition of larger social movements (Bennani-Chraibi and Jeghlaly 2012; Bono 2010), or youth’s political participation (Desrues 2012; Laine et al. 2015; Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016; Zerhouni 2017). Most of the research that focus on political participation and social movements in Morocco examine the movements’ impact on policy changes, rather than on dynamics of protest (Vairel 2011: 33). The studies that focus on youth in Morocco have not paid much attention to the youth’s own perceptions and experiences regarding their local context, neither has there been any sustained attempt to “give them a voice” on the issues that they are most concerned about (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016: 5). According to Bayat, the experiences of youth that participate in social movements can only be understood within the “stringent social controls they are subjected to” (Khalaf 2011: 12). Along the same lines, Johnston (2015) argues that networked relations, collective identities, and extra-institutional collective action are important elements of social movements everywhere. However, social movements in authoritarian states adapt to their constrained context, and public manifestations of the social movement elements can be less overt (Johnston 2015: 620). It is therefore important to talk with the activists themselves in order to understand their experiences working for the rights of sexual minorities in a context that prohibits their work. This thesis enters the social movement tradition that focuses on meso- and micro level analysis of strategic collective action. I integrate what Johnston (2015) defines as the latest trend of approaching dissident protest by interacting with the activists themselves.

The thesis will have the following structure: in chapter 2, I will map out the landscape of political engagement in Morocco. The presentation of the political context of GDM is important for a broader understanding of how the group works in relation to different external actors. A brief presentation of Moroccan formal politics will be included, in addition to an outline of the Moroccan state’s responses to informal political activity. Further, I will briefly discuss the cultural and political context of sexual minorities. Chapter 3 provides the theoretical framework of the thesis. Here, I will focus on three perspectives within SMT, namely political process theory (PPT), network theory, and new social movement theory (NSMT). I argue that it is necessary to integrate aspects and concepts from all these perspectives in order to better grasp the analytical dimensions of LGBT activism in Morocco. The theoretical perspectives mapped out in chapter 3 will work as a theoretical backdrop that guides the analysis. In chapter 4 I describe and discuss the methodological, practical, and ethical challenges I have encountered in this study. In chapters 5-7 I search to understand the
role of identity in Moroccan LGBT activism through looking at GDMs construction, and its protest strategies. Chapter 8, I provide a brief summary of the main findings. Further, I discuss the theoretical implications of the study by elaborating on some of the concepts developed in the analysis. Here, I will integrate an assessment of some of the theoretical approaches’ ability to capture the dynamics and the issues at stake in identity-based social movement groups. Lastly, I will argue for the implications my research has for further theorizing of LGBT movements in repressive contexts.
2 Mapping out the political context in Morocco

Knowledge of the political actors surrounding GDM is important in the understanding of their work. First, a brief overview of the macro-political and institutional structures of Morocco will be provided. Then, I will map out the main characteristics of informal political engagement in Morocco since the 1990s. This section will include the description of the social movement of the Moroccan Arab Spring, namely the 20th February Movement. Further, I will describe the Moroccan state’s use of repression in response to political dissidence. I will conclude with a brief outline of the socio-political context of sexual minorities. A complete description of Morocco’s political history and current construction is far beyond the scope of this study. I have chosen to include the parts of Moroccan political and social arenas that GDM is a part of.

Formal politics in Morocco

Morocco is a non-democratic country with a ruling monarchy.3 Islam is closely linked with the governing royal family’s rule, as the Moroccan king, Mohammed VI, bear the title of “Commander of the Faithful”, making him the direct descendant of the prophet Muhammad. Meaning, one cannot criticize the king, as it would explicitly imply criticizing Islam (Yom 2017: 134). There are thirty-four registered political parties in Morocco. According to Benchemsi (2014), these are predominantly controlled by the regime, and they do not dare to question the authority of the king. The Moroccan regime is classified as belonging to “the gray zone”4 (Bennani-Chraibi and Jeghllaly 2012: 870). According to Bennani-Chraibi and Jeghllaly (2012), the country still holds spaces for protest and political opposition, despite the disconnection between the government and the governed, and a general dissatisfaction towards political institutions. It has an elected parliament, a civil society, and relatively less repression than in other countries in the region like Algeria, Saudi-Arabia, or Egypt. Thus, Morocco can be interpreted as a country in reform, gradually developing in to a democracy. But, according to Yom, Morocco “look good only because the rest of the region looks so bad”

3 Morocco has been ruled by the Alaouite Dynasty for more than 350 years (Benchemsi 2014).
(Yom 2017: 133). Vairel (2011) emphasizes this statement by arguing that any and all development within Moroccan civil society should not be interpreted as a transition towards democracy.

The thousands of NGOs that operate within the country concentrate their work uniquely on social issues such as community organization and social development. The quantity of NGOs have impressed foreign observers, but these associations have long been understood to be controlled and instrumentalized by the regime (Hibou 2011; Benchemsi 2014). Still, there are a handful of organizations that work on politics and human rights. I will briefly present two of organizations that have worked with GDM under different circumstances. Human Rights Association Morocco (HRAM) is one of the most prominent human rights NGOs in Morocco. While the headquarters is situated in the capital Rabat, the organization has local sections all over the country, both in small villages and larger cities. Its establishment dates back to the 1980s, and it is a renowned organization that receives funding from international institutions. The National Human Rights Council (CNDH) is a public council that is responsible for the monitoring of the human rights situation at the national level. In addition, CNDH operates with regional commissions to assure the monitoring and control of the human rights situation on a regional level, and to receive and examine rights violation plaintiffs (Rachik 2014: 70).

According to Benchemsi, the regime tolerates the activities of human rights NGOs as long as their protests do not attract too many people, and that they confine their actions to social and economic issues (2014: 204-205). Historically, the Moroccan regime and security apparatus have repressed political activism through suppression of demonstrations, arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, and physical violence (Desrues 2012). According to Rachik (2014), social movements and civil society have responded to repression by gradually changing their political commitment from revolution to reform. As a result, the contemporary Moroccan civil society is shaped by “reciprocal adaptations between reforming authoritarianism and deradicalized activists” (Vairel 2011: 36). Contemporary studies show that mobilization is increasing, although the forms of commitment have changed (Desrues 2012). International institutions have contributed to the institutionalization of spaces of collective protest by

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5 Human Rights Association Morocco is a pseudonym, to protect the anonymity of GDMs informants who talk about collaborations between the two groups.
6 Vairel (2011) defines these spaces as spaces of contention. This concept will be further discussed in chapter 5.
funding human rights organization that change their mobilization from activism in the streets to public policy work and cooperation with the authorities (Vairel 2011: 43).

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2011, the king held a general election. In November 2011, the Islamist political party Justice and Development Party (PJD) won plurality in the parliament (Yom 2017: 138). A new general elections that took place in October 2016, where the PJD won again, but with a victory marked by record low voter turnout (Akdim 2016). Some research affirms that the regime uses the elections as an opportunity “to expose the haplessness and inadequacies of non-monarchial politics”, and that both the new constitution and the elections every two years barely touches on the royal power (Yom 2017: 141).

**Political engagement in Morocco**

According to Tiltnes (2017), young people from the MENA region generally lack confidence and trust in national institutions. A survey from 2017 shows that 69% of Moroccan youth have little to no trust in their central government. In comparison, 88% of Tunisian, and 89% of Lebanese youth lack trust in their government (Tiltnes 2017). In Morocco, participation in political parties and unions has been in decline amongst youth over the last decades. Most young people regard these institutions as “nothing but loyal cogs in the very system that needs changing” (Yom 2017: 142). However, Vairel (2011) argue that there has been informal political activity through different local and national social movements in parallel with the institutionalization of the civil society sphere.

According to Rachik (2014), the forms and means of participating in informal politics have changed since the 1990s in Morocco. In the 1990s, the biggest currents of social movements and demonstrations were led by the Islamists or the leftists. At that time, the largest demonstrations were the ones that appealed to nationalism, Islamism, or pan-Arabic issues such as Palestine and Iraq (Vairel 2011; Rachik 2014). (Vairel 2011; Rachik 2014; Yom 2017; Laine et al. 2015). Since then, the claims of social movements in Morocco have gradually shifted from focusing solely on social class, and on material rights, to including cultural and value demands. The new conflicts and debates were marked by questions of gender equality, such as divorce, gendered violence, and abortion – in addition to discussions on corruption, the death sentence, and the police’s use of torture. During the last years, social
movements have started to push the debate on cultural and linguistic rights, and gender and LGBT rights (Rachik 2014: 25).

Occupation of public space has become a key issue, and different forms of street protests have partly become the norm not only in Morocco, but across the Arab world (Khatib and Lust 2014; Rachik 2014; Bennafla 2011). Calls for dignity and freedom (“al-karama”, “al-huriyaa”) and the denunciation of the state’s contempt (“al-hogra”) have been recurrent claims, in connection with social demands for better employment, housing, health, education, water, electricity, and security (Rachick 2014: 7; Bennafla 2011: 147). During the 2000s, public social protest increased continuously. According to Vairel (2011), the streets became the central arena for reform. Protests increased from 700 demonstrations in 2005, to 8612 in 2010. In 2012, 17 186 protest, meaning demonstrations and sit-ins, were officially registered to have taken place in public space. A total of 321 000 people took part in protests that year (Rachik 2014: 5). These new collective indignations often took form through demonstrations, petitions, press releases, hunger strikes, coalitions and networks, and sit-ins (Vairel 2011: 33). Other alternative forms were graffiti, magazines, theater, music, and underground organizations or organizations abroad. “No to repression” was seen painted on walls in every city in 2011 and 2012 (Rachik 2014: 55).

**The 20th February Movement**

It was from this foundation that the 20th February Movement (hereafter referred to as M20) established its coalition which was proclaimed as “ideology-free” (Rachik 2014: 33). Some research find that M20 focused its demands on the end of system corruption; for a greater access to public education and the labor market, and the betterment of the health and justice institutions (Hibou 2011: 1). Others studies affirm that social demands were secondary to the movement, in comparison to its political and secular claims, and that the movement “expanded the conflict” by bringing opposition and controversy to the political arena (Bennafla 2011: 146; Rachik 2014: 33). There were prominent divisions within the M20 coalition. Some newspapers reported that conflicts emerged during general assemblies and demonstrations (Rachik 2014). According to Rachik (2014), the monarchy was at the center of many of the conflicts. Some called for a parliamentary monarchy, others wanted a democratic constitution, implicitly demanding the shift to a republic form of government, while others were preoccupied by regime corruption (Rachik 2014; Yom 2017). Another
conflict was caused by politico-religious groups that attempted to impose their own slogans, and that tried to separate the occupied public space between men and women (Rachik 2014: 34). Despite its internal conflicts, M20 gathered populations differing in age, gender, social class, and political opinions. People took part in the street demonstrations to express their demands on specific causes like retirement, or access to employment in the public sector. Others again, were curious and wanted to take part in something that felt of historical significance (Bennafla 2011: 150). According to an informant from the student group ABC that actively partook in the protests in 2011, M20’s primary activity was peaceful occupation of the streets, through flash mobs, sit-ins, and theatre. On average, M20 mobilized street demonstrations in around forty cities every Sunday during 2011 (2014: 35).

The movement was led by the young\(^7\) (Yom 2017: 141). According to Bennafafla (2011: 150), the first instigators of the movement were young activists, journalists, students, secularists, and the unemployed. The activists used Facebook as a constitutive platform for the movement’s establishment (Rachik 2014: 48). From there, the activists transcended from the virtual to reality by forming sections, where some were in charge of engaging neighborhoods, some made slogans, banners and distributed tracts. In the passage from the internet to the real world, organized actors such as human rights organizations became involved, as they had “better knowledge and control of the street” (Laine et al. 2015: 17). These actors were already mobilized, but needed a frame in which to reach out to large masses of people in order to confront the state power.

GDM is one of several groups that were established in the aftermath of M20 in 2012 and 2013. In order to understand how GDM relates to the current Moroccan social movements, I have included another group from the same field of activist organizations, namely the student union ABC\(^8\). The two groups have collaborated on several occasions, and some of the members of GDM are also members of ABC. The student union was established in 2012 and aims to reform the educational system in Morocco. It consists of local branches in around ten cities in Morocco. Each branch answers to a general assembly that is organized a few times each year. The forms of protest and the forms of mobilization can vary according to each branch. However, some forms of protest are generally recurrent: they organize open debates in the public, where they tackle a new philosophical issue each time. These forms of

\(^7\)“Citizens between ages 15 and 30 comprise a third of all Moroccans” (Yom 2017: 141).

\(^8\)ABC is a pseudonym.
collective protest can be seen as a continuation of traditions of M20. The topics discussed vary from the existence of God, food, love, and the question of public or private schooling. The multitude of subjects are treated under the umbrella of education, because the union thinks the debates and exchanges provide a platform for alternative education. One of ABCs most central ideas is the availability of their events, where they wish to assure democratic participation in public discussions. Currently, the group is applying for a legal organization status from the state. This legal status is demanded in order to organize freely, and will be further elaborated in the next paragraphs.

State repression

The authoritarian regime in Morocco still operates with state-based repression (Vairel 2011: 39). State repression against political activity has increased since the early 2000, in response to non-authorized street protests. The repression involves police violence, mass arrests and prison sentences for human rights activists (Rachik 2014: 30). The regime regards the independent press in Morocco as a mobilizing tool, as it mediatizes violence committed by police and other state authorities. Independent journalists are repeatedly prosecuted by local authorities, and several media outlets have been shut down (Rachik 2014: 73). Other studies find that independent media are disappearing through means like censorship (Bennafla 2011: 144).

According to Rachik (2014), the social movements that occupied public space during the Arab Spring did not face much repression from the authorities, regardless of the fact that they did not have administrative authorization to demonstrate. Official registration of NGOs and their access to funds, is an arena were the state can exercise its control. Still, the state seemingly tolerates public expression of discontent, and exercises control through arbitrary informal social regulation of protest (Vairel 2011). As a tradition of peaceful public protest is built amongst protesters and activists, the state’s attitude towards protest still fluctuates between dialogue and tolerance, dispersion, repression, arrests and condemnation. According to official numbers from the Ministry of Interior, only 0.8% of protests were restricted between 2008 and 2010 (Rachik 2014: 70).

King Mohammed VI pledged to move towards democratization in the aftermath of the demonstrations in 2011, and created a new constitution the same year (Yom 2017: 132).
Despite these efforts, laws still exist that prohibit people from exercising their basic rights. These laws even go against the newly established constitution (Yom 2017). Article 489 of the Moroccan Penal Code criminalizes lewd or unnatural acts with an individual of the same sex. The punishment is from six months to three years imprisonment, and a fine of 200 to 1000 dirhams (Lexinter 2016). All gatherings in public space which could disrupt public order are forbidden, and one must preliminary declare any planned public demonstration to the authorities (Rachik 2014). One does not have the right to found an association on the basis of a cause that goes against Moroccan laws, good morals, Islam, the Moroccan territory, or the Moroccan monarchy (Ezbakhe 2014). These paragraphs of law show the contradiction between the regime’s discourse and its praxis, and they will be implicitly, and explicitly, referenced to throughout this thesis.

**The socio-political context of sexual minorities in Morocco**

According to Dalacoura (2014: 1302), many Middle Eastern societies’ vilification of homosexuality is reinforced by authoritarian governments, conservative religious leaders, and traditionalists. In Morocco, Article 489 of the Penal Code is not always enforced. Still, direct accusations of “homosexual activity” often bring stigmatization, and the accused can lose their job and be rejected by their family (Christensen 2017: 111). The Interior Ministry has on several occasions contributed to the stigmatization of homosexuality, by accusing certain media outlets of ”not being considerate of the moral values of the Moroccan society, and provoking the national public opinion by promoting despicable behavior” (Rachik 2014: 27). According to Bergeaud-Blackler and Eck (2011), these accusations are often founded on Islam’s prohibition of homosexuality and sexual relations outside of marriage. The mainstream media has triggered spontaneous protests against sexual minorities on several occasions (Bergeaud-Blackler and Eck 2011). One example is the daily newspaper al-Massae’s report of the marriage between two men which generated a massive protest after a Friday prayer (Rachik 2014: 72). According to Dialmy (2006), all conduct that moves outside the culturally accepted system of gender and sexuality is socially penalized. In a survey on norms and values of Moroccans, “Marocain, qui êtes-vous ?”, published by the francophone
Moroccan magazine TelQuel in 2014, 83% of the respondents declared that they were against the tolerance of homosexuality. 84% of the respondents were against sexual freedom in general (Drugeon 2014). Since the beginning of this decade, the magazine TelQuel has been on the forefront in addressing the conditions of homosexuals in Morocco, one example being that the magazine published personal testimonials by Moroccan gay men in 2004 (Christensen 2007).

The first known LGBT organization in Morocco, KifKif, was established in 2004. Kifkif was particularly mediatized by the independent Moroccan press, and it was supported by the Spanish embassy, and the most central human rights organizations in Morocco (France24 2009). In return, the organization was criticized by Moroccan Islamists and politicians, denouncing homosexuality as “a crime against Muslims”, and that the organization was “an attempt to endanger the Moroccan identity” (2014: 27). In 2006, it was denied official authorization, and since then the founder has moved the group’s activity to Madrid where it operates as an NGO (Christensen 2007).

Social science research on sexual identity and sexual orientation in Morocco is very limited. The literature that exists focus on sexual and reproductive health, and especially the HIV and AIDS problematic. In addition, almost all studies on the theme is connected to male practice (Dialmy 2009; Al Bayane 2016). One of the few scholars that have worked on the subject of homosexuality in Morocco is the anthropologist Abdessamad Dialmy (2005; 2009). Dialmy (2009) affirms that many Moroccan men disguise their homosexuality as prostitution, because it is inconceivable to publicly assume one’s homosexuality and to make it an identity.

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9 I do not have access to verify the survey, nor its method. I still consider that it can serve as an example of attitudes towards homosexuality in Morocco.
3 Theoretical perspectives on structure, networks and identity

To understand the role of identity in social movements, I adapt a multiplicity of perspectives from social movement theory (SMT). There are different ways of understanding and defining social movements. One of the broader definitions is “(1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest” (della Porta and Diani 1999: 16). Tilly and Tarrow (2007) recommend avoiding the label of social movements when it comes to “all of contentious politics, its social bases, and its cultural contexts” (2007: 8). They promote the broader analytical concept of contentious politics to grasp the notions of social movements, revolutions and contention. Contentious politics is defined as:

Interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties. Contentious politics thus brings together three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action and politics (2007: 4).

In line with Johnston’s (2015) work on social movements in authoritarian states, I emphasize the covert actions of activists, as social movements in authoritarian states “adapt to their constrained and less open environments” (2015: 620). Connecting Johnston’s (2015) perspective with Tilly and Tarrow’s (2007) concept of contentious politics, I choose to operate with a broadened conception of social movements, because it helps to “capture unique strategic and organizational considerations of authoritarian settings” (Johnston 2015: 619). I will discuss what these considerations entail further in the chapter, where especially a strategic perspective of social movements will be elaborated.

Following della Porta and Diani’s (1999) definition of social movements, it is important to emphasize a relational perspective in the analysis of a group of activists moving inside and outside fields of social movements. The focus on interaction among political actors is inherent across the different understandings of social movements and contentious politics, and I will further expand this aspect in my theoretical framework. Reviewing all theories on social movements is beyond the scope of this study. It is important to bear in mind that my
presentation concerns theoretical questions that have dominated the debate in the field of SMT. However, I have limited the scope to questions that are of special interest for the theoretical perspective that I have adapted for the analysis of my data. Thus, it is not an exhaustive presentation of SMT.  

Political process theory

Since the 1960s, the subject of social movements has become a major field of study within sociology, especially in the USA and Western Europe (Tarrow 1998; McAdam & Tarrow 2001). Political process theorizing (PPT) has been one of the dominant theoretical perspectives developed by social movement scholars, as it documented the critical role of various structural settings in facilitating and shaping collective action (McAdam et al. 1996; Jasper 2004). The social movement field reflected the paradigmatic currents of sociology in the 60s and 70s, notably the tendency of structuralist institutional explanations, as it focused on conditions for action that were outside the actors’ grasp (Tarrow 1998: 18). A rational action conception has traditionally been inherent to PPT, because it considers the use of protest as a political resource, and social movements as political actors that represent different interests (della Porta and Diani 1999: 4). This conception has “explored movements’ relationships with political parties, interest groups, opponents, and institutions” because it considers social movements to play roles as those of political parties and interest groups (Tarrow 2012: 2). The central focus has been on the relationship between institutional actors and protest. Research within this tradition has studied how political structures provide opportunities for organizations; how movements exploit institutional opportunities; or how opportunities for specific organizations change over time (Tarrow 1998; della Porta and Diani 1999). In this tradition within social movement theory, political opportunities are defined as “consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics” (Tarrow 1998: 19-20). Political constraints are understood as “factors – like repression, but also like authorities’ capacity to present a solid front to insurgents – that discourage contention” (Tarrow 1998: 20).

