Emigration as a Political Stance? Moroccan Migrants' Narratives of Dignity, Human Rights and Minority Identities in Transnational Context

Anna Virkama
University of Tampere

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Abstract

The protest movements known as the Arab Spring brought the frustration and disappointment of the North African citizens with their governments to the world's attention. Five years after the Arab Spring, the issues of human rights and individual freedom remain important issues in the democratic transition of the Arab societies. Since the countries in North Africa have also been important migrant sending countries for decades, the connection between mass emigration and human right issues forms an interesting research area. This empirical article aims to bring a new perspective to the debate by analysing the narratives dignity, human rights and minority identities of 80 Moroccan migrants living in France. The article first identifies four particularly vulnerable groups among the migrants: women, disabled people, homosexuals and ethnic minorities. It demonstrates how the migration project in case of many study and labour migrant was also motivated by issues related to personal freedom and dignity. Finally, the article discusses the emerging forms of political participation, identities and connections in transnational context and argues for more research on the role of diasporas in the socio-cultural transformations in the North African societies.

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EMIGRATION AS A POLITICAL STANCE?
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AND MINORITY IDENTITIES IN TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

The protest movements known as the Arab Spring brought the frustration and disappointment of the North African citizens with their governments to the world's attention. Now, five years after the Arab Spring, the issues of human rights and individual freedom remain important issues in the democratic transition of the Arab societies. Since the countries in North Africa have also been important migrant sending countries for decades, the connection between mass emigration and human right issues forms an interesting research area. This empirical article aims to bring a new perspective to the debate by analysing the narratives dignity, human rights and minority identities of 80 Moroccan migrants living in France. The article first identifies four particularly vulnerable groups among the migrants: women, disabled people, homosexuals and ethnic minorities. It demonstrates how the migration project in case of many student and labour migrant was also motivated by issues related to personal freedom and dignity. Finally, the article discusses the emerging forms of political participation, identities and connections in transnational context and argues for more research on the role of diasporas in the socio-cultural transformations in the North African societies.

1. Introduction

High youth unemployment rate, difficult economic conditions and wide gaps in income levels have been generally identified as the causes that triggered off the revolts in the Arab World in 2010. But the protests and revolutions were not only about the economy: the Arab people were as much out on the streets to demand human rights, dignity and personal freedom. Five years after the Arab Spring, corruption, women's rights and the issues of religious and ethnic minorities are still among the challenges that North African societies face in their post-Arab Spring transitions towards democracy.

Most North African societies are important migrant sending countries, and have been so for decades. Maghreb countries have large diaspora communities in Europe, including intellectuals who have chosen or have been forced to live in exile. For some, exile can be a strategic political decision (Kadri, 2012:19, 25). A new stream of research literature is emerging after the Arab Spring, linking the migration and politics in the Arab world, and particularly in the important migrant-sending countries in North Africa such as Tunisia and Morocco (Brand, 2010 & 2014; de Haas & Sigona, 2012; Fargues & Fandrich, 2012, Natter, 2015). Indeed, the role of the diaspora communities can be important in the post-Arab Spring transitions as the modern communication technology allows the migrants to maintain intensive ties with their communities of origin.

In this empirical article I am asking what is the relationship between human rights and minority identities in migrants' emigration decision. My focus is not on migrants who have applied for a political asylum seeker status or otherwise identify themselves primarily as political refugees, but rather as study or labour migrants. Yet, as I will argue in this paper, many have also personal reasons related to a status as a woman or a minority, or they see emigration as the only solution towards increased individual freedom. Finally, I will look at the political potential of the transnational migrant community.

The first analysis of the Arab Spring in North African context highlighted the frustration of the young people with regard to employment and perspectives of upward social mobility. In the light of the existing research literature it is now known that four decades of failed educational

programmes and structural adjustment has produced a whole generation of young people that never integrated into the local labour market. In addition, in North African societies the power has been maintained in the hands of few established families, who thereby transfer their position to their children, leaving very limited possibilities for social promotion through education. Limited perspectives for social mobility, political change or economic prosperity has lead numerous graduates to cross the Mediterranean to look for opportunities in Europe even sometimes at the risk of their own safety. This 'youth culture of despair' has lead to massive participation in the protests starting in December 17, in 2010 (Boum, 2011:239.)

The frustration of the youth in Maghreb has also been explained by cultural patterns of patriarchal society, which traditionally excludes young people and women from the political, economic and social system. The leading elites generally belong to the older generation. The opinions of younger people are not taken seriously, leaving them with no voice in public affairs. In North African context where population in average is young, political leaders may also manipulate the idea of the "people" as immature and undisciplined children who need to be controlled. (Serres, 2013, 13, 20-21.) This has excluded many young people from the politics, leaving them with few means to participate in the civil society or decision making.

Therefore it is no surprise that many students have "voted with their feet", leaving their country for studies abroad. Maghreb countries have globally high rate of internationally mobile students[1], and the governments have encouraged the student emigration as a way to ease the situation of over-crowded national universities. France has traditionally been the most popular destination for university students coming from Maghreb countries. Of the three Maghreb countries, Morocco has relatively largest community of citizens abroad with over 4,5 million citizens living in other countries. Remittances migrants send back to their home country are seen by some scholars as an indicator of strong ties that migrants maintain with their country of origin.

Although the above mentioned reasons are all relevant factors triggering emigration from North Africa, there are, as I will argue in this paper, also personal reasons related to the issues of individual freedoms, migrant's position as a woman or a minority, or dignity as a human being in general. I will look at these themes in the narratives of Moroccan transnational migrants living in France. Finally, I am formulating a hypothesis of the type of influence and participation transnational communities can have in their country of origin.

The qualitative data for this study were collected in between 2008-2011 as a part of an international, research project called *TRANS-NET: Migration and Transformation. Multi-Level Analysis of Migrant Transnationalism,* funded by the European Commission[2]. The project analysed how people's activities across national borders emerge, function and change, and how they were related to the processes of governance in increasingly complex and interconnected world (Pitkänen et al., 2012).

In this article I analyse the research data in the light of the discourses on