10 For further insights into the history and developments in the field, I recommend the works of della Porta and Diani (1999), McAdams et al. (1996), Tarrow (2012), Polletta and Jasper (2001), and Calhoun (1993).
Traditionally, scholars using PPT have often applied the concept of framing to understand the cultural dimensions of social movements (Jasper and Goodwin 1999). According to della Porta and Diani (1999), frames are “schemes of interpretation”, or predefined structures that guides the receivers perception of reality (1999: 69). Within this perspective, intra-movement conflicts are often understood to be a process where actors challenge frames, because the conflicts often erupt over the understanding of a problematic situation or issue. This can be due to the different possible identifications of a problem, as groups within the movement can find conflicting sources to blame (Benford and Snow 2000). Further, social movement groups can frame identities in order to politicize people from socially marginalized identity groups (Bernstein and Olsen 2009). According to Terriquez (2015), identity categories can be transformed into sources of political power and collective action through framing processes that provide a sense of injustice. Jasper and Goodwin (1999) argue extensively that the concept of framing cannot cover the aspects of collective action that are not intentional or instrumental. The authors claim that the framing approach is not sufficient enough to grasp the culture that contextualizes protesters and audience, because the statements and actions of protesters have diverse audiences that can be influenced in a variety of ways.

By analyzing the momentum of social movements, PPT scholars developed a theory of “cycles of protest” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). This accentuates the opportunities or constraints of political structures that social movement actors are confronted with. Traditionally, scholars have evaluated movements’ ability to materially surface and to gain momentum according to the PPT framework (Currier 2007: 14). Currier (2007) rightly remarks that this type of theory, which deals with an institutional framework, primarily stems from studies of political processes in Western democracies. Nevertheless, the framework is increasingly being applied to explore how social movements seize political opportunities in authoritarian contexts (Currier 2007: 14). Here, it is important to broaden the scope of the political opportunity structure as to include foreign actors (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 75). Johnston (2015; 2006) argues through his conceptualization of social movements in authoritarian regimes that certain types of activism could possibly pass unnoticed by PPT scholars because demonstrations can be limited and/or covert. It is therefore important to further broaden the notion of visibility within the PPT perspective.

Repression is a part of the political opportunities and constraints spectrum, although it has been studied in a lesser degree than political opportunities (Tarrow 1998: 19). Tilly defines
repression as “any action by another group which raises the contender’s cost of collective action” (Tilly 1978: 100). PPT has often understood repression in connection with the state or a central authority that acts to manage dissent in disarming ways (Ferree 2005: 138). As a consequence of this perspective, there are still types of repression and protest that fall under the radar of SMT. In line with the recent work of Johnston (2015), Davenport (2005) argues that SM scholars generally study public and overt manifestations of contentious politics, and that they tend to ignore “less obvious forms of dissent such as everyday resistance” (2005: 10). However, studies on feminism and women’s mobilization have shown that repression is not always identical to state-centered responses to challenge. In her study of repression in gender-based movements, Ferree (2005) operates with the concepts of hard and soft repression. Hard repression involves “the mobilization of force to control or crush oppositional action through the use or threat of violence”, while soft repression involves “the mobilization of nonviolent means to silence or eradicate oppositional ideas” (Ferree 2005: 141). In addition to including a broader understanding of forms of repression, I argue in line with Johnston (2015) and Davenport (2005) that it is important to move beyond the repression/opportunity structure framework that is advanced by PPT. In her study of leftist activism in contemporary Egypt, Duboc (2011) claims that the PPT framework “imposes a dichotomy between demobilization and mobilization” that does not capture the fluid and sporadic nature of social movement in Egypt where “mobilizations flare up and die down only to reemerge on another occasion” (Duboc 2011: 60-61). Repression against insurgents can be an inherent part of a regime, and not something that only translates in peaks of violence.

Literature on the contentious politics perspective has criticized PPT, especially for its static structure that lacks interactive explanation (McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). The contentious politics scholars have upheld the important point of analyzing how the relationship between contention and collective identities plays out. This means that it is not necessarily a political opportunity or constraint that “lets” an actor engage politically, but the actor forms possibilities for contention and mobilization through interaction with other activists across informal and formal networks.

**Networks in social movements**

Research on social movements and collective action has always pressed the importance of networks for mobilization and recruitment (della Porta and Diani 1999). Individuals’
participation in activities and in groups within the social movement field facilitates the creation of informal networks. From there, a multitude of affiliations can play an important role in the circulation of information and resources (della Porta and Dinai 1999: 120). Networks are also interpreted as playing a key role in the development of collective identities. This is reflected in della Porta and Diani’s (1999) definition of social networks within social movements as

those systems of relationships which connect the sphere of the actor (whether an individual or an organization) to that of a broader social dynamics, and which, in the process, enable new interpretations of reality to develop, new solidarities to emerge and new potential for conflict to be transformed into collective action (1999: 112).

Social movement networks connect the individual activist to the broader political arena of organizations and institutions. In order to understand the structure of movement networks it is advisable to take into account the nature of the social conflicts in which the movements are actors, and the characteristics of the identities and the belief systems involved (Mische 2009). In addition, networks can enable the creation of solidarity ties between likeminded activists. Within SMT, there have been longstanding debates on the question of the development of collective identities and its connection with network dynamics (Mische 2011). PPT tend to understand individual identities in social movements as embedded in elements of social structure – specifically, in roles, networks, and groups. This means that individuals who inhibit the same roles or who are members of the same ethnic or sexual orientation groups would be likely to share a collective identity (Bernstein 1997; Gamson 1995). Surely, structural components matter in the creation of collective identities but it is “empirically suspect” to assume that similar group membership yield similar identities (Snow and McAdam 2000: 44).

As one of the primary scholars behind the cultural turn in social movement studies, Melucci emphasized that collective identities are constructed within networks of everyday life (Mische 2009: 260). Networks are characteristic of Melucci’s (1995) conceptualization of interactive collective identities because they can generate solidarity and commitment in response to emergent tensions. Consequentially, they could be said to be especially important for supporting engagement in high risk activism (Mische 2011: 10; McAdam 1986). This echoes Snow and McAdams (2000) definition of solidarity networks as “people who not only are linked together structurally in some fashion or another but also share common social relations,
a common lifestyle, and a common fate and who therefore are likely to share a common identity” (2000: 48). Mische (2009) argues that interpersonal ties are essential to identity formation but that these do not provide a sufficient explanation, in light of the influence of the multiplicity of intangible and overlapping ties within movements (Mische 2009: 260). Recent studies argue that networks are not just sites for the production of movement solidarity, but that they also act as "conduits for the transmission of identities, repertoires, and frames across different kinds of movements” (Mische 2009: 261). But how does cross-network interaction play out? Meyer and Whittier (1994) describe “spillover” effects between feminist and peace movements, arguing that these are influenced by four mechanisms of transmission: organizational coalitions, overlapping movement communities, shared personnel, and changes in political opportunity structures (Mische 2009: 261). Following the conceptualization of these mechanisms, it becomes clear that mapping out all dynamics of social movement networks is a difficult task. However, I still consider it important to specify the dynamics of intersecting movement relations. Here, I argue that identity can play a key role in the definition of boundaries between groups and types of network relations. Diani (2009) stresses that identity defines the differences between a pure coalition driven by pure instrumental principles, and a movement network. This conception can bring analytical clarity to the mobilization for LGBT rights within social movements, especially in light of Diani’s (2009) argumentation that

it is the definition of a shared identity which qualifies a movement network vis-à-vis a coalition network, and draws its boundaries. The ego-network of a movement organization (i.e. the set of actors with whom an organization has links) also usually includes actors that are not perceived as being part of the same movement or ‘family’ of cognate movements, but simple allies on specific causes (2009: 10).

It is important to distinguish these substantially different types of networks as it can contribute to a more detailed analysis in the study of meso-level context in social movements, as it differentiates actors and their intra-movement ties.

Alliances and cooperation are important for broad mobilization, and can be even more crucial for smaller groups that work for marginalized causes that move within these networks (Currier 2007). For these groups, the formation of alliances is a key strategic activity that often come about as a result of constraining conditions that demand creative solutions and cooperation (Jasper 2004; Johnston 2015). Currier’s (2014) study of LGBT organizations in
Malawi validates the importance of alliances in mobilization for marginal causes, and of coalitions for the nurturing of further LGBT organizing. Here, strategic dilemmas may emerge because groups have to evaluate when to focus on consensual issues in relation to collaborations, and when to work for the inclusion of particularistic projects (Mische 2009: 276). Likewise, groups working for marginalized causes within a broader movement needs to evaluate if and when to make “use of broad, multivalent umbrella-type categories (like universal human rights), even though they know that their coalition-partners may have very different interpretations of what these terms means” (Mische 2009: 276 - 277).

New social movements and identity politics

Many people regard identity claims primarily as a form of self-expression or even self-indulgence – what others do when they are too comfortable, too confused, or too distressed for serious politics. On the contrary, identity claims and their attendant stories constitute serious political business (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 81).

New social movement theory (NSMT) represents the “cultural turn” in SMT. Bernstein (2002) has long been a critic of the division in between NSM and PP theories in the SMT field, and she argues that, “whether or not activism is defined as political is a cultural construct that changes over time” (Bernstein 2002: 535 – 536). Historically, European scholars (Melucci 1995; Touraine 1981) have criticized PPT for its tendency to adopt a kind of ‘political reductionism’ due to its rational choice characteristics. As a solution the authors place importance on the actor and stress the cultural processes and the multiplicity of concerns and conflicts within real movements (Jasper and McGarry 2015: 3). The new social movement (NSM) literature treats identity as a process rather than as a resource, and looks at how identity affects movements (Jasper and McGarry 2015: 18). Primarily, NSMT examines the political organization and identities of the middle classes that contribute time, energy, and resources to achieving shared goals of social and political change. Scholars argue that one of the factors that gave rise to NSMs was the economic prosperity which characterized the post-war period. Since economic needs were met, it allowed for a greater focus on “postmaterial” issues, through the women’s movement and the environmentalist movement (Inglehart 1999). Research also shows that NSMs often are organized non-hierarchically and aim to put consensus-based, participatory democracy into practice (Calhoun 1993; Currier 2007). These types of movements have traditionally been interpreted as fighting for symbolic and cultural
issues, and are “conceptualized as internally directed movements aimed at self-transformation that engage in expressive action aimed at reproducing the identity on which the movement is based” (Bernstein 2002: 534). Here, it is important to keep in mind that NSM theorizing is limited by the use of empirical studies from North America and Western Europe, where movements act within a certain mode of economic and democratic development “with attendant rights and privileges for the new middle class” (Currier 2007: 13).

NSMs are often thought to be dealing with identity politics, as they seek “recognition for new identities and lifestyles” (Currier 2007: 13). According to Bernstein (2002), identity movements have been considered as engaging in essentialist politics, contrary to the political movements addressed by PPT, which make “explicit political claims” (2002: 535). Movements with strong ties to collective identity are viewed by some as divisive and incapable of broadening their appeal outside their restrictive membership base, this in comparison to the successful mobilization of class politics in the past (Tarrow 1998). Bernstein (2002) opposes the argument often found in PPT which deems that identity movements always engages in ‘identity’ or ‘expressive politics’ (2002: 536). As a solution, she argues for the integration of both PPT and NSMT in the creation of the “political identity” approach to social movements which will work in the intersection between politics and culture:

Part of the confusion over what constitutes “real change” arises from the problematic dichotomy between “cultural” and “political”, which is reflected in debates between new social movement and identity theorists on the one hand and resource mobilization, political opportunity and political process theorists on the other (2002: 534).

Identity movements have not been ascribed as contributing to meaningful social change (Bernstein 2002: 535). However, LGBT movements can serve as an example of how movements are both culturally and politically motivated in their work. Here, political interests are understood as the work for the betterment of legal rights through changing laws and policies, and cultural interests as “challenging dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, homophobia, and the primacy of heteronormativity” (Bernstein 2002: 536). LGBT movements incorporate characteristics from both NSM and identity movements, and broader, traditional movements like the labor movement (Calhoun 1993). Studies from Western Europe and North America show that LGBT movements have moved between the
mobilization for cultural and political rights, as groups have fought both for sexual liberation and law and policy changes through interest-group politics (Bernstein 1997: 532). Contemporary LGBT movements then work as an example of how the dichotomy between identity and political movements has historically blurred the understanding and analysis of mobilization, strategies, and goals within complex movements (Bernstein 2002: 568). As a consequence, identity strategies should be regarded as one of many strategies that social movements use in the work to reach a multitude of both political and cultural goals (2002: 536). I argue that political conditions and networks should contribute in the understanding of forms of mobilization, strategies and goals of LGBT activists within social movements.

Collective identity and strategic choices

The many dilemmas of political action are highlighted in the emerging strategic perspective within SMT (Jasper and McGarry 2015: 6). This perspective highlights the agency of activists and social movement groups, by focusing on the dynamics of movement strategies. Agency emerges in the strategic choices of individuals and groups, as they must “initiate or pursue one flow of action rather than another, respond in one way to events rather than in others” (Jasper 2004: 2). This goes in line with Currier’s (2007) definition of strategic choices as “the decision to use social movement organization (SMO) resources to execute a task in the pursuit of a larger organizational or movement goal” (Currier 2007: 15). In other words, the strategic choice framework merges the theorizing of NSM and PPT by focusing on “how, when and why SMOs make certain choices” (Currier 2007: 15).

Focusing on strategies does not mean focusing on an evaluation of its possible results. The goal is rather to map out how social movement groups work on the development of strategies. Jasper (2004) argues that in order to understand political action, one has to include strategic choices as a component in the groups’ foundation. Social movement groups do not develop strategies and make strategic choices in isolation. The strategic choices of individuals in interaction with other actors must be discerned in relation to the macro level of movements, states, and institutions because “strategic choices are made within a complex set of cultural and institutional contexts that shape the players themselves, the options perceived, the choices made from among them, and the outcomes” (Jasper 2004: 5). Numerous empirical studies have looked at how both the local socio-political context and the social movement group’s internal dynamics constrain the alternatives of strategic choices (Bernstein 1997; Currier
2007). Additionally, it can enrich the analysis if one expands to include the influence of transnational communities, tactics and strategies from neighboring countries, or from fellow activists living in environments with similar sociopolitical and cultural conditions (Currier 2007: 16).

By searching to understand the role identity plays in social movements one merges the structural perspective of PPT and the cultural perspective of NSM. This is because the goals and strategies of social movement groups are connected to “concrete institutional dynamics and to the structural location of the actors” (Bernstein 1997: 560). Traditionally, there has been a strong tendency in the literature on social movements to view collective identities as uniform to demographics like class, gender or sexual orientation (Jasper and McGarry 2015: 23). It is clear that identities can be shaped on the basis of structural positions like sexual orientation, but they can never wholly construct identities automatically. Several studies on social movement identity construction find that shared identities are created by movements or groups in order to equip participants with tools to develop congruence between their individual and collective identities. However, it is not certain that collective action constructs identification. According to Jasper and McGarry (2015), identities can contribute to collective action as well as derive from it. As a strategy, social movements often emphasize one single identity to promote a coherent movement. Consequentially internal diversity of groups can be minimized, or movement actors can treat minority group identities as secondary (Terriquez 2015). Both broader movements and smaller groups work consciously or unconsciously on their identification, and this work can create, sustain, and transform identities (Jasper and McGarry 2015: 1-2).

Collective identity can be a strategic dilemma for social movement groups, as it can aid the movement and be undermined by opponents (Jasper 2004: 3). Studies on LGBT movements have contributed to an expansion of the notion of collective identity, as to understand more of its role and its malleability (Moussawi 2015; Nagel 2016). Here, it is important to emphasize how identities are strategically deployed in the response to political and cultural context and external actors. Bernstein’s (1997) study of campaigns for lesbian and gay ordinances in the US looks at how LGBT organizations present their collective identity publicly. Here, the dilemma lies in how to play out the identity of the LGBT movement in the public sphere. In the study, Bernstein (1997) maps out different analytical uses of the identity concept in social movement literature. I consider her conceptualization of “the identity of empowerment” as
useful in the analysis of the marginalized collective identity of LGBT groups. In this case, identity is regarded as the bridge between individual and collective action, and as necessary push-factor for the move from individual to collective interests (Bernstein 1997: 536). Jasper and McGarry (2015) draw on Bernstein in their work on collective identities and strategic dilemmas, where they argue that collective identities are wholly constructed images which are defined by moral boundaries against other identities and/or structures that can move people to act out of feelings of solidarity. Identity can bring resources and hold advantaged positions in some contexts, and be repressed and constrained in others, and hold different allies and opponents in different arenas. Identity can also be seen as a source of pride and can therefore contribute to mobilization (Jasper and McGarry 2015). Therefore, it can also be seen as a powerful tool for internal reinforcement. However, activists also have to play out their identity visibility externally in relation to a possibly repressive sociopolitical environment. Here, social movement groups are dependent on strategic flexibility in the face of repression (Johnston 2015: 626). In some cases LGBT groups have to avoid public visibility and focus on mobilization that does not require media attention in the face of hostile audiences (Currier 2007: 17). In this regard, the construction of private safe spaces is important and can be considered a precursor for political organizing. Within this space, activists are free plan and discuss with each other, and to reinforce the group identity for further collective action.

**Conclusion**

It is important to bear in mind that not all activism is based on public manifestations of collective protest. Both Johnston (2015) and Duboc (2011) argue that it is impossible to understand activism in authoritarian regimes within the traditional framework of PPT without focusing more on underground protest. According to Khatib and Lust (2014), NSMT can contribute to a better understanding of less overt protest, because the perspective emphasizes symbolic action and the importance of networks. By merging the different theoretical perspectives of PPT, network theory, and NSMT, one can include the possible effects of an oppressive sociopolitical context with networks and coalitions into the understanding of identity construction, and the strategic choices of a social movement group fighting for a marginalized cause. This adapted framework takes into consideration that cultural strategies can be political, and that the structural components surrounding the political actor in PPT is not necessarily a rigid institutional structure, but can be both cultural and political. It equally
helps us to investigate the possible relationship between collective identity construction and political conditions, and “integrates political process and political opportunity perspectives’ focus on the external environment with new social movement theory’s emphasis on identity and culture to create a political identity approach to social movements” (Bernstein 2002: 537). A combination of the theoretical frameworks will work as a backdrop in the analysis of LGBT activism in a repressive context.
4 Data and methods

In sociology, research questions, choice and use of method, and theoretical framework is intertwined (Lamont and Swidler 2014). It was the interest in a specific social movement group that guided the construction of this thesis. In my research, the initial focus was on how GDM works for mobilizing in a context that offer limited alternatives for activism. The initial explorative research question pushed me to pursue the study by using ethnographic methods. Since the early phase of the master thesis, I knew I needed to travel to Morocco and experience the field, to come closer to understanding LGBT activism through the perspective of the informants. The choice to conduct in-depth interviews and participative observation to explore how the group developed their work as activists was important. Throughout the fieldwork the research question evolved and became more focused, as to involve the establishment of activist spaces, and the mobilization strategies that were developed within these spaces. Further, I also included a more interactive aspect, as I looked at how GDM work with and perceive visibility in relation to different recipients. The chapter describes and explains how I have worked during the fieldwork and the stages of analyzing the data, and the path which have led me to an understanding of the role identity plays in a social movement in a repressive context.

Research strategy

The thesis is based on empirical data collected in Morocco during the period of October-November 2016. I spent 42 days immersed in the field. A total of twenty individuals were interviewed: I conducted sixteen formal interviews Morocco, while one was carried out through Skype on my return in Norway. Two of the interviews in Morocco were conducted with respectively two and three informants. All but one of these conversations were recorded, as to obtain a precise quotations and to secure a level of validity that could not be gained through field notes alone (Silverman 2011). Interviews lasted from about 40 minutes to approximately 2 hours, with an average of about 1.5 hours. Eight members of GDM, and four members of ABC, were interviewed. In addition to members of GDM and ABC, I interviewed eight individuals from the LGBT community. Two of these informants were active members of an association that fights AIDS in Morocco; one informant was a researcher involved with
the study of the conditions of sexual minorities in Morocco; and the five remaining informants were not engaged in any formal or informal political activity.

I interviewed all members of GDM that were in the country at the time of my field work. One member was abroad, while two members had emigrated from Morocco, but continued to be active from a distance. This means I interviewed eight of a total of eleven members. The informants are young adults, with ages varying from 20 to 35 years old. The majority live alone, with their partner, or with friends. Every one of them have higher education, varying from professional school, bachelor degrees, masters, and doctorates. The majority were in employment. Some worked in the civil society sector, in public sector, or in international NGOs. I chose to study this group because it was one of the sole groups in Morocco that concentrated their work exclusively on LGBT and gender rights at the time of my fieldwork.

GDM has organized workshops and seminars on the rights of LGBT people, and it monitors arrest cases involving sexual minorities. Foremost, the group is known for its media campaigns that demand the decriminalization of homosexuality in Morocco. In general, the campaigns consist of information on arrests, online petitions to demand the release of the victims, and press releases that condemn arrests in collaboration with Moroccan and/or international human rights organizations. The campaigns figure in several languages; English, French, Standard Arabic and the Arabic dialect Darija – as the group aims to reach audiences both in Morocco and abroad. The members themselves define the group as an independent community revoked from traditional and institutional organizational structures. This implies that there are no leaders, no fixed positions, or administrative hierarchy in the group. Being established in 2013, the group can function as an example of how young LGBT activists organize in the region of North Africa in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

The initial criteria for participating in the study was current or former engagement in political activity with links to GDM. I wanted to talk to as many members of GDM as possible, because it was important that I tell the story of their strategies and their work accurately. By including as many informants as possible, I was able to understand the complexity of their perspectives more wholly (della Porta 2014: 241). Once I had conducted a few interviews and had started to form an idea of the group and its context, I chose to include informants that were not politically active but who were a part of the LGBT community. These research participants were included throughout my field work, as my understanding of the group’s work changed, and I was interested in their perceptions of GDMs work, and their thoughts on
politically engaging with the LGBT cause. These additional interviews with individuals collaborating with GDM, or individuals that were part of the LGBT community was thought to help me detail the understanding of GDMs work and how the group interacts with allies and collaborators. In addition, this helped to capture the actors not only as members of a group, but equally as participants in a broader movement. This allowed me to look at a multitude of actors co-operating within the same field, and the alliances that resulted from these processes.

**Recruitment and access**

I have previously lived and worked in Morocco. In the spring of 2015, I had the chance to observe first-hand the work of the activist group GDM, as a participant⁹ at one of their seminars. I was fascinated by the way they operated, and I wanted to know more about their work. Further, I asked one of the organizers, Shems,¹³ about the possibility of writing about the social movement field the group was a part of. It is recurrent in the study of social movements that the activist informants expect the researcher to exhibit the same political ideas and values as they themselves embody (Milan 2014: 446). The political alignment between the group and I eased the access into the field. The initial relationship was then established within a frame of that was not entirely colored by the researcher-research subject relationship. I got to know the members of GPM as an engaged student, not primarily as a researcher. In addition were several members of the group are themselves students in social sciences. Throughout the field work, the informants from GDM expressed interest in my research project, and we agreed that it could function as a document of the group’s work for the legal rights of sexual minorities in Morocco. Still, the relationship between the interviewer and the informant can never be considered equal (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015: 37). I will further develop this point in the discussion on the role of the researcher in this chapter.

One year after my first stay in Morocco, I contacted Shems on social media with a request to approach the group and ask for permission to interview the members. I sent a formal request, where I was cautious to explain all aspects of a possible master thesis. This helped to further build a relationship of trust between the future informants and I. Trust between researcher and

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¹² Representing my employer at the time.

¹³ Shems is a pseudonym. I will elaborate on the use of pseudonyms and the protection of informants’ identities later in the chapter.
informant is crucial, especially when studying sensitive subjects (Tjora 2017: 116). The social movement scholar Milan (2014) claims that “there is a close relation between the way researchers relate to the research objects and the type and quality of information they gather. It is a matter of relationship building as much as it is an epistemological and ontological question” (Milan 2014: 446). As I was introduced to new possible research informants, I was always careful to insist on the purpose of my research and the fact that my academic curiosity was fueled by my social and political engagement in Norway.

**Interview guide**

The focus of this study was the experiences and opinions of the activists of GDM. Individual interviews allowed me to gain first-hand knowledge about their activism and the context surrounding their activities through their own accounts. Interviews with activists is a common means of data collection in social movement studies, and is often preferred in order to gain information on specific aspects of a movement’s reality (della Porta 2014). In line with Kvale and Brinkman (2015), I understand the qualitative research interview as a process that includes both an interactive search for knowledge between the researcher and the research subject; and as a true recount of previous experiences. It is clear that the information I gathered informed and directed the data I collected consecutively. It is inherent to the ethnographic approach that there is emphasis on elements which emerges during the field work (Pleyers 2010: 31). As my research question remained fairly open, I did not want to exclude any perspectives that could prove to be of importance. Therefore, the interview guide was initially semi-structured, with four main topics which led the conversation to a certain degree. Although I had a few questions ready for each of the four topics, I let the respondent’s answers guide the course of the interview. Going into the field, the four main topics were (1) entrance and belonging, (2) networks, (3) forms of protest, (4) context.14 As I revisited the interviews afterwards, I could see what the informants were most preoccupied with. As the field work evolved, and I developed knowledge of different aspects of their activism and its context, I changed the interview guide to englobe aspects I captured during the field work. For each new interview I would also bring up any new elements that had been introduced by the previous informants. This way I could bring out the different perspectives of each informant, and I could therefore establish a more fulfilled image of the group dynamics which

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14 The final complete interview guide can be reviewed in the appendix.
later formed a part of the analysis. It was important to bring out the different perceptions and experiences of the members and the external informants, in order to show that it was not a completely homogeneous group.

**In the field**

Research projects are often chaotic, and the researcher can at times feel lost between cancelled interview appointments, seemingly useless observations, and a general feeling of futility (Tjora 2017). These are all characteristic of parts of my field work in Morocco. Feelings of impatience and helplessness were especially recurrent in the first few weeks, as it took about ten days from my arrival until my first interview appointment with an informant from GDM. From there things speeded up, as I asked at the end of each interview if the informant could give me the contact information of a different member, or if they knew other individuals that could be interested in my project. My point of departure was to talk with the members of GDM, but after the first interviews I quickly understood that I needed to enlarge the scope of the investigation to include the thoughts of actors surrounding the group: activists in organizations that had collaborated with GDM, and people in the members’ LGBT networks.

The majority of the interviews took place in the informant’s home, which provided a frame that encouraged unrestricted conversation (I will elaborate on the problem of recording interviews later in this chapter). Unfortunately, this was not always the case. Finding places to conduct the interviews proved to be a challenge, as the members of GDM did not want to meet in public. Conducting the interviews in private was a security measure, as the informants were not comfortable with talking about the subject of sexual minorities publicly. My first interview with an informant from GDM can serve as an example. We had agreed to meet at a café in the city center so that I could present myself and my research project. While waiting for the informant, I had posed my notebook on the table. As the informant entered the café and greeted me, she whispered that I had to put away my notebook, because the people around is in the café could see it and speculate. On two occasions I had to conduct interviews in cafes, which resulted in conversations that were to a certain degree influence by auto-censorship. They agreed to speak on M20, and on their own political activities in ABC, but they did not want to talk about anything concerning GDM. One interview with two informants from ABC took place in a café in the city center. Beforehand we had agreed that I
would not address the topic of GDM or sexual minorities in general, because they considered it was too dangerous to aboard the topic in public in case a passer-by would listen in on the conversation and report it to the authorities. The direction of the conversation was clear, we were to discuss their activism in ABC. Later, I regretted that I did not find an alternative location for the interview as their opinions on GDM and their experiences working with the subject through ABC would have enriched the data material. Still, the interview was important to gain insights into the dynamics of ABC and the informants’ entry into activism. Other informants again, both from ABC and GDM, seemed more carefree. One informant especially did not seem to mind inviting me into his home, as he “took for granted that the authorities already knew everything that was going on”.

The methods of a research project is dependent on the access the researcher has to the field (Tjora 2017: 37). My data material is primarily constituted by in-depth interviews. During the period of the fieldwork, the group organized two weekend-long meetings. Several of the members mentioned these meetings during interviews, but I was not invited, nor did I ask if I could join. Surely, participating at one or more of these meetings would have enriched the empirical data by being exposed to knowledge of the subjects and strategies that they discuss and the group’s decision-making processes.

Along the field work I deemed it necessary to apply several methods to grasp the complex reality of GDM. Shorter and informal conversations on the subject of activism and sexual minorities were additionally carried out with young people all over the city. This was an important aspect of my method of gathering and constructing data while living in Rabat because it helped me understand the culturally complex context of GDMs work. The data material is therefore complemented with ethnographic observation, and the collection and analysis of campaign archives and newspaper articles on the groups' activities. Participative observation was completed at around four more or less organized demonstrations in the center of the city where I lived. I walked alongside the crowd to get an overview of the different slogans and banners present. Taking into consideration that GDM does not protest publicly, the observations primarily served to give me insight into the dynamics of public demonstrations in Morocco. They fueled my general understanding of the field, but were not an integrated part of the analysis. Clearly, it would have been preferable to spend more time in the field, and with the group, as to expand the study further to include more actors from the context surrounding GDM.
My gender could influence the conditions for the interviews. One illustrative example is the lack of autonomy I experienced in the house I was living in during my stay. I had rented a room in a riad owned by a Moroccan woman. She applied house rules which forbade male visitors from entering if the female tenants were alone in the house. Having male friends in my room with the doors closed was also forbidden. I once had no other choice but to conduct an interview with a male member of GDM in the room I rented, as he lived with his parents in another city. During our two-hour-long interview, I received several calls from my female roommate and the woman that owned the house, telling me that I had to sit out in the open courtyard (which functioned as a living room) with the male guest. As we could not talk freely on the topic of LGBT rights and activism in the presence of third parties, I had to vaguely explain the situation to the owner, and insist that we finished the interview in the privacy of my room. The ordeal was uncomfortable because I did not foresee that I would potentially put the informant at risk by inviting him to my home.

Undoubtedly, the interviews were influenced by the “socio-biographical characteristics of the researcher, especially those that are most difficult, such as age, gender, class, and ethnic identity” (della Porta 2014: 248). My status as a White, female student from Europe undoubtedly affected my research. As an outsider there were many cultural, social, and linguistic nuances and aspects of the informants’ reality that I did not fully grasp and to which I did not have access. Being a European and studying activism in Morocco could at times be interpreted as problematic by my informants. I interpreted this critique as stemming from a post-colonial perspective espoused by many of the informants. However, my Norwegian nationality was considered as less difficult as it was compared to the French, American or English nationalities. These could be considered as problematic by some informants because of previous experiences with journalists, activists, and researchers from these specific countries. Distancing myself from the French nationality was especially important, because it seemed that they were generally negatively perceived amongst the Moroccan activists. On the topic of my research project and the role of Western researchers coming to Morocco, an informant said: “You from the Nordic countries are different, you didn’t colonialize, you are not a part of the whole power dynamics.” In large parts, the negative image of the French also stemmed from the activists’ previous experiences with activists and journalists coming

15 A riad is a traditional Moroccan house with an inside courtyard.
16 This quotation is obtained from field notes. It is from a conversation that took place before an interview, and was therefore not recorded.
from France to Morocco to report on the conditions of LGBT people. Therefore, my status as an engaged student contributed positively, as I discussed initially in this chapter.

**Linguistic barriers**

Conducting interviews, or simply interacting with people from another culture can be challenging, as it is difficult to orient oneself in the field where cultural factors influence the relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015: 173). It is clear that the language one speaks can function as a marker for social divisions or groupings such as ethnicity, race, class, educational status, age, and gender (Madden 2010: 61), as mentioned previously.

The interviews during my fieldwork were conducted in French, as it is the first foreign language in Morocco (Benzakour 2007). I could have made use of an Arabic interpreter, to include informants who did not speak French or English, but I took a conscious choice not to do so as I felt there were more inconveniences than advantages to such an approach. The use of an interpreter could contribute to self-censorship among the informants, and it could be ethically problematic, considering the sensitivity of the topic and the information revealed. But it is clear that being an outsider who did not speak Arabic or the Moroccan dialect Darija prevented me from gaining access to crucial aspects of the everyday life of the activists. One example is participating in demonstrations, where I could not understand the slogans the crowds were shouting. I asked around, and got an idea of what was going, but it was impossible to grasp the whole picture because I could not partake in the conversations around me. On several occasions informants commented on my outsider position directly. Nora, an informant from the LGBT community told me: “Ah, you are only staying here 7 weeks, it’s a shame, what can you learn about this culture in such a short time. And you don’t speak Darija, so you can’t talk to 90% of the people living here….” Her reflections sum up some very vital issues as linguistic barriers have a very explicit effect on my data, be it with the range of informants available or the nuances lost in the interviews conducted.

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17 The visit of a reporter from the French talk show Le Petit Journal was used by an informant as an example of biased reporting on sexual minorities’ conditions in Morocco. See Balu (2016) for a presentation of the reporter’s visit.

18 I speak French fluently after having lived and studied in France for four years.
The steps of analyzing data

My two-month-long field work resulted in a relatively large quantity of empirical data. During my stay in Morocco, I already started the process of transcribing the interviews in their entirety. From this, I could focus on each informant’s perspective, which could then contribute in the formulation of questions for the interviews to come. Coding the data was a long-drawn-out and at times frustrating process. I can easily admit that I started the analysis by “jumping to conclusions”, as Tjora defines it (2017: 196). Initially, I sorted the data into categories, which resulted in an a priori analysis that was influenced both by dominant theories from the social movement theory field, and my own expectations of the material (Tjora 2017: 197). This process resulted in the material being coded into around fifty broad categories. When I then moved on to develop an outline of the analysis I realized that I lacked a clear overview of the material, and that crucial perspectives and statements from the interviews were lost inside the extensive categories I had prematurely constructed. I scrapped this draft and started anew, this time influenced by Tjora’s stepwise deductive inductive approach, where the basic methodological premise is that researchers should develop codes based on what informants have said (Tjora 2017: 198). This resulted in around 300 codes that are closely constructed on the basis of the empirical data, which further provided me with an overview of the actual contents of the interviews. From there I developed an overview of the analysis. The detailed overview of the material included the themes that were emphasized by the informants. These main themes then became the focus of the analysis, where I could present the different perspectives and experiences of each informant. This resulted in an abductive analysis, which is premised on the idea of constructing concepts rooted in the empirical material, influenced by existing literature (Blaikie 2010). The theoretical perspectives that are applied in this thesis are mapped out in chapter 3.

Moreover, language influenced the process of analyzing and presenting the data. Unfortunately, meaningful linguistic nuance has been lost over several stages in the project – because the interviews have been conducted in French and not in Darija, and key quotations have been translated from French to English in the analysis.

Selection bias can affect the reliability of the study. It is important to clarify the relationship between researcher and informants, especially when the researcher’s personal knowledge of the group and informants is what allows her to carry out the research (Tjora 2017: 237). In all
social science, the researcher possesses varying commitments to the subject under study (Silverman 2010). As I established initially in this chapter, my engagement with the group and the work they were doing surpassed the traditional sociological ideal of the “objective observer” (Gubrium and Holstein 2012). I agree with Huberman and Miles (2002), who affirm that it is not possible to step outside of one’s own experience “to obtain some observer-independent account of what we experience” (Huberman and Miles 2002: 41). It has been a long process of reflecting on my motivation for doing this study, and how my commitment has influenced and possibly biased the generation and interpretation of data. I had to revise my research problematic as I encountered activists and others that expressed other opinions and experiences of GDM than I had heard from the GDM informants themselves. These encounters marked the rest of my fieldwork, and I expanded my research question to integrate aspects of activists’ interaction with external actors, as it became clear to me that it was important to capture how their work was perceived by others. Chapter 7 is a direct result of this expansion.

Nora’s thoughts on the limited scope of the project, as evoked earlier in this chapter, reflect an important issue that was equally evoked by many other informants from the LGBT community, namely that my study revolves around a group of activists who are situated within one segment of the Moroccan social elite. This elite segment was not primarily defined in terms of economic capital. Rather, it referred to a high level of education and cultural capital. The informants’ remarks accord with Becker’s (1967) concept of a hierarchy of credibility, where individual situated at the top of a social hierarchy are deemed more credible and given a voice with which to express their viewpoints and have them be granted legitimacy. Becker’s point is exemplified by what Omar, a member of GDM, told me: “Ah we’ve learned these interviews by heart! We do a lot of this stuff. With journalists, students, or researchers. There are a lot of articles on the group.”

Often, people with resources are overrepresented in the researcher’s material, and people with less resources are left behind (Milan 2014). The majority of the members of GDM could be said to belong to the Moroccan middle class, and were defined as such by several informants. This goes in line with a wider finding in social movement studies that activists often spring from the middle class, especially in the case of new social movements (della Porta and Diani 1999). Their representation of reality could therefore not be taken as representing the majority of the LGBT population in Morocco. Throughout the project, I have reflected on the fact that
my description of LGBT activism in Morocco is a simplified, partial image of reality belonging to a specific social group. I affirm that these representations of reality matter and are fully worthy of our attention and interest, because they give insight into a social world that remains unknown to most. This social world has also remained relatively underdescribed in the social movement literature. It is equally important to describe the perceptions of these activists because it allows one to catch a glimpse of how LGBT activists work for the rights of sexual minorities within a constraining context that is characterized by difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions.

**Ethical reflections and considerations**

Gaining consent from the members of the groups was the first step in carrying out this study. Several months ahead of the planned field work, I contacted GDM, firstly through my key informant Shems, whom I had met during a 6-month stay in Morocco in 2015. I informed her of my thesis over a private message on Facebook, and asked for permission to contact the other members with further information on the project. In my request to the members, I made clear my intentions with the interviews and to what extent the study would be publicly available. In addition, I emphasized my wish to record the interviews for the purpose of transcription while assuring the informants that I would erase each recording after completing the transcription. I sent the request to the group's common e-mail address, to which each of them had access, and I got the reply that I was welcome to conduct interviews. I did not obtain any written consent beyond this confirmation. With regard to the sensitive subject of the study, I did not wish to possess any document with the informants’ name. On site in Morocco, I re-informed the informants before interviews of the researcher’s confidentiality, and what the data would be used for. As a precaution, I asked the informant not to reveal personal information such as their full name or address, as it was not relevant for the study. I assured them that I would not publish anything in which they would be recognizable. In addition, it was important to me that they were aware of their right to stop the interview at any time, and that they could contact me afterwards to withdraw their contribution.

Recording the interviews influenced the quality of the conversations. Some of the informants reacted when I asked if I could take out my cellphone to record the interview, and one incident did occur relating to confidentiality and recording during the fieldwork. One of three participants in the focus group interview contacted me shortly after we had parted ways, as I
was on the train back to the city. She demanded that I erased a snippet from the recording where she had disclosed her full name. While still on the train, I immediately edited and erased parts of the recording and sent it back to her for confirmation. This episode illustrates the particular challenges of researching a sensitive issue in an autocratic conservative society.

In the social movement methods literature, the risk of exposing activists to surveillance and repression is a central issue, in both authoritarian and democratic countries (Milan 2014). It is crucial that the possible consequences of involving activists in a study play a key role in designing and implementing this kind of research project (Milani 2014: 446). Some of the members of GDM would participate only if I made sure that there were no possibility that individuals would be recognized and that the recording would be deleted immediately after I had transcribed the interview. I was therefore quick to transcribe the interviews after having conducted them, and to edit the transcripts if the informants had revealed any sensitive personal information. To fully secure their anonymity proved to be difficult, as there are few groups of activists working on the same subject in Morocco today. I have replaced their real names with pseudonyms, I have removed their city of origin, and their age and specific professional occupation. For the sake of the analysis, I have not altered their gender and socio-economic class, as I deemed it would not provide enough information to distinguish the informants. I have changed the names of the groups, adding pseudonyms, and removed information on the city in which they engage politically. Even supposing it would enrich the analysis, I have chosen not to include articles, images, videos, and other press materials explicitly in the analysis of the group’s work, so as to preserve the anonymity of the members of the group.
5 Reinforcing activism through spaces of experience and solidarity

The aim of this chapter is to map out how the individuals got together and established a group, and consequently develop a common identity they in many ways already had before meeting each other. One can learn a lot about the internal dynamics of activism and its role in social change by the way politically engaged individuals describe joining or participating in political organizing for the first time. As most of the members of GDM were very young in 2011, they were generally outside the social movement field during the Arab Spring. Their thoughts and first experiences in its aftermath could work as a starting point in the analysis of their political participation. The empirical data suggests that there are very different trajectories leading up to the group’s establishment, in which they share a common ground of experiences and/or perceptions of the injustices in society. The first part of the analysis will investigate how the informants became politically engaged: their experiences vary from participation in the 20th February Movement (M20), to discussions on Facebook, participation in other types of organizations or groups, or non-participation in the aftermath of 2011. The second part of the chapter will map out the internal dynamics of GDM, by drawing out the internal spaces the activist develop. To conclude, I will look at how these spaces reinforce the informants’ commitment to activism.

Activist identification

Although they did not actively participate, many of the informants attest to initiating their relationship with activism during the Arab Spring in 2011. The M20 movement in Morocco is defined by many of the informants as a space for meeting people with similar world views. The informants that actively engaged with the movement attested to feeling freer, and to being able to speak their mind, as a space was opening up for people to express their grievances more publicly. This resulted in a common forum, out in the streets and online, that allowed the informants to meet each other, and lastly to establish GDM. Before the group’s establishment there were not many alternatives for people that wanted to engage themselves politically specifically for the rights of LGBT people in Morocco. “I started asking the question why, that I shouldn’t just stay like this”, Omar, a member of GDM, said when I asked him to describe when he first felt like an activist. Many of the young protestors talked
about the feeling of wanting things to change, and how it transformed into the feeling of actually being able to do something when demonstrations started all over Morocco in 2011. Omar could share the ideas and principles he held with others:

Then I really felt like there was some space for us, and with the 20th February movement a lot changed on the political scene in Morocco. We had some room to express ourselves, it wasn’t like before.

The protests in 2011 did not escalate in the same manner in Morocco as in Tunisia or Egypt (Bennafla 2011). However, the turmoil brought along a perception that it was possible to think and act politically in ways that had not been available up to that time. Many of my informants’ testimonies suggest an increased sense of agency and an increased commitment to the struggle for better conditions for minorities in Morocco in the aftermath of the demonstrations in 2011. Previous studies (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016) show that new and creative ways of protesting were characteristic of the M20 movement. The youth activists that were a part of M20 were able to organize platforms and work together on specific issues. M20 became a space in which “marginalized opposition actors and atomized agents could make their voice heard” (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016: 13). It can be argued that albeit most of the people active in GDM or ABC were not actively involved in demonstrations during the Arab Spring in 2011, it created spaces for encounters between people with similar value systems.19

Finding strength in coming together to fight for their rights is a notion that is recurrent in the informants’ testimonies. As Hamid, another member of GDM explained:

I saw the demonstrations but I didn’t participate. But when I came here I really felt… I call it a renaissance because I felt confined and tied up, but by coming here I met a lot of interesting people, I found a space where I could talk about my principles without being scared of insults. For the others I was Hamid, and I found a space where I could express my principles and my ideology.

The conversations with several of the informants resonate with the findings of Zerhouni and Akesbi’s (2016) study of youth from M20, which show how youth could translate their dissent into collective action. For the majority of GDMs members, it was especially the

19 A value system is understood as a belief system that is absorbed through one’s socialization as a whole, and which “may lead to a coherent orientation toward a range of specific issues” (Inglehart 1999).
aspiration to share one’s opinions and thoughts on sexual identities and LGBT rights and to translate these into concrete action, which led to the creation of a common space. The space of GDM can be interpreted as a demand for personal and collective freedoms against the logics of Moroccan society. This not only resonates with the attempts of the M20 in 2011, but equally with Pleyers (2010) study of the alter-globalization movement across different countries. There, activist spaces were created as an answer to a desire for autonomy in the face of the domination exercised over different aspects of life (Pleyers 2010: 46). Through this space, the members of GDM could expand on their common identity as activists and agents of change in the struggle to better their rights as sexual minorities. In addition to wanting to fight for the rights of LGBT people, almost all the members described themselves as activists involved in a general struggle against the oppressing forces of society. They cited a broader purpose as the motivation for engaging with activism. As Omar said:

You don’t have to be in an organization to call yourself an activist, to consider yourself an activist. You can be an activist outside any organization. I’ll say that activism has always been in my life, but to be able to act on it, it was in 2011.

Identifying oneself as an activist can be interpreted as incarnating the desire for autonomy (Pleyers 2010), and in the case of GMD, being an actor that is actively on the search for liable alternatives. In the context the members of GDM live in, the search of an alternative is an inherent part of the fight for social change. The members’ grievances go hand in hand with their general sense of belonging to activism, as many said they were already engaging with feminism and human rights ideas, but that they were watching from afar, not feeling ready to make the step to “share their principles” with the society around them. Believing human rights are universal, being against neoliberalism, capitalism and the patriarchy, are some of the opinions the informants cited as drivers for wanting to fight to change society. Their grievances are expressed more along abstract ideas than concrete demands, and several of the informants defined themselves as utopian when they spoke of their dreams of an alternative society.

It is not solely GDM that contributes to the members’ realization as activists. My informants are actors in an interconnected field of social movement organizations, NGOs, and unorganized actors, where positions are fluid. The members move within these networks because they are essential parts of GDMs mobilization strategies, but also because the members themselves are actively part of other forms of political engagement. As I have
discussed previously, most of the members began a process of identifying as activists during the Arab Spring or in its aftermath, despite not necessarily participating actively. But far from all the current members engaged in dissident activities in the frame of social movements between 2011 and 2013. This could indicate that the activist identity is not fortified merely in GDM, but surpasses the boundaries of the group, as the individuals engage in multiple formal and informal arenas, and for different subjects other than LGBT rights. The members’ diverse political engagements go hand in hand with their vision of an alternative society. As Omar said:

We aren’t… Well I still use the term but, we are not a minority. But we are all the victim of one system. It’s the patriarchal system that chokes us all, and that feeds off other system, like the capitalist system. So basically we are open to everything that is linked to human rights in their totality. We are certainly working on one cause in particular, but that’s also to gain credibility, because if we work on everything the work won’t be organized and there won’t be any credibility to it.

The group spent a lot of time discussing ideology during their meetings, but it wasn’t necessarily crucial to all the members that they share an ideological base. However, a majority of the members evoked the importance of the notion of universal human rights. For them, it is impossible to exclude the rights of sexual minorities from human rights, and this position functioned as a core claim, despite their differing political ideas that they spent hours debating. The core claim stood in opposition to other organizations within the same social movement, who did not share GDMs views on the place of sexual minority rights in the forefront of the political struggle. This point will be further discussed in chapter 6. Jalil, a newly recruited member, told me that the group’s vocation was to fight for the legal rights of sexual minorities. For him, ideology would remain ideology, and what would count in the end were their actions. Defining himself as a “normal Moroccan”, Jalil said that he did not agree with the premises of the initial movement in 2011:

You know, I'm the group's most conservative member, and the Moroccan propaganda said that one shouldn't take part in the Arab Spring because it would only cause a mess. I agreed, I was for change in the long term and not for chaos, that’s what I thought at the time.
Jalil appreciated GDMs intensive and committed style of working, which often meant weekend-long meetings where they would work on a campaign for a specific arrest case. Despite his political differences with the other members, he emphasized the group’s ability to be contextually sensitive by not delving into essentialist identity politics. Their mode of pursuing a sort of politics of interest was constructed on the long term, with the goal of including sexual minority rights as a basic human right in Morocco. Given the group’s policy on horizontal participation, Jalil was able to equally partake in the design of the group’s mobilization and the content of its claims. This shows the group’s adaptation potential, regardless of its seemingly radical identity. Aicha, a member that joined in 2014, had engaged as a volunteer in different NGOs, and told me that she always had beliefs rooted in human rights and feminism. Accordingly, her identity as an activist was not only focalized around LGBT rights, but on several societal issues. When she met one of the members at an activist workshop, she quickly decided that she wanted to fight for the rights of LGBT people. What made her invest in GDM was their holistic political perspective of what society should look like. Their common understanding of society resulted in an ease of communicating, according to Aicha. The group allowed her to express her grievances and she found intimate friendships in the community. Yassin, a member that joined the group in 2014, did not participate in the M20 movement in 2011. He followed the movement with interest, but had decided not to engage actively. He wanted specifically to contribute to help better the rights of LGBT people in Morocco, but he did not find any suitable alternatives, before the online magazine edited by members of GDM, written in Darija, surfaced on the internet in 2013. He had already met people from the community through volunteering in a NGO that worked on promoting sexual health. There he discovered that sexual minorities lived under difficult conditions in Morocco, and that people were getting arrested. For him, the group was a tool they could use to work for the LGBT cause collectively and individually, on their own terms and in line with their context. He said:

We always agree on not provoking the society, and to move gently, to not change the situation. Even though we know that the situation won't change in one year, or two or three, but we try, every one of us fight firstly to change our situation and collectively together with the other members to change our situation. But we know well that we cannot say that we speak with the voice of the community here in Morocco, that we are going to change the situation for the community. Everyone from the community have to do something to change, first their own situation and collectively the situation
in Morocco. If the whole community doesn't commit for the cause, we can't… we are not the voice of the community here in Morocco, but we try to do something to change.

**Coming together**

The members met and established GDM in 2013. Omar and Hamid, two of the co-founders of the community, met online around the time of the 2011 uprisings. Internet has played a decisive role for many of the individuals’ entrance into activist life, because they could talk about anything protected by fake names and fake accounts. Several of the informants talked about discussions on Facebook and other online forums where one could share one’s thoughts on queer politics, feminism, sexual identities and orientations with others. Online platforms that allow for these interactions are deemed important for the disentanglement of the subjects of sexual orientations and gender. In 2013, people from Morocco, Palestine, Egypt, Algeria and the US launched an online magazine directed towards LGBT people in the region. The goal was to communicate information on sexual orientation, gender, sexual health, and legal rights to the LGBT community. Adil, one of the activists that would establish GDM, was one of the editors. In many aspects, the online magazine can be seen as the materialization of a contentious space, in line with the concept defined by the social movement scholar Vairel (2011) in the context of the Arab Spring in Egypt and in Morocco. Here, contentious spaces are fractions of the social worlds social movements create, where actors share substantial ideas of mobilization and politics. Several of the future members of GDM took part in this virtual space before they had met offline. Together, Hamid and Omar decided to contribute to a campaign the magazine was doing for the International day against homophobia and transphobia. “It was the time for me and Omar to reflect and to do something”, Hamid said of the aftermath of the magazine launch. They decided to make a video where they spoke with their faces covered, over footage of different places where gays used to meet in the city: in a green, secluded park behind the train station, on the main avenue of the city, and in front of one of the big doors entering the medina. They then sent the video to the magazine and posted it on Youtube. "It's really the first gesture me and Omar did. We filmed these places and then we just spoke, about how homosexuality is something normal, that it's not bad". The making of this video is an example of the innovative ways the informants would play out protest, when there where seemingly few other alternatives of expression on the topic of LGBT rights.
GDMs different strategies for protest will be further developed in chapter 6, but it is important to take note of how the activists found ways to speak their mind in relation to the LGBT cause, even before GDM was established. The time before meeting the rest of the members was filled with a sensation of impatience and restlessness: “We were worrying, we wanted to create something, to move, create a movement to speak up about our rights and to fight in an organization, but we didn’t know anyone else.” This resonates with what several of the members evoked concerning spaces opening up in 2011, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

As depicted, the individuals have very different experiences of entering the world of activism. Most were just out of their teens and were observing what was happening on the sidelines when the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt sparked a series of demonstrations in Morocco in 2011. But Shems, one of the founding members of GDM, was out in the streets during the protests in 2011. She joined the M20, and throughout the demonstrations she found people that shared her will to change Moroccan society:

The fact that we got out in the streets and met so many new people that wanted the same thing, and to feel their strength, that’s maybe the moment I felt like I was doing something different, reflecting on a change with other people, we went from talking to acting concretely.

Among other protesters she met people that became her friends, and it developed into the starting point of several new formal and informal activist groups. "I've had experiences since 2011 that have been less than great", she said, referencing to the establishment of different protest groups. There, her fellow activists shared her wish for a radically changed Morocco, but they did not share her principles of what that society should look like. There was a clash between the established politics of the M20 and Shems’ own understanding of the nature of the problems of Moroccan society. Were Shems focused on patriarchal society’s structural oppression of the individual – the personal is political – and the inclusion of LGBT rights in human rights politics, the M20 movement as a whole focused on economic and development variables and reform (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016). This follows studies on social movement which find that consensus concerning the sources of the problems in society are not formed automatically within a social movement, and controversies regarding who and what to blame frequently erupt between groups comprising a movement (Benford and Snow 2000). For Shems, the space that M20 created was not itself rid of the power structures that they were trying to fight against, and it did not provide her with a place of true solidarity were she could
fight for LGBT rights. Therefore, she didn’t fully invest herself in the protests. This changed when she met people that shared her grievances.

Watching the turmoil of the streets of Tunisia and Egypt on TV and on the internet inspired Amina, another founding member. She told me that:

> When the revolution started in Tunisia, I remember I started connecting with other activists from that part of the world, I guess it was a kind of mobility for all kinds of alternative people to come out in reality and try to do something.

Moved and encouraged by fellow activists online, she engaged with local NGOs and partook in the flow of alternative movements that were created out of M20. The student group ABC was one result of the alternative, contentious spaces that opened up in 2010/2011. Following in the footsteps of the M20, ABC took to the streets to live out their political engagement. Considering the restraints the authorities had put on gatherings in public space, the M20 had made it their mantra to occupy the streets, as discussed in chapter 2 (Bennani-Chraïbi and Jeghllaly 2012; Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016; Bennafha 2011). According to the informants from ABC, they all believed that the street is a space that belongs to the people. The participants therefore actively used public space, "occupying it", organizing debates in parks and in open spaces around the city. According to the informants from ABC, the streets where the primary place they could act out their grievances. GDM would also take part in this space, in collaboration with ABC. This point will be further elaborated on in the coming chapters.

Their goal being to reform the educational system, ABC used public space actively to reflect on what education is and should be. "If one claims to want to change the education in this country, one has to present an alternative, and that is what we do when we get together and discuss", Ayoub, a member of the local branch of ABC, told me. The student group organized activities in a park every Sunday where everyone was welcome to discuss philosophy and societal issues. Shems, member of GDM, said that these discussions were a "space that's alternative and where we are free to speak and discuss whatever we want and where there is no censure." She had suggested to ABC that they could host an open public debate on the rights of sexual minorities. The open discussions function as a place of experimentation with practical alternatives, and echo the activities of the alter-globalization movement as depicted by Pleyers (2010). The author conceptualizes the organizations themselves as concrete spaces of experience which allow the individuals to realize themselves (2010: 43). The Zapatista movement is used as an illustrating example, which the author defines as a space where
participants can construct themselves completely (Pleyers 2010: 39). Several of the
informants from GDM and ABC talked of their dedication to different forms of activism, and
through the conversations it became clear that for the majority political participation had
become a lifestyle, not just through the respective groups, but through their networks of
activist friends and engagement in other activities.

A Sunday in 2012, ABC organized an open discussion on sexual orientations. Every one of
the individuals that would come to establish GDM were present. Amina said:

One of the subjects was sexual orientation or sexual identity, and we were all there and
we didn’t know each other, but then we were feeling like we were defending the same
cause and we didn’t even know each other.

They were excited and curious of who the others were, as Hamid recounted: “We saw that
there were homosexuals there, people that were for the cause you know. It was the first time
we could be out in public and discuss homosexuality without being scared.” They found
strength in numbers as they defended each other when they faced insults from passers-by who
joined the discussion. When the event was over several people hung around, enthusiastically
speaking about how they defended each other. “We found out that we all felt a similar type of
frustration each on our side. And at that moment we told ourselves that no one is going to do
something about it in our place. We have to do it ourselves”, Saima said. The informants felt
like the group could be used as a tool to help them change the situation of LGBT people in
Morocco. By giving of their time, emotions, and their being to the movement, they reinforced
their common beliefs and they developed their common identity as activists. According to
Gould (2002; 2009), emotions and emotional processes play a vital part in sustaining social
movements. The strong feelings attached to a community and a shared identity help build
further from these common grounds (Gould 2009: 178). As discussed previously in this
chapter, the members of GDMs identity as actors of change - someone in charge of one's
political life and outcome - was already there to a certain degree. What had changed was that
the group provided a means to act on their beliefs, both as a space where the activists could
come together and as a tool through which they could mobilize. Coming together and
establishing a group is a political act, and the distinction between daily life and activism
disappears because it was their own rights they were defending, as Hamid said:
Sincerely, in the beginning it was a means for me to revolt you know. The fact that I fight for my rights, it was a way to revolt against my family, against society, against the State. A way to tell them, look this is what we are, it's not what you think it is.

What they define as their first unofficial action took place not long after they first met. They were bursting with energy and creativity, excited to have found each other and to have started something together. Their first action then became symbolic: “We wanted to show people that the time for talking on the internet was over, the community is now out in the street”, Hamid said. So they wrote a letter from a fictional character, a gay Moroccan man, “that could’ve been your brother, your son or your friend”, and put it in the letterboxes of lawyers, journalists and politicians in different neighborhoods in the city. It caused a scandal:

People were outraged that we, gay people, could be out and about in the city. We were even the subject of the speeches of a known priest that condemned us on Youtube, he warned people that homosexuals would soon be in all the cities and towns of Morocco.

This initial protest action symbolizes that the group had moved out on the open, and had become publicly visible. Thus, the campaign can be interpreted as culturally contingent, moving from one realm to another, out of the margins of the internet where people had to actively seek them out, into the public through reports from the mainstream media outlets.20 At the time, there were no organizations inside Morocco that publicly focused their work solely on LGBT rights. Therefore, the target audience was multi-dimensional, as the group aimed to reach out to the LGBT community, the authorities, and the majority population. I will further expand on how the informants perceive the group’s visibility, and how they work with different audiences in chapter 7. The different audiences make their work political and cultural, moving beyond the traditional definition of identity politics (Bernstein 2002: 10). Their actions are not characterized solely as identity politics because they do not only aim to impact the cultural realm, through the normalization of the LGBT population, but also to establish the group as a political actor. Changing cultural attitudes by trying to normalize sexual minorities sends a strong signal to the authorities, and the group positioned itself as a dissident actor in relation to the regime. Chapter 6 will delve further into GDMs cultural and political strategies.

20 The group would later expand the campaign strategies, as is described in chapter 6 and 7.
The frustration of not being able to help people that needed it has been an important driver in establishing the group for some of the informants. Through GDM the members had a place where they could channel their desire for change. Amina recalled how Adil, the magazine editor, felt when receiving calls for help online from readers of the magazine. “He really was the engine in organizing everyone for our first workshop where the goal was just to discuss and exchange experiences.” All the informants from GDM evoked the importance of using the group as a space for exchange where they could figure out their politics together. The first six months after its creation, the group gathered several times per week, doing meetings that lasted more than four hours. They had to agree on strategies, on their representation as a group, what organizational model they should apply – if they should constitute an association, what were the possible stakes? Shems explained that they “were specifically reflecting on how we could do workshops and meet queer people, meet them and work on sexual health, and on the judicial aspects. How we could protect ourselves against the laws that exist.”

Being outside formal modes of organizing deprived them of the trickle-down effect of knowledge that occurs in traditional SMOs (della Porta and Diani 1999). The members solved this by concentrating their efforts on interactive learning processes within the group. Because the group only consisted of around ten people, it became important for the members to put their individual skill sets to use. Several of the members emphasized that all of them had qualities in different domains: some were good at computing, web site management, others in communication, design, project proposals, or research for funds. It thus transformed the group into a place of apprenticeship, where they all could learn from each other.

In parallel, the members participated at transnational seminars and workshops whenever they had the resources. Some of the members evoked the importance of establishing and maintaining spaces of exchange with activists and allies abroad. Strong relationships with activists from the MENA region, especially North Africa, were emphasized as particularly important. Omar said that there “is a real space for sharing experiences, where they learn from us and us from them”. Several of the informants talked about the contextual similarities they held with LGBT activist from countries like Tunisia, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey and Algeria. Taking into consideration the similarities in the legislation that criminalizes homosexuality in these countries, it was essential for the activists to share experiences of successful strategies and establish bonds of solidarity between countries.
Friendship and a space of solidarity

The horizontal structure of the group, it means that we don’t want to reuse hierarchal relations that are actually power relations and patriarchal. Even hetero-normative. So the idea was not to reproduce schemes that we ourselves were fighting against and deconstructing. Shems

One can interpret the development of friendships within the group as a natural consequence of the many long hauled meetings they held during the establishment of the group. The notion of friendship was at the center of several of the members’ descriptions of their experiences since forging the group, and has come to constitute a fundamental element for their political engagement. Friendship works as a push factor that keeps the group going and transforms the community into a space of solidarity. Aicha described it as “not just an environment where I militate but also a place where I can discuss, learn something new and even have relationships that are pretty intimate on an emotional level. It’s like a family.” The group takes the role of a family for some, a space where the individuals seek out comfort in times when one needs support in the face of oppressive responses from the authorities. GDM members’ strong sense of community resonates with Gould’s (2002; 2009) findings from her study on AIDS activists in the US organization ACT UP in the 80s and 90s. She found that the activists’ strong emotional attachment to a common cause and the feeling of connection with other people in the struggle motivated them to engage in activism. The emotions of solidarity generated through collective action are found both in ACT UP and GDM. Several of the members of GDM deemed that it’s important to create “a space of self-care”, where one can “keep up and to spread the idea as far as possible without getting depressed”, as Saima put it. Further, the space of solidarity functions as an environment where the activists can reinforce their capacities; learn from each other in terms of both skill sets and the exchange of political ideas. The members organize workshops for themselves, where they discover their strengths and weaknesses. Saima defined the community as “a friendly space, a place for militant work for the cause but also a space for well-being.” Through this intimate space, the group transcends the purely organizational, and becomes a significant part of the activists’ life. Here one can draw parallels to Pleyers’ (2010) concept of spaces of experience, which he defines as a place that the activists create that is autonomous and distanced from society. Within this place actors can express their subjectivity and knit social relations (2010: 39). He invokes the empirical example of alter-globalization activists that stress the importance of expanding
political activism to include “happiness, conviviality and friendship” (2010: 51). As in both the studies by Gould (2002; 2009) and Pleyers (2010), the intimate space described by the informants from GDM reinforces their activist identity, and functions as a symbol for their political engagement as an intimate part of their lives. Omar defined it as both a material place where the members meet, and as a place of political conviction:

The community and ABC, it’s not something you leave at the office when you go home at night, it’s always there in your head, and the people that you see in meetings they are also your friends. You can work at midnight, it’s no problem because it's not work you do for money or to survive. You do it because you believe in it, and because you aspire for change.

The group is dualistic, in as much as it functions as a space for activism, and as a space of solidarity. GDM is a platform where like-minded people can come together and break out from the marginalization of day-to-day life. Shems described the group’s unity as a coping strategy:

It’s been a very interesting human experience in the way that we join a group, feeling solidarity in a society where one lives through so much oppression just because I’m a woman, I’m queer, I’m an atheist, I’m from the countryside, from a village, there are so many paradigms that marginalizes me compared with this kind of normalization in society. So having this solidarity group to reflect and work with, it can only be positive, enriching.

The informants confirmed that their long and demanding meetings resulted in a stronger sense of unity in the group. But the unity did not necessarily engender a process of homogenization. Several of the members emphasized the importance of maintaining their differences, as it would keep the group's mobilization strategies out of the extreme. Jalil, one of the newly recruited members, told me that he valued the members’ contrarieties. He characterized himself as conservative, and despite that there were people in the group that defined themselves as communists, anarchists, liberals, religious, atheists, and queers, they would, in one way or another, agree on how to get the work done. The polarization would create a consensus somewhere in the middle, making their differences a strength. Pleyers (2010) findings from his study of the anti-globalization movement goes along the same line, as the groups value diversity whether it concerns culture, sexual orientations or each activist’s
specificities (2010: 27). Although there were difficulties and meetings would last infinitely, the members of GDM considered it an asset because it was the ways of working that were essential to them. In the space that the members shared, Shems found what she had missed during her years as an activist in the 20th February movement:

It helped us enormously to know how to listen to each other and to understand each other’s arguments. (…) It is imperative that men stop raising their voices just because they’re men while there are women who won’t raise their voices because they are socialized not to and so we won’t hear them. Power relations are always there and we have worked on ourselves enormously. Where we are today compared to where we started, it’s completely different.

Establishing an alternative is explicitly envisioned in the organizational structure. The idea of participative dynamics ridden of power relations is at the core of their group identity. There was emphasis on a participative and horizontal structure without hierarchy, and lengthy discussions about every aspect of a decision making process were important for the functioning of the group. Coming back to the group as a space of experience, it allows the individuals to experiment with alternatives of what another kind of society could be (Pleyers 2010: 43). GDMs common idea of an ideal organizational model could be interpreted as a mirror of their image of an ideal alternative society. Pleyers’ (2010) findings from the alt-globalization movement, shows that the activists’ construction of an alternative space contained horizontal organization, strong participation, limited delegation, rotation of tasks, and respect for diversity (2010: 43). The depictions of the members of GDM are strikingly similar, as they are overtly conscious of the components of such a space, as a reaction to the formal structures that exist around them. The structure of GDM was constructed in opposition to the conservative dynamics of Moroccan civil society, which the members described as "very classic and traditional". One example that was evoked by the GDM member Saima, was the "leader and the follower". This was defined as a recurrent problem within the formal structures of civil society. According to several members of both GDM and ABC, questions of leadership, rank, and prestige would often get in the way of the organizations' functions. For GDM, they refused all forms of leadership because the group's union was its only way of survival. Every decision in the group is made by debating and finding consensus, and the rejection of hierarchy was a way of sustaining the union and a contributing factor in their consensus building.
Conclusion

Although very few of the members engaged actively with the 20th February Movement in 2011, most of them expressed that this period created a sense of new possibilities. Further, all the members of GDM claimed that participation in political activism allowed them to voice their grievances publicly, but also internally in the group, to someone that cared about their views. I have elaborated on the internal composition and dynamics of GDM through a discussion of what I conceptualize as spaces of experience and solidarity. I find that most of the members share a holistic project of society, which is tightly connected to their identities as activists. Their ideological perspectives also reflect on the group’s organizational structure. Here the informants emphasize the refusal of hierarchy, the importance of a horizontal model for decisions and debating for consensus. The members rotate on all tasks, put emphasis on collective learning processes, and systematic commitment. As a result, they have been able to build a strong political culture that demands and encourages broad and active participation. I argue that the spaces of solidarity and experience that the members construct are fundamental to their strong sense of agency. The spaces that constitute the group allow each individual to construct themselves as activists, where they can pursue the fight for their rights. This finding goes along the lines of the work of both Pleyers (2010) and Gould (2002; 2009), which emphasizes the importance of emotional commitment to the political cause, and the construction of alternative activist spaces.

By joining forces they have increased their ability to politically affect their situation. I interpret this agency as divided in two parts. (1) Their ability to forge and sustain a common activist identity at a group level through spaces of experience, (2) and the creation of a space of solidarity where the members seek out comfort and friendship, and thereby reinforce their shared identity as activists. I argue that the group plays a significant role in maintaining the will to fight for change, and functions as a space to do politics differently. Many of the informants invest themselves in activism because activism functions as a space of solidarity and experience, where activism is a tool that drives them as agents of change in the LGBT community.
6 Mobilizing in a constraining context

How does GDM organize its mobilization through strategies, and work together with external actors locally, nationally and internationally? Firstly, I map out the constraints GDM encounter in their mobilizing work. This is to explain the context in which their strategies are developed. Secondly, the chapter explores the strategies GDM apply to mobilize for their cause, and to achieve their aim, which is to abolish article 489 of the Penal Code that criminalizes homosexuality (Lexinter 2016). Here, I will discuss how other social movement organizations facilitate the work of GDM, both locally and internationally. The analysis concludes with a discussion of how GDMs searches credibility for its work. Throughout the chapter, I will emphasize how the interplay between mobilizing conditions and constraints impact the strategies employed by GDM.

Constraining factors

People are invisible, because they are afraid to speak up, they are afraid to go to the police and file a complaint on homophobic or transphobic violence, because they risk being accused because there is a law against these people. In the end we are criminals. It’s hard to realize it. Saima

Throughout the interviews, the informants from GDM expressed their awareness of how limited their alternatives for working were, as they talked about how different internal and external factors influenced the strategic options available. The forms of protest available were restricted, as they were constrained by the lack of cultural and material resources. Many of the informants spoke of the demanding cultural and political terrain they had to operate within, and that it was difficult to express one’s opinions in the face of traditions and religion. In addition, several of the members emphasized the lack of financial and human resources. But there are especially two elements that have made GDMs mobilization work difficult and possibly dangerous. (1) Their need to be corporally invisible, because they fight for a cause that is currently criminalized by law; and (2) their fight for decriminalization makes it impossible to obtain a legal status as an organization. As laid out in chapter 2, there is minimal to no alternatives for GDM to demonstrate and protest publicly in the streets, given the articles of law that restrict public gatherings, and prohibits organizations with intentions that go against the Moroccan law, the Muslim faith, or good morals (WIPO 2017). The safety
risks force the group to be creative, and to develop strategies that function as alternatives to material protests and traditional street demonstrations. An example is the state’s surveillance of the group, an aspect most of the members brought up during our conversations. The surveillance was one of the factors that lead them to develop safety measures, which was the subject of one of the first meetings they held as a group. There they learned what information to disclose online and via e-mail, and alternative channels for communication. Some of these measures were acted out in relation to events and seminars the group organized – where the location and time of the workshop were kept secret, and only disclosed on the day of the event. As a consequence, the events became inaccessible to large parts of the local LGBT community. After a while they had to stop organizing seminars and meetings with activists and members of the LGBT community altogether, despite the measures they had already taken. As an explanation, Shems told me that “given that [the state] already have information on what we are doing, on our projects and everything, and concretely on doing workshops with people, it would be dangerous for the participants, but also for us.” The members of GDM also fear infiltrators, as the use of infiltrators is a known tactic of the authorities. The group has been victim of infiltrators on at least one occasion, where an individual posed as a member of the audience at a closed debate on LGBT legal rights. State surveillance has also resulted in the disclosure of some of the members’ identities, where their full names have been published on regime-run news sites. Aicha told me that

We can invite someone and they turn out to have bad intentions and they disclose our identities. That would not be cool because most of us, if our families find out there will be no more contact because it’s a taboo subject. This is why we can’t take risks.

This form of state repression of social movements and civil society partially echoes Tilly’s (1978) study of resource-deprived groups and their mobilization, where it is argued that the forms of collective action are influenced by threats to the groups’ livelihood or survival. Through my conversations with the members of GDM it became clear that the fear of their own safety and the safety of others explains that their strategies of mobilization operate almost exclusively outside the realm of the streets and corporal protest. Yassin told me about an episode that forced the group to change its practices, because the authorities had disclosed detailed information of one of the group’s projects in a newspaper. The members interpreted the newspaper report as a direct message from the regime to the group, as a warning that they knew what the group was up to. As Yassin said:
The state knows that if we do trainings with the [LGBT] community that will change their ideas, they will love themselves more, they will organize, be motivated to do campaigning, to do advocacy, commit to movements, and why not create their own movement…

The authorities visibly did not want the group to reach out to the LGBT community. For GMDs members, it became clear that they had to reorganize and develop strategies that involved less direct action aimed at the LGBT population. Further, the chapter will depict how GDM found creative and pragmatic solutions in a context that could seem in loss of opportunities. A part of the solution was to take their activities “underground” by not disclosing them to anyone. That activists hide their work from the authorities is a recurrent strategy among social movement organizations in authoritarian regimes. As discussed in chapter 3, the lack of overt protest does not equal that there is no activity in the margins. Johnston (2015) argues that an expansion in repression from the part of the regime can increase activists’ protest activity because repression function as proof of the need of social change. Within these dynamics there is often a continuous strategic assessment of opportunities and threats, moving activists from overt to covert indignation (Johnston 2015: 626). It has been a long journey for GDM to figure out which forms of mobilization works for them, as one has to adapt to the constrained and less open environments and rethink possible forms of mobilization. GDMs trajectory as agents of claim making has been turbulent, with periods of trial and error. Their strategies have evolved as they adapt to constraints they face with almost every public action they take. Omar illustrated it as follows:

One of the things we have to integrate in our strategies is how to act in a situation of crisis. Because we did not know we would come to this. We told ourselves it would continue as usual, but no. Anything can happen.

Omar referred to an incident were several of the members’ names and addresses had been published on a blog, which resulted in that the members in question had to leave the country for a short period because it could lead to problems with both local authorities and civilians. It also forced GDM to reconfigure its strategies of engaging with the LGBT community. Although several of the informants stated that they were willing to risk their personal safety to act on their convictions, it did not mean they were ready to jeopardize the security of others.

21 The point of group visibility will be further developed in chapter 7.
As several of the members spoke of the risk of infiltrators and the risk of information leaks when discussing the organization of workshops with the LGBT community, it was clear that they were opposed to endangering people of the LGBT community. Here, the issue of the group’s public visibility also plays in because the group does not want to direct attention to the LGBT community where people generally prefer to live their lives outside political activity. This dilemma will be further elaborated in chapter 7.

Allies of convenience

Constraints have been fundamental for the group’s motivation for working closely with other organizations. GDMs strategies largely include collaborations with other actors from the social movement or the institutionalized civil society sphere. This is because the hostile sociopolitical environment surrounding GDM constrains and complicates their LGBT rights organizing. The examples that were drawn out in the previous paragraph show that GDM is highly dependent on external help in their political and social work. GDMs strategies consist in parts of the establishment of networks of allies and collaborators that can facilitate the group to reach their goals. Several of the members evoked the help from partners working in Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt and the rest of the MENA region, but also in Europe. Omar, a member of GDM, described these actors as partners on strategic, financial and technical levels. One partner could furnish them with office premises if needed, another could function as an umbrella organization for foreign funding, or host their events in a secure environment. Funding was especially difficult and included long hauled processes where the group was dependent on local organizations to pose as recipients for transfers from foreign funders. It would seem that GDMs strategic work was intertwined with the help from allies and partners. However, several other informants from GDM spoke of the difficulty of entering into local collaborations. Saima described the traditional human rights organizations in Morocco as a field of individual actors that would categorically work alone. According to her, GDM places itself in opposition to this field. They would try their best to collaborate with others, despite the fact that it was difficult because of conflicting visions of human rights and the place of the rights of sexual minorities within the associations’ policies.

Several of the members of GDM described the cooperation with Moroccan associations as difficult and that most of them closed their door on GDM. Therefore, the help GDM receives from external actors are almost exclusively transmitted on an individual level, through friends
of the members, or fellow activists. Several of the informants from GDM evoked episodes of trials were individuals within the organization in place were willing to help, but that the local section as a whole would refuse. “Individuals are easier than institutions”, Jalil said, a view that was shared by several of GDMs members. This perception does not only implicate institutions in Morocco, but also international organizations and institutions. Shems told me that they apply pressure on the Moroccan authorities “through the power of other states, of course by using networks of activists”. Their strategy would systematically deal with individual actors within organizations internationally and nationally, maintaining relationships and expanding transnational networks through people that know people. GDMs collective identity as a group fighting for the rights of sexual minorities has been beneficial in the establishment of these networks of individuals. The explicit LGBT identity of GDM attracts allies and people who have solidarity with the cause. This makes GDMs identity a political necessity. Far from being only “a fictional character”, as many social movement scholars have pointed out in their work, it creates both solidarity and visibility (Jasper and McGarry 2015: 5-6). The concept of visibility will be further elaborated in chapter 7.

As discussed in chapter 5, several of the members were active in a number of other organizations. There, they would come into contact with other activists and supporters. This echoes the empirical findings of della Porta and Diani (1999), which argues that individuals construct relationships through encounters across networks of SMOs. The relationships create a political dimension that intersects with the private dimension. A number of informants attested to establishing these relationships during the M20, out in the streets at diverse protests such as sit-ins and demonstrations. Others met like-minded people online, on Facebook, in forums where they discussed politics. The actors within these networks have an overview of each other’s abilities as activists, as Ayoub from ABC said: “Every actor has an objective to reach and he knows more or less the environment he operates within, what he can and can’t do.”

At times, organizations like HRAM have figured as backchannels for GDM. This means that GDM can engage politically “behind the scenes” rather than publicly. It is not necessarily a safety measure as much as it is a question of claim validation, or certification, from big organizations like HRAM. At times, GDM has sent out manuscripts of press releases ready for distribution directly to the organization, which then publishes it publicly under its own name. I characterize this as an alliance of convenience, because several of the members
explicit expressed that they did not share ideological affinities with this organization. According to Ayoub, an informant from the student group ABC, GDM takes part in a tradition of Moroccan civil society and social movement coalitions where alliances are seen as purely mechanical. During the Arab Spring, the M20 was in big parts constituted of coalitions of SMOs that lasted about one year, as depicted in chapter 2. Communist organizations forged alliances with socialists or republicans, all in the aim of bettering the political conditions, broadening their cause to be able to achieve larger, common goals of a new Moroccan constitution. Ayoub told me that:

Within ABC we don’t agree on allies, and GDM they don’t agree on allies. Depending on the moment, the allies are completely different. Even GDM I’ve seen that they are allies with someone and six months later they would not work with them, on the contrary.

Coalitions can be the product of instrumental choices (della Porta and Diani 1999), and different forms of action demand different types of allies. Ideological and cultural differences may contribute to fragmentation at certain periods, but not at others, as institutionalized organizations have more control over information and relevant resources. This resonates with della Porta and Diani’s (1999) argument on strategic coalitions, as “the perception that the possibility of developing effective action exists leads actors to stress the pursuit of specific goals rather than the possibility of global change” (1999: 134). To succeed with these alliances, the actors may have to play down their ideological specificities (Diani and Mische 2015: 316). Taking into consideration the constraining context GDM works within, the picture of instrumental choices becomes more complex. It is clear that alliances are a means for GDM to achieve both short term and long term goals. However, it is important for GDM to involve other organizations in its struggle as to expose the importance of its cause to the human rights actors in Morocco. This point will be further discussed later in this chapter.

**Information and documentation**

Because we got the information too late, that’s why. When we talk about partners, it’s necessary for us to get the information straight away, on the minute or the hour. If not, it will work against the victim. Jalil
Taking into consideration the constraining context and the danger of more overt mobilization, GDM decided to pursue documentation of cases of violence and arrests of LGBT people. By the means of documentation, the group aimed to create an archive of abuse and arrests of LGBT people in Morocco. The members started to monitor the media, which proved to be the most accessible means of identifying violation cases. One member explained that they had to document cases via the press because they were “not being a movement that is free and easy to go to people and explain our program and to create a network and to have people that can report cases to us.” It was important to keep this operation hidden from the authorities – and researching online was possible to do in the privacy of their home. One only needs a computer and an internet connection to operate media monitoring. It consisted of researching arrests of LGBT people several times a day, and of surveilling media outlets for reports on police arrests based on article 489 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes homosexuality (Lexinter 2016).

The GDM member Jalil told me that they can never be sure if the information on arrests or cases of violence they receive is correct or not, as they always get different versions of one event. Generally they have to rely on local and national media outlets that communicate arrests. They spent a lot of time doing research online, and looking through local newspapers to see if there have been reports and collect all available information on the case in question. However, to do an exhaustive search, they relied on either informants from the LGBT community or contacts in allied social movement groups or civil society organizations. Ideally, they would contact allies in associations that have office branches all over the country, which meant that they could confirm the information.

Jalil told me an incident where he had read about a LGBT arrest in a local newspaper from a city in the south of Morocco. Together with the group, he decided that he and another member should witness the trial. When they arrived in the city after travelling for several hours by train, it turned out that there was no arrest, and no court. The report in the local newspaper turned out to be a false rumor. Access to information then becomes a core issue concerning mobilizing against article 489 that criminalizes homosexuality (Lexinter 2016), as one of GDMs main strategies is to document and inform the national and international public on arrests. It is therefore crucial that GDM is informed when new arrests occur in the whole of Morocco. Most of the members of GDM live in the same city, but their monitoring operation covers the whole of Morocco. Being constraint to a small group structure, they rely on reports
from friends and allies from all over the country for information on criminal cases concerning LGBT people.

The lack of a legal status prohibits them from accessing the courts; therefore it is often imperative that institutionalized organizations function as an intermediary for GDM to access case files. Assistance from third parties are also required to hire lawyers, and getting contacts in cities were there have been arrests or cases of violence. As the informants have explained, in the case of an arrest, they directly contact allies that work in organizations that has a local section in the city where the arrest took place. Institutionalized organizations contact lawyers, and forward contacts in the city where an episode has occurred. The ally will reach out to the person in the city in question and ask if the local section agrees to help GDM. Jalil said that they prefer to work with the organization HRAM, as they are present in almost all cities in the country. If GDM doesn’t have contacts at the location, someone from HRAM can obtain the number of the case file or information on the verdict. GDMs initial strategy of obtaining information was to establish a network of LGBT people and allies in several cities in Morocco. The members wanted to create a network in order to have several relays to distribute or obtain information in the case of violence or an arrest. This way, they could easily contact someone in the city in question, either on Facebook or in person. However, as the members evaluated the risks as too great both for the allies and themselves, the group has to go through several other organizations to obtain and verify the correct information.

It is not always certain that the locals agree to contribute. Jalil told me that it’s rare that they get information directly from the victims. This is because the victims can be suspicious of aid from outsiders, or because the victim wishes to avoid the attention outside assistance would attract, both in the person’s locality and nationally in the media. If the victim in question and other national organizations refuse to cooperate, it has happened that members themselves travel to the village or city. In these instances, the members do not present themselves as GDM, but as a human rights organization, and in some cases they are accompanied by international organizations to facilitate their work. There they obtain information directly outside the courthouse, and act as witnesses to account for the presence or absence of a lawyer and a judge. This creates a register of trials, and a documentation of the victims’ legal protection.

Although they direct their work according to a strategy of alliances, the members were skeptical to some aspects of this operation. Several of the members evoked CNDH as an
example: CNDH is a national institution for civil society, funded and directed by a committee selected by the authorities. Being an official institution, CNDH holds a network of lawyers all over Morocco, and they could therefore easily help GDM by providing information on arrests. Shems exemplified GDMs uncertainty in relation to CNDH by telling me about the time she attended a meeting with the institution:

There was a police man that called me in from the hall, told me ‘GDM you can go in now *if you please*22’. (laughing) You know you ask yourself some questions after that. Like are we just pawns pulled in by the system, to contribute to a kind of valorization of the system… So they can say ‘hey look, we have LGBT activists in this country!’, so… a lot of questions.

GDMs work explicitly goes against the will of the Moroccan regime, but they are still able to obtain resources and aid from CNDH. The members are still uncertain of how to handle this paradox, and they have asked themselves if this is an honest offer, or just a means to control the group. Seeing that the group’s identity in parts are founded on ideological anti-systemic ideals, as I mapped out in the previous chapter, the idea of collaborating with the authorities does not sit well amongst most of the members. Shems told me that:

> It’s pretty interesting because even within CNDH there are activists that work… that help other groups of activists that are against the system, like us. But not in an official way. And that raises the question of if this just individuals or is there a will behind it.

This is a fundamental uncertainty that exists within GDM. It is difficult for the group to distinguish if the solidarity expressed by CNDH is authentic. The relationship between the two actors could be wholly instrumental, which means that both GDM and CNDH use each other – as the authorities (through CNDH) exhibit to foreign institutions that they sustain a healthy civil society in Morocco, and GDM to take advantage of their network of human rights contacts and lawyers.

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22 The original French phrasing “*s’il vous plaît*” symbolizes a deeper sense of politeness than the English “please”. In addition, the phrase includes the French “*vouvoiement*” that increases the courtesy even more.
Dimensions of denunciation

To be able to do advocacy work, to confront the state with its responsibilities, because it’s far from being a question of isolated cases. This is violence against homosexuals, trans, this is violence that happens every day and that is hidden and marginalized by different mechanisms that doesn’t allow for voices to speak up and to be heard. Saima

As the members progressively documented assaults and arrests of LGBT people, they came to a deeper understanding of the discrepancy between the official story the state was communicating, and what was actually happening to sexual minorities in Morocco. For GDM, their priority became the fight for decriminalization of homosexuality through the abolition of article 489 of the Moroccan Penal Code (Lexinter 2016). In order to do this, they focus on the direct consequences of the law, the arrests of LGBT people. One of their strategies, as a continuation of gathering information and documentation of abuse and arrests, is therefore the communication of this documentation locally, nationally and internationally. I conceptualize it as a strategy of denunciation, because several of the members have accentuated the group’s wish to confront the state. The GDM member Hamid told me that:

After we started monitoring cases, then I understood that we really have to do something. It’s not just a justification to fight for what I am, but also to fight for change in this society. And that’s what’s pushing me to continue this fight despite all the risks, despite what we have gone through, what we’ve had to endure.

The denunciation strategy operates over two dimensions. (1) One dimension is the diffusion of information on abuse and arrests through their own media outlets, and further through media allies’ diffusion. This is the most often incarnated through press releases, campaigns and petitions. (2) Another dimension is the denunciation as a means to culturally and politically change the social movement field and the politically leftist civil society in Morocco from the inside. Several of the members of GDM expressed a wish to denounce the abuses and thoroughly integrate what they named a “universal human rights” regime within their fellow SMOs. This second dimension will be further examined at the end of the chapter. The steadfast goal of decriminalization is an important factor in explaining the group’s strategic choices. Further, the two dimensions could indicate that the strategy is constructed partly by cultural and political goals for social change. This mirrors Bernstein’s (2002) argument in her study of the 1940s to 1960s lesbian and gay movement’s mobilization in the US, which
asserts that social movements can’t be conceived as either political or cultural. (2002: 568). GDMs strategies goes along the same lines as Bernstein’s (2002) claim that “the relative emphasis on identity and culture on the one hand and politics on the other is shifting, multidimensional, and complex, depending on resources, networks, and political conditions” (2002: 570). Calhoun (1993) argues similarly in his study of social movements from the nineteenth century. Here, the author criticizes the traditional perspective on social movements which often entails a single set of instrumental questions on mobilization. To surpass this single model analysis, he argues that one has to look at the inherent plurality of the forms, contents, and social bases of social movements, and the meanings they have for the participants. GDMs members’ wish to challenge the cultural hegemony of the Moroccan state has influenced their mobilization. This resulted in a strategy that aimed to better the legal rights of the LGBT population, which demands a change of law that can only happen through advocacy and mobilization in the long run; and a strategy which aimed at improving the cultural and social conditions of sexual minorities in Moroccan society today. The latter demands recognition of the violence perpetrated against the LGBT community, communicated through the group’s media campaigns. The campaigns inform different audiences of the violence many sexual minorities suffer, a reality the members claim the majority of the population does not know about. Simultaneously, it is important that the campaigns focus on the legal rights of sexual minorities, and that they do not continue within a frame of simple victimization. This point will be discussed in chapter 7.

**Media strategy**

Tilly and Tarrow (2007) define identity claims as a tool of declaration that an actor exists. GDMs forms of visibility are to some extent made up of work on local, national, and international campaigns. One aspect that was essential, according to my informants, was to shed light on the violence suffered by LGBT people, both in terms of assaults by civilians and arrests by police. The group communicates the cases through newspaper articles, slogans, and symbols. Campaigns have the job of educating the public to accept a different understanding of the world (Della Porta and Diani 1997: 179). GDMs press releases and media campaigns can be interpreted as the formation of a counter-narrative to the established story of the socio-political and cultural conditions of LGBT people in Morocco. GDM has sometimes used photos of individuals from the regional LGBT community and the Moroccan diaspora abroad in its campaigns. The usage of the photos of a diversity of people could be interpreted as
going against the majority’s image of the LGBT population, with the aim to change the
cultural understanding of homosexuality in Morocco. Further, it can be interpreted as an
empowering act of visibility, in the face of a context that does not want to acknowledge their
existence. Almost all the members of GDM consider it dangerous to display their sexual
identity publicly. But by publishing pictures of the community, they can show the public that
the LGBT community exists – through the safety of the internet. However, most of their
campaigns are characterized by neutrality, in the sense that they only consist of information
on arrests or cases of violence. In addition, there is information on the measures allies and
people of concern can take to help the victim. There are no pictures, no slogans or messages
of pride, only a group statement condemning the arrest and a message accompanied by a
hashtag to diffuse the campaign as widely as possible. Yassin described the campaigns as:

The objective of the press releases is foremost to pass on the information, and
epecially to denounce the arrests and to say that it’s contrary to the idea of the human
rights that Morocco adheres to, and to pressure them by saying we do not accept this
and that we have to act.

The campaigns are launched online, where the group’s goal is to incite discussions on social
media forums. Beyond the internet, the group aims to create a public debate. In opposition to
the tabloid news reporting of the Moroccan media, the group aims to construct neutral
campaigns that diffuses a clear message: there are violations taking place against sexual
minorities. The campaigns are established in opposition to the mainstream Moroccan media
that reports on the arrests or cases of violence as tabloid news. According to della Porta and
Diani (1999), protest actions that searches to build broad support has to be innovative and
newsworthy enough in order to attract the mass media’s attention. In the case of GDM, the
members want to redefine the incident to deal with the victim’s lack of legal rights, and the
perpetrator’s pardon. As Saima said:

Media campaigns are important because they spread information. The media deal with
the question of sexuality, homosexuality and transsexuality like a question of ‘today’s
news’, and sexual scandals rather than an impairment of human rights. We think it’s
important to document and visualize the reality independently of the media.

23 For examples of Moroccan media reporting on violence against the LGBT population, see Bergeaud-Blackler
and Eck (2011).
There are parallels between GDMs media strategy and the strategic identity deployment of 70s LGBT activists in the US, studied by Bernstein (2002). These LGBT organizations stressed similarities with the majority population and avoided to define themselves in opposition to these, an identity strategy LGBT activists had pursued during the 1960s. Rather, the 70s LGBT activists would define themselves in opposition to the stereotypes wielded by the religious right (2002: 569). By promoting an alternative report of LGBT arrests in opposition to those of the mainstream media, GDM envisioned to develop Moroccan the majority populations’ perception of the LGBT community, as well as the LGBT community’s perception of itself. Several of the members told me that it was important for them to reach out to the LGBT community in addition to the authorities. It was important to touch both populations in the communication of violence done against sexual minorities. The aim to change the individual consciousness by informing publicly through the media indicates that GDM paired both cultural and political strategies in their purpose to transform political structures.

GDMs denunciation strategy includes the use of both national and international allies within the media as a means to diffuse their documentation of arrest cases. The member Hamid told me that their allied journalists would contact them before reporting on an arrest or a case of violence against LGBT individuals. The journalists would not use the information issued by the state, but the information diffused by GDM through their press releases on social media. The group presented an alternative to the official narrative. Hamid said that the goal of the press releases was exactly that – to give people the good information and to denounce the state’s version of the fact. Some of the members stated that the mediated diffusion had very explicit results. Jalil explained:

I think that almost all the cases we have worked on, where there was pressure and we spread the word, the penalization was reduced, even under three months. When the case is hidden, that it’s not mediated enough by us or someone else, then the penalty generally is more severe.

The reduced sentences were interpreted as a result of the attention spurred by the media campaigns. It often engendered the engagement of Moroccan lawyers that would represent the victims in question. The presence of a lawyer and the pressure from the campaigns communicated to the authorities that there were attention directed on the case, so they could not act recklessly. The strategy of actively involving more influential organizations in
campaigns and press releases resonates with Michael Lipsky’s (1965) concept of protest as a political resource of the powerless, applied in the analysis of the civil rights movement in the US during the 1960s. Lipsky asserts that the different groups of the movement depended for success not upon direct utilization of power, but upon activating other groups to enter the political arena. Because protest is successful to the extent that other parties are activated to political involvement, it is one of the few strategies in which even politically impoverished groups can aspire to engage (1965: 1).

Research on protest coverage shows that action “must involve a great many people, utilize radical tactics or be particularly innovative in order to obtain media coverage” (della Porta and Diani 1997: 182-183). The media strategy of GDM does not enter into this definition. Taking into consideration the marginality of GDMs cause in Moroccan society, one cannot assume the involvement of a great quantity of individuals or organizations, neither tactics that are too radical, as not to exclude the majority population from the media audience. The innovation of GDMs media strategy can be seen as a result of their discrete strategies in the face of state surveillance, and as a solution to their fear of disclosing their identities to a mass public. Statements and campaigns offer accessible means of diffusion and insight into the conditions of sexual minorities, because, as Saima said, “we are not a movement that is free and easy to go to people and explain our program”. The members issue statements to each of the networks they are a part of, abroad and nationally. For each arrest or violence the group detected, they communicated information on the episode to their widespread networks in the MENA region, and in Europe and in the US. They thereby relied on their partners to further diffuse the information to reach the international press. The objective of involving the international press is to involve the international human rights community, both in terms of LGBT NGOs and human rights institutions. The group viewed this as a means to apply pressure on the Moroccan authorities so that they would exercise article 489 in a lesser extent. GDM has several partner organizations abroad that publish campaigns for them. It is Facebook that primarily works as a platform for further diffusion. The press releases are published on the group’s site, and from there they are re-published by co-activists in Europe, and in the MENA region, and in Africa. It is crucial for the majority of the activists that they are the active part in the diffusion of information to Western recipients. This point will be further developed in the next chapter. The strategy of diffusion is partially formed by the group’s insistence on being in charge of their situation and how it is portrayed abroad. In the
previous chapter, I described how the group created intimate spaces of experience and solidarity to reinforce their activism. Their denunciation strategy can be interpreted in extension of this.

GDMs campaigns can be interpreted as expressions of symbolic contention, in line with Johnston’s definition of symbolic contention as “composed of events that are manifestly about one set of claims but which also serve as proxies for a direct political challenge against the regime” (2006: 207). In the case of GDM, their symbolic contention consists of petitions, collective manifests and press releases, slogans, images, all of them diffused via social media and allies in liberal national and international media. The aim of the media campaigns is to draw attention to the situation of LGBT people in Morocco, and eventually to attract enough attention to their condition to change the legislation. The target of protest is both the Moroccan authorities, and the international human rights community, insofar as the pressure they in return can apply externally on the authorities.

**Duality in strategies**

When we’ve really made an effort, when we have proven that we are working on the cause, HRAM for example, they started opening some doors for us, not directly, but…

HRAM was never with GDM as an organization, HRAM isn’t supporting GDM, but people from HRAM are supporting GDM. Hamid

The second dimension of GDMs denunciation strategy is their work for cultural and political changes in Moroccan human rights organizations. Several of the informants would say that they aim to involve civil society in Morocco, as their participation translates into pressure on the authorities from formal structures. This is seen as a process of direct persuasion, because the group interpret collaborations as important in bringing them closer to their goal of denunciation and diffusion of arrests and finally to remove article 489 from the Penal Code. At the same time, the group would establish a closer relationship with these organizations, and conceivably obtain the possibility to change allies’ organizations’ policies from the inside. Most of the group members were unison in their claim that the more institutionalized organizations within Moroccan civil society completely rejected the rights of sexual minorities as being a part of their human rights policies. As an example, Shems explained:
HRAM isn’t scared of repressions, they are used to repressions. They are scared of internal repressions, within their association there are plenty of homophobic people, there are plenty of people from other sections from all over Morocco, and they are scared of discrediting the association’s work and their own activists that are not really trained in human rights. It’s a question of ego and of fear of losing credibility.

Adding to their restricted resources was their deeply embedded conviction to organize differently from the traditional organizations of the Moroccan civil society, as I have mapped out in the previous chapter. One of their primary goals has been to change the Moroccan leftist NGOs' rights regime to be one that works with "universal human rights". This means that the institutionalized organizations must include the rights of sexual minorities, something they are still not doing. Several of the members criticized other national human rights organizations for being too closely connected to “the system”, and for monopolizing the question of human rights. “They make no room for the young, these are feminists that are old”, Yassin told me, adding that “the issues linked to sexuality, individual liberties, they don’t want to touch that, they work rigorously on violence and politics because those are the issues that don’t disturb the state.” The members meant that there were discrepancy between the organizations' rights discourse and what was concretely being implemented. The members knew this because several of them had previously worked at different formal organizations; human rights associations, workers unions and student groups. There they had fought each of them individually, to promote the rights of LGBT people to be included in the organization's official policy. Later, as they mobilized through GDM, it was important for the members to categorically introduce the question of the rights of sexual minorities, as a means for applying pressure directly on the members that constitute the organizations. This developed into an explicit strategy for GDM. Here, international and national workshops and human rights seminars play a decisive role in the preparation of new networks. The members emphasized the importance of participating actively at these events, doing their best to “pass on the idea that the rights of sexual minorities are important, and that it is not a question that is prioritized”, as Omar described it. It was imperative for GDM to impose themselves whenever there was a meeting in human rights, because few, if any, would represent the rights of sexual minorities and gender rights if not them.

Ayoub, a member of the student group ABC and a former member of GDM, had especially noticed the development of LGBT rights politics among the bigger NGOs since the
appearance of GDM. He explained that historically, HRAM had been concerned with distancing itself from the question of sexual minorities in fear of alienating local activists and provoking the authorities. Until recently, as GDMs campaigns sparked more national and international interest in the arrests of LGBT people in Morocco. As GDM often made an effort to include HRAM among the organizations that official sign and support the campaigns or petitions, they were forced to take an explicit stand on the matter. Ayoub said:

In Arabic we say ‘archouma’, that they should be ashamed, HRAM, when they don’t take a side. But even more than just being ashamed, it’s also a question of international funding, because the foreign funders can take it the wrong way.

This means that GDM can pressure HRAM in different ways, both directly on the local level between activists in meeting and seminar, and on an international level. Currier (2014) found the same dynamics between local human rights organizations and LGBT activists in Malawi, where the human rights actors did not display their support for LGBT rights in order to avoid reactions from political, religious, and traditional leaders. Foreign NGOs, which expected human rights organizations to defend LGBT rights, then threatened to revoke their financial funding. HRAM too, is to a certain extent dependent on extra-local funding, and has to present itself as a human rights organization by international standards. The complex dynamics of the relationship that GDM maintains with international actors will be addressed in the next chapter.

**Strategy of certification**

Did we prove ourselves worthy? Do they find it interesting now and that we can talk about it? The fact that GDM exists and that we have persisted to exist, that we are not afraid and that our presence made them work on themselves, and to admit that we are important. Shems

Increasing their credibility through media campaigns also became a part of GDMs strategy. As I have mapped out in this chapter, the campaigns function as a form of protest, in as much as it is documents the proof of their existence and denounces the violence that takes place against the LGBT population. Through my interviews with the members of GDM it became apparent that they have established a conscious strategy of certification. Included in GDMs strategy is the idea of strength in numbers, as the members believe that their work needs
validation from human rights organizations. Externally, certification provides legitimacy through bigger actors. These actors are multiple, ranging from the LGBT community, other activist groups, national human rights organizations, and international and transnational institutions that can provide resources. Several of the informants talked explicitly of the group’s dependency of external help. They spoke of the efforts of working to prove their organizational strengths and their ability to do mobilize for the rights of sexual minorities. The group’s process of demonstrating their legitimacy as activists and as legitimate receivers of international funding can be interpreted in line with McAdam et al. (2001) concept of certification. In Dynamics of Contention, McAdam et al. (2001) define certification as “the validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external parties, especially authorities, and its obverse, de-certification” (2001: 316). The authors assert that there is a direct connection between innovative action and certification/de-certification. In the case of GDM and the Moroccan context, the emphasis is on the sustainability of the group’s work, in addition to the innovation of their actions. One member mentioned a renowned international organization that had contacted the group a while after GDM had effectuated one of their bigger media campaigns on an arrest case. He said that the organization had previously rejected to help GDM, with the justification that the country was not culturally ready for concentrated efforts to better the rights of sexual minorities. However, in the aftermath of the campaign, the organization had reached out to GDM to suggest the organization of workshops on the question of masculinity.

GDMs strategy of certification is geared towards funding and increased support from organizations. Several of the members talked about how working with HRAM enforced their credibility as activists. One informant, Amina from GDM, told me that they concentrated their work as a means to prove to civil society that they made an effort in working for the LGBT cause. As a result of this strategy, “HRAM started opening some doors for us… not directly but, HRAM was never with GDM as an organization, but people from HRAM are supporting GDM”. This strategy works internationally too. GDM view international organizations as a tool that can increase their credibility as a collaborator, domestically as well as abroad. Several of the examples of certification that the informants evoked included the help form individuals in the place of institutions or organizations. Recommendations play an important role in this matter. The informants mentioned that both fellow activists in the region and internationally had recommended them to human rights institutions. These recommendations are examples of the contributions brought about by GDMs networks in the regional and
internationally, as discussed previously in this chapter. Amina spoke of the funding they had received from an embassy through the recommendation of an activist friend “that was happy with the work that was emerging in Morocco at that era”. An extension of the certification from international and national actors is a further increase of the group’s credibility. GDM has evaluated the use of external certification as necessary to obtain local and national credibility. In the occasion of a few arrest cases, GDM has been accompanied by important national or international organizations that legitimate their presence.

**Conclusion**

The forms of protest that GDM has constructed through its available resources can be interpreted as more than just instrumental means for attacking the authorities of its anti-LGBT politics. The group constantly seeks to document violence, to diffuse information on this violence, inform and enlighten the LGBT community of its legal rights and know-how in situations of urgency, and to slowly approach and transform cultural value systems. The difficult conditions for GDMs activist work pushes the members to explore new and creative strategies and practices of mobilization. The society’s marginalization of the LGBT cause, and the state’s repression through surveillance impact both the goals and the means of activism. GDM has had to reorganize and alter its strategies on several occasions due to risks of disclosure. However, the members find strength to continue their struggle as they see the results of their mobilizing efforts. The documentation of cases of violence and arrests, the denunciation through media campaigns and internal work on the value system of Moroccan human rights organizations are strategies which have both cultural and political goals. This goes in line with Bernstein’s (2002; 2003; 2005) work on identity politics and politics of interest, where she argues that one cannot separate the cultural and political dimensions of social movement group’s work, as they are intertwined.
7 Strategic visibility

How does GDM understand and work with its public visibility, and how does the group orient itself in the field of different audiences? There is an ambiguity in GDMs visibility as the group faces different audiences where they make strategic decisions to visible or invisible. In chapter 5 I looked at how experiences of identity are translated into political action. In chapter 6, the group’s strategies for political action were drawn out and discussed in relation to the context it works within. This chapter will focus mainly on how GDM strategically construct its visibility as LGBT activists to avoid exposing the sexual minority community of unwanted attention. This includes looking at how GDM manages invisibility as a strategy in the face of the Moroccan authorities and the majority population.

Intertwined with this focus is the external imposition of identity by local authorities and media, and also international Western actors through what the group itself defines as the process of victimization.

Further, I will draw out three aspects of what I interpret as GDMs visibility dilemma. Firstly, I will look at how the members of GDMs face accusation of provocation from “their own ranks”, meaning fellow activists and people of the LGBT community. Secondly, I will discuss a crucial consequence of GDMs visibility abroad, namely how GDM deals with their relationship with the West and its image of LGBT activists in Morocco as agency-free victims of repressive structures. Lastly, I will look at how a majority of the members of GDM solve their exposure by seeking alternative channels to act out their activism.

Balancing visibility

An analysis of a social movement group’s visibility can disclose how the group acts in relation to different audiences. The social movement literature shows that visibility is a fruitful strategy that is embraced by LGBT movements (Currier 2007: 23). In the Moroccan context, the notion of visibility contains more substance than the simple exposure to a primary target or audience. This is often emphasized in traditional political opportunity theorizing (Tarrow 1998). A down-up analysis of GDMs strategic balancing of visibility shows that the group deals with visibility in a context that includes more actors than the media alone. In Currier’s (2007) study of LGBT social movements in South-Africa and Namibia, she affirms
that the external sociopolitical environment to which a LGBT social movement organization is visible, contains multiple actors, such as “the state, the sexual minority community, human rights organizations, and other sympathetic or hostile groups” (2007: 17). GDM must deal with different dimensions of visibility in connection to different audiences. The group is visible as a political actor in the fight for the rights of sexual minorities. However, GDMs visibility can also be interpreted to be of cultural nature. The group’s public representation has cultural repercussions in regards to the public construction of the LGBT identity. In this chapter, the focus will partly be on the dilemmas GDM face when dealing with different forms of visibility in the interaction with different audiences. I have categorized some of GDMs main audiences to be (1) the authorities, (2) the sexual minority population, and (3) foreign actors.

In the literature on LGBT social movements from Europe and North America, it is often argued that the organizations must be “visible to protect and advance the interests of LGBT persons” (Currier 2007: 19). This argument is not adaptable to a context where the public debate functions differently, and where the formal political space represses LGBT claim making. GDM cannot partake in a public debate on the legal rights of sexual minorities, because their cause is marginalized and repressed. However, GDM still depends on visibility in its political mobilization, where pressure is exercised on the Moroccan authorities through campaigns coordinated nationally and internationally. This pressure is their primary means to influence the arrest cases against sexual minorities, and it is therefore crucial for the group to communicate the violations to allies abroad. The communication plays out both in public and through internal channels – through campaigns publicized directly by GDM or mediated by international allies and collaborators.

**The identity dilemma**

To capture GDMs work of balancing visibility with different audiences, I draw on Jasper and McGarry’s (2015) concept of the identity dilemma. The authors emphasize the dilemmas of the collective identities of SMOs, and they argue that regardless of the groups’ ability to mobilize people to political action through shared identities, the identity can still be imposed by outsiders as a means to oppress. A collective identity is not only a banner to inspire mobilization, it can also be used against the movement or group (Jasper and McGarry 2015: 2-5). As GDM works for the rights of sexual minorities in Morocco, the members have to
continuously orient themselves in a field of different audiences that understand GDMs struggle differently. Chapter 6 described how the LGBT cause could be used as a means to attract attention and to mobilize an international audience. Visibility pressures the authorities, as Amina told me:

> If we want visibility, and Moroccans are really afraid of their images to be shaken, and if you really show from the international point of view that this is the real Morocco, this is what is happening, this is violations, then it’s good. It puts pressure to release people who got arrested, or at least create a debate about it, and make a scandal.

GDMs political visibility is a dilemma, because it’s necessary for applying pressure and attracting foreign funding, but it also exposes the group as a political actor nationally in Morocco. By insisting on the subject of sexual minority rights in a political context, GDM is interpreted as an actor that displays sexual minorities in the public. However, the visibility the group produces can equally be interpreted negatively by audiences other than the authorities. As the group discloses and politicizes the sexual minority identity in Morocco, it brings unwanted attention to the sexual minority community by transcending it from the private sphere to the public sphere. Several of the informants talked about the taboos of politics, religion, and sex in Moroccan society. Taking into account how GDMs protest strategy was bringing attention to the violations done to the sexual minority population, one understands that adjusting between the culturally and politically unacceptable and shedding light on the conditions of the LGBT community is a difficult balancing act.

### Invisibility

> There has always been arrests, we just didn’t hear about them before. Now it’s mediatized, newspapers talk about the arrests. Yassin

In her study of LGBT social movement organizations in South-Africa and Namibia, Currier (2007) finds that “the dilemma of public presentation can be especially vexing for social movement organizations that advocate for unpopular political or social change or that operate in a repressive sociopolitical environment” (2007: 155). GDM has to balance the public visibility of their struggle for LGBT rights. Invisibility is a consequence of the group’s safety measures. It can be an obstacle in their community outreach. When Amina talked about constraints in their organizing, she brought up the example of meetings and events. In most
invitations, the group cannot specify the topic, neither where the event is taking place. The group often present the topic as human rights related. The need of discretion therefore prevents the group from reaching out to allegeable recipients outside their own networks. Jalil also talked about working towards the sexual minority community in the public:

We were working on flyers informing homosexuals about what precautions to take, judicially, sanitary, security-wise, how to come out to your family… we didn’t spread them anywhere, only to homosexuals we knew personally. It’s very difficult, because what we are doing, if someone wanted to do that in the street they would have serious problems and they would be caught.

Consequences of visibility

In keeping with Bernstein’s (2005; 2002) work on identity politics, it is clear that GDMs identity as LGBT activists serves as a source of political organizing, but that their identity also functions as the basis for oppression (2005: 67). GDMs strategic dilemma of visibility goes in line with Bernstein’s (2005) theory, but also Gamson’s (1995) argument that the visibility of the LGBT identity can be “the basis of oppression and the basis for political power” (1995: 336). As seen in chapter 5, the construction of spaces of experience and solidarity around the identity of the LGBT activist creates a basis for agency in the struggle for political change. But the LGBT identity also represents a danger for the members’ security. The members can’t risk publicly protesting for the LGBT cause. Saima brought up the risk of being visible in the streets as an example of unavailable protest resources. She told me that “it would be like asking someone to kill me, if I would go out in the streets protesting in the name of the LGBT community”. It can endanger the members’ safety to move the LGBT cause out in the public sphere. Saima said that, as a consequence, “you can occupy space through other groups, and for us, social media networks is the streets, they play an important role in mobilization and visibility”. GDMs protest strategies consisted in large parts of campaigning online, as I have mapped out in chapter 6.

The public oppression of the LGBT identity is present in the Moroccan mainstream media. The media’s general discourse on sexual minorities defines the sexual minority community either as criminals or victims, according to Saima. She felt that they are made invisible when the media and the police labels people like her as criminals. In this perspective, the group’s
visibility can be seen as a tool in the establishment of an alternative representation of sexual minorities in Morocco. The majority of the members felt that it was important to challenge the demeaning definition of LGBT people imposed by the general Moroccan culture. Some mentioned the changes the group had brought about in terms of how homosexuality is talked about. They considered a campaign successful if it caused a public debate. Omar told me that “the public denied the existence of homosexuality before the group started working”. Yassin spoke of the discursive changes in the topic of homosexuality in the public, where “the language has changed, before they called us perverts, counter-nature, now they say ‘mithli’ which means homosexuality”. The topic of sexual orientation is becoming visible in the culture, which is valued as a big step ahead for the members. The group has put effort in presenting their struggle as a struggle for equal rights for all – universal human rights, and for the recognition that sexual minorities exist.

**Invisible and visible work**

According to Currier (2007), it is erroneous to presume that LGBT movements must achieve public visibility in order to be successful. The assumption that explicit visibility is the final aim of LGBT movements is not necessarily applicable in all contexts, especially where there is limited democratic debate in the public sphere. Furthermore, Currier (2007: 20-21) argues that this perspective assumes that gay cultural visibility equals gay political visibility. As a group, GDM has a clear focus on political rights claims. However, the discussion of the group’s portrayal in the media indicates that many are also concerned with the group’s cultural visibility. Within the group there are different opinions regarding what its visibility should consist of. Some of the informants emphasized the group’s invisibility as a reason for joining the collective. Yassin told me that he liked the group’s principles because “they were working on the ground, and they didn’t want to go out in the streets, to be visible”. Still, it was important for some of the members to display the LGBT community publicly as a strong union of people. Omar said that “just the fact to talk about us and to admit that we exist, it’s a big step ahead for us”.

The group has to balance their work for political and cultural recognition with the fact that most people from the LGBT community do not wish disclose their sexual identity or sexual orientation. Several of GDMs members talked about the Moroccan LGBT community and its
idea that “as long as you don’t provoke, as long as you don’t fight for your rights as a sexual minority, you can live freely”. Hamid explained that:

The LGBT community in Morocco still has this idea that as long as you don’t provoke, as long as you’re not one of those people that fight for homosexuality, you can live securely as a homosexual. I mean, they are reproducing the state’s idea that you can do what you want in your room as long as you close the door and that you live in society as a heterosexual, married. There are still people that say that GDM is provoking society. But we have always been very careful not to provoke because we have seen how other organizations have done it.

It is clear that the risk of provocation is especially intertwined with public visibility in the case of GDM. In consideration of the sexual minority community, GDM cannot be too publicly visible, as to not attract unwanted attention to the LGBT population. The majority of wishes to live discreet lives without exposing their sexual orientation or sexual identity. An informant from the LGBT community told me that a lot of people are against the advocating for the rights of the community, and that it’s better “to act discreetly and to hide, rather than being visible”. The perceptions of some of the informants from the LGBT community resonate with Duyvendak’s (1996) study of the Dutch LGBT community’s reactions to the local responses to the AIDS epidemic. Duyvendak (1996) found that having a homosexual identity did not necessarily mean that one shared the same political and social interests, nor the same opinions on how to tackle the AIDS crisis. Having lived through the same experiences does not necessarily lead to consensus, and “‘homosexual interests’ do not exist a priori, nor would anyone be able to formulate them solely on the basis of his or her homosexual identity” (Duyvendak 1996: 434). The informants from the LGBT community that had chosen not to be involved with activism emphasized how dangerous it could be to be publicly political about the LGBT cause. By being politically visible one could risk oppression not only from the authorities and the police, but also from ordinary people. The problem was not necessarily being visible per se, but as soon as visibility became political, it could cause problems. Haffsa, an informant from the LGBT community that was not politically active, told me that:

We would love to help gay people, because we belong to that community so we would love to help. But unfortunately we can’t do anything, because either we are going to jail or people are going to really hate us.
As a solution to this identity dilemma, the members must distinguish the entity of GDM from the LGBT community as a whole. Most of the members emphasized that they did not want to represent others than themselves. Omar explained it like this:

I continue to be an activist… but I don’t represent anyone, I’m not the representative of the LGBT community in Morocco, because who am I to represent them? The group neither, the group simply contributes to change. It’s a tool for change, for contributing to change in this oppressed minority’s situation. But no one has the legitimacy to represent a community or a minority.

It was important to uphold this distinction for the majority of the members, because they recognized that their reality as activists was different from the lives of people of the sexual minority community. The mainstream media often popularized the image of the group as representative of the community as a whole. This could entail that people from the sexual minority community risked to be associated when the group’s campaigns appeared in local and national media. Jalil accentuated that the group was different from the community as a whole, and that it was important not to promote a common identity:

I think we can’t know what the entire LGBT community thinks. Maybe there are conservatives, or among them there are people that don’t want to live out their sexuality, people that don’t want to tell everyone everything.

The LGBT identity becomes a dilemma, as the powerful mainstream Moroccan media redefines the identity to stereotype an entire population. As a solution, the members centered the campaigns on the specific arrest cases and not the LGBT cause per se, and that “it plays a role too, the fact that we publish particular cases, it plays a role in making the community aware, and also society in general”. The intention of visibility, in their campaign work, is less on the recognition of a queer identity, than on the cases of arrest and as a consequence the abolition of article 489 of the Penal Code that criminalizes homosexuality.

**They are different from other groups working on the same subject**

GDM wishes to adapt the form and message of its claim making as to avoid inciting the Moroccan public. Here, their dissociation from other activist groups that work on the subject of LGBT rights plays a part in GDMs strategies. According to Hamid, GDM distinguishes
itself by “saying things as they are, by saying that there are homosexuals being jailed just because they are homosexuals”. For GDM, the focus lays with the law and the individual’s right for protection and privacy. According to several informants, other local groups working on similar subjects are not adapted enough to the conservative Moroccan culture. Talking about other groups’ activities, Aicha told me “we don’t film people that cry, we don’t do that. We want to deal with the question as a matter of law, that these are people that have rights, and that the state has to do what’s necessary to protect their rights.”

Many of GDMs members thought that it was crucial to balance the visibility to obtain results in terms of their mobilization on arrest cases. This meant that they would strictly work on political visibility to obtain results in terms of arrest cases, and direct their communication directly to their external collaborators abroad. Some members, like Jalil, opposed the idea of public visibility. He meant that the group should focus on the integration of the legal rights of sexual minorities, not the empowerment of the LGBT identity. As he told me: “the group will never make the decision to ‘come out’ (...) we only act for the good of the community and that which doesn’t have too negative an impact on the Moroccan public opinion.” The group needed to balance the work between public activism and political work for legal rights. della Porta and Diani’s (1999) argument for movements’ strategic visibility continues along the same lines. They emphasize the importance of members’ flexibility and adaptability in order to succeed in a context that does not share the social movement’s norms and values. Further, the discrepancy between the different actors’ value systems may limit the organizations’ actions (della Porta and Diani 1999). This could easily be the case for GDM, as a consequence of the members’ strong opposition to the authorities and what they define as the oppressing Moroccan culture. della Porta and Diani (1999) writes, when dealing with the strategic visibility of social movements:

An important precondition for the success of movements lies in the ability of their exponents to reformulate their own values and motivations, in order to adapt them in the most efficient manner to the specific orientations of the sectors of public opinion which they wish to mobilize (1999: 68).

It is clear that the members of GDM are aware of the necessity of adapting to different environmental conditions, as they balance the deployment of their activist identity according to the authorities, the LGBT community, and foreign actors. The members have been able to be strategic in their public visibility, due to the place of debate and consensus in GDMs.
organizational model. Also, the members could face severe consequences if they chose to protest publicly, as discussed in chapter 6.

**Discreetly contesting the authorities**

As seen in the discussion of GDMs strategies in chapter 6, visibility is a major part of GDMs strategy in contesting the state. It consists in large parts of exposing the state’s violence against sexual minorities. Jalil talked about a specific incident where the group had prepared a press conference to present the findings of their documentation project. This would involve a complete disclosure of the arrest cases and the state’s systematic violence against the sexual minority community. However, due to the group’s emphasis on complete internal consensus facing all decisions, they canceled the conference. Through group debates they decided that the disclosure of their activities would threaten not only their personal security but also the security of their family, friends, and the sexual minority community as a whole.

Several of the members talked about the intensity of certain campaigns, in terms of peaks of repression from the state and the attention from mainstream media. The work of Taylor (1989) on abeyance within the U.S. women’s movement shows that groups chooses to draw back from public visibility, as they move within a context of political hostility and want to work on projects in secret without harassment from the state. At times, GDM has receded completely from public visibility when working on projects that demands secrecy, such as the documentation of arrests and cases of violence mapped out in chapter 6. Omar said that “only the people very close to us know that we work in the field with legal monitoring, advocacy, and all of that”. In this case, it has been a strategic decision for GDM to aim for invisibility in the face of the authorities. To risk project disclosure would be dangerous for the members of the group, and also for their family and friends. One consequence of the group’s abeyance is that the group’s “success” could be overlooked, because public protest is generally the index whereby a social movement’s strength is assessed (Bagguley 2002: 182).

**Being visible in the West: contesting victimization**

We don’t give any more interviews face to face with journalists. (…) They often use the words differently, adding a kind of victimization, or don’t even talk about what we were talking about, just selecting some parts to say: ‘oh these poor lesbians who live in
this city and that fight, poor things, every day against a patriarchal system and that
needs to be saved. Take her to Europe, save her from these bearded men’. Shems

GDMs strategic dilemma of visibility has an international dimension because the members
interact systematically with funders, media outlets, and allied organizations abroad.
According to Currier (2012: 442), LGBT movements contend with a more diffuse set of
forces in the transnational political field, which includes donor agencies, foreign activists, and
Western governments. Clearly, visibility brings vital resources such as funds and political
attention to the legal claims GDM promotes. Currier’s (2007) study of Namibian LGBT
organizations mapped out a similar pattern, as the organizations “leveraged their accrued
national visibility into material benefits and international acclaim” (2007: 120). However, all
the members of GDM underlined the problematic aspects of international relationships. It was
important for the majority of the group to avoid reducing its political cause to a question of
“saving the minorities”, as Omar put it. The group categorically wants to avoid being labeled
as victims, because it entails that they are deprived of agency to change their own situation.
Throughout the conversations with the informants, they consistently brought up the notion of
“victimization”. This notion consisted of a refusal to concede to the imagery of the West,
which presents the Moroccan LGBT community as defenseless victims in lack of any agency
to change their own situation. As Hamid said, when speaking of Western actors’ tendency to
undermine the agency and abilities of Arab LGBT activists:

We are not victims. We are in a situation that is not easy but we work, we live our
lives, we live with our families, we have a life, so we are not victims, even though we
live a difficult life but we are trying to change our situation.

It was important to the members of GDM to remain in their locality and to be authors of their
story. It was essential to inform the international media and co-activists of their context,
because they alone could speak of their own conditions. As Amina put it, when talking about
publishing press releases through their social media channels:

And of course international organizations would know, will know, that this is
something coming from the inside, it’s not that they came from outside to report on it.
We gave them the information to say like, we are from here, and we are telling you
what is happening here.
This thesis has presented ways in which the activists transform difficult conditions into possibilities for protest. And further how they have succeeded in shedding light on violations and changing the course of trials with media campaigning. For the members, it is important that the attention of their Western allies is directed towards these dynamics, instead of portraying the activists as victims of a repressive culture, state, and religion, with no recourse. Some of the members interpreted the victimization a part of to the Western construction of the homosexual Arab. According to della Porta and Diani (1999), social movements often need to produce interpretative frames that outline a broader vision of the issues in order to avoid reducing it. GDM has continuously had to correct the image of them as individuals ridden of agency. They work to present a broader vision which contains their own depiction of Moroccan reality. In this depiction, they are seen as political actors, and not a trope constructed by Western human rights institutions. The vision is materialized through the group’s the strict refusal to comply with the bureaucratic measures demanded by Western donors. The group continues to insist on their organizational model as discussed in chapter 5. The group’s organizational space could in itself be an explaining factor of their strong hostility towards the West’s imposing framing, if one interprets it in light of della Porta and Diani’s (1999) vision of culture as “a set of instruments according to which social actors make sense of their own life experiences” (1999: 68). The organization is where GDM have constructed the strong sense of self, through the group’s spaces of experience and solidarity, as discussed in chapter 5. The activist culture that GDM has constructed contributed to their political strategies in regard to European and North American actors. As Omar told me:

We spend a lot of time thinking about our strategies, on how to use the media without being used ourselves because it’s so problematic because on several occasions, especially by… what we call the blonde medias… meaning European, American, they use us to victimize the queer community. This is dangerous to us, because we do not want to be victimized, we are activists!

Western victimization can also be interpreted as an extension of Jasper and McGarry’s (2015) concept of the identity dilemma. Because the same identity that has been built by the activists themselves, can also be imagined differently by others “and imposed on a group from the outside to oppress or position it in a social hierarchy” (2015: 2). The opposition Omar made between victim and activist serves as an example here. However, the group has to work with this dilemma because they are dependent on, and work to achieve, international visibility.
Visibility attracts donors and allies, and with them resources that are vital for the success of the group. Visibility abroad, as discussed in chapter 6, is one of the primary factors in pressuring the government to acquit or reduce sentences in LGBT arrest cases. Here, the group’s dilemma materializes as they do not want to endorse the majority of the Western political actors that present them as victims to be saved. Furthermore, the group is partially dependent on funding from foreign donors. As Nassim, an informant working for a Moroccan HIV/AIDS organization, described:

To be clear we could never find a Moroccan structure to help or to insert money when it comes to human rights and LGBT people. I mean, we can only turn to structures that recognize that these people exist. And at the same time we can’t work with political agendas, us as militants, as members of the population, we don’t want to be a part of some political story.

Public visibility is crucial for LGBT organizations in order to obtain funding and support from foreign actors (Currier 2007). Several of the informants considered the dilemma to be problematic over several different dimensions. Of foreign aid to GDM, Shems said:

There is nothing human about it, its hard politics. It’s appropriating struggles, appropriating struggles through capital, power. We are very aware of this and for us it’s important not to be in a position of victimization, we are not victims, we don’t want to be used or oriented, we don’t want to be involved in post-colonial relations, these are really sensitive topics for us, because we are really radical when it comes to this. So we try to elaborate strategies so that we don’t have to end all collaborations, because evidently it’s beneficial to us. But at the same time we have to find a balance not to be used.

GDMs wish to work outside the system, as depicted in chapter 5, applies to international structures as well. It was a recurrent perception among informants that their connections with Western institutions where instrumental, in the sense that European and North American actors wanted to use the group as a pawn in a macro-political game. Furthermore, involving foreign agendas in the internal struggles in Morocco could be perceived as a controversial act by local audiences. This depiction resonates with Currier’s (2007) findings in her study of South-African and Namibian LGBT organizations where organizations faced criticism.
nationally for relying on foreign funding. As a consequence, they were perceived as “little more than puppets of Northern donors” (Currier 2007: 158).

**Alternative channels for public occupation**

Almost all the members of GDM consider it dangerous to display their sexual identity publicly, and several of them also mentioned that they had no interest in personal exposure, as it was the group and not the individual that mattered.

Typically, social movements who engage with identity politics aim to improve the conditions of individuals who identify with one single identity group, but often these movements promote more than one identity in the course of claims making (Terriquez 2015: 346). As mapped out in chapters 5 and 6, the members of GDM identify not only as activists that fight for the rights of sexual minorities. They adhere to an alternative project of society, a vision they share with several other groups in the social movement field in today’s Morocco. The identity GDM promotes, surpasses a LGBT identity. It involves identifying as an actor of change who pushes Morocco to be a better society in many different aspects. As discussed, GDMs strategic mobilization is in part acted out through collaborators and alliances locally, nationally and internationally. According to the informants from GDM, ABC function as an explicit local space for GDM to organize activities on the subject anti-homosexuality laws. It was important for the activists to actively participate in political protest in public, outside the social media channels where they primarily operate their visibility. It was equally essential to meet people from the LGBT community and its allies, outside the internet. When talking about doing a collaboration with ABC, Shems said that “it was about doing something outside Mr. Ambassador’s house, doing something in the streets without saying it is GDMs activity.” By operating through ABC, GDM could represent itself visibly – but invisibly – to a broader audience.

Four of the informants from GDM were active members in ABC. They attested to the importance of ABC as a corporal manifestation of the members’ activism. Several of the informants echoed each other in their motivation for participating in ABCs activities. Yassin, a member of GDM that had previously held a prominent position in the ABC general assembly, explained ABCs public activities like this:
The idea is get everyone to participate, that’s why we do the activities in the street and not in an office were we only hang out with each other. Even the people that just walk by in the street, they see groups debating, they get interested and they start participating.

In opposition to GDM, which can only gather privately, away from the public, ABC always organize activities in the open. The GDM members had a common understanding of ABC as incorporating a different set of tools than those of GDM. As GDM is known in the public for their work on media campaigns for the legal rights of sexual minorities, they renounce the possibility to protest publicly. ABC has the capacity to occupy public space, and to work with different tools. ABC can be interpreted as something more than an ally or a partner. To some of the members of GDM, ABC is a vessel, a space that one can fill with any political content. A place where one can play out a multitude of aspects of the activist identity. The informants feel there is no discrimination, and no stigmatization within this space. As Omar, an active member of both GDM and ABC, told me:

In ABC there is this space (…) when I speak I’m not representing myself as a homosexual or as GDM, because I’m not obliged to. If it wasn’t for ABC… it’s through them that the circle grows bigger. It’s a space where you can meet people that share your ideas and your principles.

The participation in ABC does not demand a strategic deployment of visibility. Or the strategic representation of the LGBT identity as not to possibly provoke an audience. The position as an activist for the betterment of the educational system is not characterized as marginal or controversial. As Omar said, one is not obliged to represent a community. Having ABC as an alternative site for protest is a means for the members of GDM to act out direct political participation.

However, the informants from ABC had experienced the consequences of collaborating with GDM. Karim, a member of ABC, told me that “there’s always this game with the media”, when it comes to ABCs possible connection to the LGBT cause. He evoked the aftermath of a demonstration in the commemoration of the M20: “The media came to interrogate us on the LGBT question, but we wanted to talk about education (…) the media only wants to talk about LGBTs because they know it will make a buzz”. This serves as an example of the difficult terrain GDM has to work in, because the state and mainstream media outlets “want to
instrumentalize us, so that they can put us in a box and divide us. But in reality there is a plurality of causes”, as Karim said. According to several of its members, ABC also needed to be strategic in their priorities, and in their defense of GDMs cause. Karim said:

“It’s a strategy, cause it’s a question that has been there these last years, that ‘yes, GDM we have a good relationship with them’, but up to what point, and can we expose ourselves, how does it affect our communication, you know…”

It is clear that the betterment of the rights of sexual minorities in Morocco is a difficult political struggle to navigate, for GDM but also for ABC. It is important for ABC to provide support for GDM, and to be active allies of solidarity. In parallel, it’s problematic that ABCs support generates obstacles for the communication on their own cause, the reform of the educational system. Jasper and McGarry (2015) state that where there is conflict over identities in social movements, external players attempt to fragment a movement by challenging the legitimacy of its identity. The informants of ABC interpreted the mediation of the LGBT cause similarly, because the general activist identity of the social movement was juxtaposed with the LGBT cause. This could be a recurrent strategy of the state, as the mainstream media equally has tried to assimilate the identity of the GDM activist with the sexual minority community.

Conclusion

GDM works strategically with its visibility, as the members try to adapt the form and message of their claims in face of different audiences. I have discussed GDMs construction of visibility in relation to Jasper and McGarry’s concept of the identity dilemma. GDMs identity as LGBT activist can be used as a means to oppress the group and the sexual minority population. Therefore, GDM emphasizes the political aspects of its cause, as the members communicate to the sexual minority community, the Moroccan authorities and majority population, and international collaborators and allies. Theory on LGBT movements often accentuates visibility as a sign of an organization’s success (Bernstein 1997, 2002; Currier 2007). However, a LGBT group that operates within a constraining context often has to apply strategies of abeyance, as invisibility can be crucial. An important example to enhance in this regard, is GDMs main strategy of documentation of arrests of sexual minorities, as depicted in
Due to security measures, the group stays silent about this work, and may as a consequence appear to be inactive.

Further, visibility is positive for the group in the sense that it brings resources in terms of funding and pressure from foreign institution on the Moroccan state. The informants describe their relationship with European and North American actors as difficult and complex. This is because the West operate with an image of the group as a marginalized individuals without alternatives for action. The group is aware of this aspect of transnational collaborations, and has developed strategies of identity.

The members of GDM can seek alternative channels for public protests. ABC, a student group founded by fellow activists is especially emphasized. ABC can function as a vessel for GDM in a broader mobilization of the LGBT community and its allies. This can be interpreted as GDM largest issue, as there are obstacles inhibiting the group from reaching out to the sexual minority community in Morocco. Considering the constraining context GDM works with, the members have chosen to direct their activities towards political structures, rather than social and cultural issues. In this specific fields, the actors involved are the Moroccan authorities and international institutions, in place of the sexual minority community.
8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I start by presenting the main findings of the thesis. Further, I will move on to discuss the main theoretical implications that can be derived from the analysis, in accordance with the main research problematic: “What role does identity play in lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans movements in repressive contexts?” I have chosen to discuss two concepts in particular, notably “space of solidarity” and “visibility”. I argue that they touch on areas of social movement theory (SMT) that are less elaborated, and that they therefore can contribute to expand on the knowledge we have on social movement dynamics.

GDMs members’ trajectories into activism are varied. We have seen that M20 did not provide an arena for mobilizing for LGBT rights. Many of the activists did not engage in political activity before they constituted Group in Defense of Minorities (GDM). The group’s establishment has forged and sustained the individuals’ agency as activists. I find that the activists have constructed a space of solidarity through the group, where they can express their opinions on the injustices of the current Moroccan society. Further, they can reflect on strategies on how to improve the conditions of the LGBT population. The members’ perceptions of this space are different, and some regard it as a tool for collective action. Within this space, they have learned from each other, in terms of skill sets, experiences, and ideas. The group’s internal dynamics, in which the members emphasize the importance of friendship and solidarity, have reinforced their commitment to activism. Their commitment is equally sustained by how the organizational structure is played out: there is no hierarchy, and each decision is made by consensus. This way, the group functions as the embodiment of an alternative that is constructed in opposition to the society they live in.

It is within this space that the members develop strategies for political mobilization. Repression from the state – explicitly formulated through laws that forbid LGBT organizing but also through the form of surveillance and threats of identity disclosure, has an important impact on the alternatives for protest. Repression, or threats of repression, has made the group change its strategies, to the point that it in parts lost its direct ties with the LGBT community. The group concentrates its efforts on the strategies of documentation and denunciation. These strategies consist of documenting LGBT arrest cases and denouncing the arrests through media campaigns and collaborations with national and international human rights organizations. Networks and collaborations play a vital role in this regard, because GDM
often needs to confirm information on LGBT arrests and violence with larger national human rights organizations. The constraints GDM faces in its work force the members to be creative and to expand their work to involve allies and fellow activists on an individual level. By working with individuals from different organizations, GDM aims to gradually change other human rights organizations’ value systems in order to obtain a recognition of the rights of sexual minorities as a part of their human rights policies. Collaborations with institutional actors are often characterized as instrumental.

GDM is involved with different audiences over several dimensions. The activists have to construct their work in regards to both cultural and political visibility and invisibility. The case of GDM shows that activists have to mobilize strategically not only in relation to state actors, but also to the majority population, the LGBT community, and international human rights actors. Foremost, GDM needs visibility in order to apply pressure on the Moroccan authorities, and it is key in the mobilization of allies internationally and nationally in Morocco. Western media channels are an opportunity for GDM to communicate its message and to mobilize more audiences, in order to pressure the Moroccan authorities. It is important to emphasize that, in many cases, this strategy has worked, and LGBT individuals have been acquitted from trial. Still, the strategy poses a dilemma for GDM, because they refuse to be a part of the story that the foreign media, “the blonde media”, often applies when reporting on sexual minorities in the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The group’s visibility can be used to promote an alternative representation of sexual minorities in Morocco. However, visibility brings along hostile audiences and external actors that impose different meanings to the LGBT identity. This echoes Jasper and McGarry’s (2015) concept of the identity dilemma. Fighting stigma is difficult when the members have to consider how their struggle affects the social conditions of the majority of sexual minorities. According to informants from GDM and the LGBT community, sexual minorities do not want to politicize their identity because it could result in further repression from the state and the majority population. GDM has chosen to withdraw parts of their activity from public visibility. This was partly in response to the repression they had encountered from the authorities, but also to avoid further stigmatization of the LGBT population.
Main theoretical contributions

Space of solidarity

The organizational space of solidarity and experience that the members of GDM have constructed, which are mapped out in chapter 5, echoes findings from a plurality of historical and contemporary studies of social movements. According to Calhoun, one of the central features of new social movements (NSMs) has been “their insistence that the organizational forms and styles of movement practice must exemplify the values the movement seeks to promulgate” (Calhoun 1993: 404). This means that the movement can function as an end in itself because it provides a space that stands in opposition to the society it is protesting. Furthermore, Calhoun (1993) argues that the conceptualization of these movements as a new phenomenon is misguided, partly because social movements as far back as the 1840s professed to follow an anti-hierarchal and non-oppressive ideology. Polletta and Jasper (2001) argue that solidarity and identity is worked on within a movement through “identity talk”, which changes selves and relationships “in ways that extend beyond the movement” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 296). The space of solidarity that the members of GDM have constructed is an example of such work. The space allows them to retract from overt collective protest into the group, where they can discuss and debate freely. My study indicates that this space is necessary in the reinforcement and sustainability of LGBT activism. Gould (2002; 2009) argues similarly, in her research on AIDS activists in the US organization Act Up during the 80s and 90s. As in the case of GDM, the members of Act Up maintain their commitment in the face of repression by joining forces, and consequentially increasing their ability to politically affect their situation.

The concept of activist spaces is found in research on movements in different parts of the world. The Zapatista movement in Mexico is an example of movements that expand on spaces of participation. Pleyers (2010) argues that participation is especially important for the Zapatistas, because they do not have legal spaces of participation in national political life. According to the author, identifying as an activist equals actively looking for political alternatives for social change, and the Zapatista movement offers the activists a space where they can completely construct themselves (Pleyers 2010). Here, there are clear parallels with the internal structure of GDM, which is tightly intertwined with the group’s collective identity construction. I interpret GDMs space of solidarity as developed in response to the
constraining context they work in. The ways in which many of the informants expressed desire to free themselves from the constraints of the Moroccan society echo in large parts the aspirations of the activists in Pleyers’ (2010) study. In many aspects, the analysis of the GDM activists’ space of solidarity confirms Pleyers’ (2010) findings. The activists of GDM work in an intimate space they have constructed in opposition to the Moroccan society they want to change. In many ways, their space is a mirror of the alternative society they struggle to build.

The interconnections of visibility and identity

Similarly to what continues to happen in some Western settings, it is only when homosexual identity is asserted and homosexuals demand respect, as such, that they are deemed a threat to the social order (Dalacoura 2014: 1302).

Being one of the sole groups working for LGBT and gender rights in Morocco, the target audiences of GDMs actions can be interpreted as multi-dimensional. Take the example of the group’s first collective protest that was described in chapter 5. By posting an anonymous letter from “a gay man that could have been your brother or your friend”, the group tries to normalize the LGBT identity. In line with the US feminist movements of the 60s and 70s, GDM “claim political meaning for what is often viewed as cultural or personal behavior” (Bernstein 2002: 536). It sends a strong message to the LGBT community, the majority population, and to cultural and political institutions. I interpret the visibility produced by this action as both cultural and political, following Bernstein’s (2002) criticism of the theoretical divide between political and cultural movements. Further, I draw on Jasper and McGarry (2015) who affirm that collective identities within movements can provide resources and be a source of pride. GDMs space of solidarity works as an example of identity as a tool for internal reinforcement. However, this “identity of empowerment” (Bernstein 1997) can also be subjected to repression and stigmatization by external audiences.

The study of GDMs visibility also reflect the multidimensional nature of GDMs strategies. One example of the interconnections of identity and visibility is representation (Duyvendak 1996). Here, Jasper and McGarry’s (2015) concept of the identity dilemma contributes to map out the stakes of GDMs collective identity. GDMs identity can be redefined and imposed by external actors, and made to present not only the group but also the sexual minority population in Morocco. This redefinition stigmatizes the LGBT activists and brings unwanted political attention to the sexual minority population. The members of GDM were aware of
this dilemma. Several of the informants clearly stated that they did not represent anyone but themselves, and further explained that the majority of the LGBT population did not want political mobilization on its behalf. Several scholars have studied this dilemma of representation and collective action in the name of membership interests (Gamson 1995; Duyvendak 1996; Nagle 2016). Tilly and Tarrow (2007: 74) evoke the Zapatistas in Mexico as an example of how the mobilization of an identity does not automatically derive from the existence of a social base to which it corresponds. Similarly, both Gamson (1995) and Adam et al. (1999) argue that being a sexual minority does not necessarily entail the feeling of belonging to a certain identity, or to a membership with certain interests. If an oppressed identity automatically would become a politically engaged actor, then there would be a wave of movements fighting for the cause, both in the case of the Zapatistas, and GDM and sexual minority rights in Morocco.

GDMs construction of visibility provides insights into the interplay between the activists and the external actors in their surroundings; audiences, targets, and allies. In the analysis of GDMs strategic visibility, I have drawn on Johnston’s (2005; 2006; 2015) perspective on overt and covert activism. As discussed in chapter 3, Johnston (2015) argues that collective protest could pass unnoticed by traditional political process theory. The constraining context GDM works within limits the protest forms available. The strategies the group applies are to a large extent not disclosed to any audience, in fear of state reactions. Therefore, one cannot assume that social movement success is primarily measured by public visibility, as has been the case in many studies of LGBT movements in the US (Johnston 2015). It is difficult to evaluate a social movement organization’s impact only by looking at its success in achieving explicitly stated goals. Relating to this, the members of GDM said that the abolition of the anti-homosexuality law was a strategic long-term goal which would not be attainable for many years. Many aspects of GDMs mobilization strategies play out through backchannels and silent collaborations, pursuing short term goals such as national and international denunciation of LGBT arrests. Insights into these dynamics would be lost without an expansion of the concept of visibility.

**Suggestions for further research**

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, there are few studies on LGBT activism in Morocco. My study has empirically contributed by bringing new insights into the dynamics of
Moroccan LGBT movements in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. It provides empirical knowledge of LGBT mobilization outside the context of Europe and North America, and contributes to further build on SMT’s understanding of identity-based movement dynamics. The study gives insight into how identity affects the elaboration of a political collectivity, and the strategical decisions a social movement group makes in the face of a constraining context.

The concept of visibility can contribute in the theoretical discussion on identity-based social movements in repressive contexts, as it expands on the political and cultural dimensions of visibility. It would be fruitful to elaborate on the concept of visibility in further research on LGBT activism in Morocco by broadening the scope of the study to include the perceptions of actors from the current Moroccan social movement. This could possibly give more insights into the political field that surrounds LGBT activists. The concept could also shed light on transnational dynamics in the region, by applying it in the study of how different LGBT groups organize overt and covert collective protest. Taking into account the similarities of the anti-homosexuality laws in Morocco and Tunisia, it could be interesting to conduct a comparative study of the two LGBT movements and the interplay between them.
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94


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All references listed in this thesis have been reported.

Word count: 38223
Appendix 1: Final interview guide

(Background: Age, sex, profession, education, type of residence, education and profession of parents.)

1. Entry into activism.
   a. Tell me about the first time you participated in a political activity.
      i. How did you hear about it?
      ii. Who did you go with?
   b. Tell me about the first time you felt like an activist.
      i. What happened further?

2. Tell me about the group.
   a. How did you establish the group?
   b. How are you connected with the other members?

3. How does the group act?
   a. How do you want to change society?
      i. Individually.
      ii. Collectively.
   b. What are your strategies and tactics?
      i. How do you elaborate strategies?

4. Broader connections.
   a. Do you work with others?
   b. How is the group connected to a broader environment?
   c. Tell me about coalitions with other LGBT organizations in the region.
   d. How is your relationship with the LGBT community?

5. Tell me about your context.
   a. How does repression influence your work?

6. Do you use public space?

7. Did you vote for the elections?
Appendix 2: Request to participate in study

Demande de participation au projet de recherche

"Etre LGBTI au sein du mouvement social des jeunes au Maroc"

Chères - chers membres ,

Je souhaite orienter mon mémoire de master vers l'étude des dynamiques sociales de groupe de jeunes activistes LGBTI marocains, au sein de l'espace des jeunes organisés post-2011 au Maroc. J'espère donc mener un travail sur le collectif , dont j'ai eu la chance de connaître partiellement l'action lors de mon séjour de six mois au Maroc l'année dernière.

Ce travail de recherche, qui durera un an - jusqu'au juin 2017, fait partie de mon master en sociologie de l'Université d'Oslo, mais sera aussi intégré dans le projet Power2Youth, un projet universitaire international qui consiste en une approche globale à la compréhension de l'exclusion des jeunes et aux perspectives de changement menées par les jeunes dans la Méditerranée du Sud et de l'Est. (Toutes les informations sur le projet: http://www.power2youth.eu/project#sthash.oaG5xurP.dpbs). Le projet inclut des contributions des centres de recherches et des universités de l'Union Européenne et de la Méditerranée de l'Est et du Sud.

Mon étude portera sur des entretiens et l'observation participative au sein de Collectif. Je souhaiterais mener des entretiens semi-structurés avec des membres actifs, qui couvriront des questions sur les activités du groupe; les relations que tiennent le Collectif avec d'autres groupes du mouvement; la dynamique interne du groupe, y compris la structure organisationnelle et la plateforme idéologique. Les entretiens seront enregistrés sur un magnétophone, en plus de mes propres notes manuscrites. La recherche s'étendra sur les relations de solidarité tissées – avec d'autres groupes de jeunes activistes, mais aussi à l'intérieur du Collectif même. La problématique étant: Comment l'identité LGBT forge-t-elle la participation sociale et politique du Collectif? Comment cette participation affectera leur identité collective ? Toutes les données personnelles des membres seront traitées confidentiellement. Moi seule ainsi que mon superviseur ayant accès à ces données personnelles. La liste des participants sera gardée séparément des autres données. Je rendrais tous les participants anonymes sans possibilité de reconnaissance dans la publication finale.

La participation au projet se fera sous la forme du volontariat, et vous pourrez à tout moment retirer votre consentement sans donner d'explication. Si vous déciderez de vous retirer du projet, toutes vos données seront sous le couvert de l'anonymat.

L'étude est soutenue par l'Ombudsman de la Confidentialité de Recherche.

N'hésitez pas à me contacter concernant toute question sur le contenu du projet ou le traitement des données. Ma responsable de mémoire, Professeure Mette Andersson, sera aussi à votre disposition au numéro + 47 22854974.

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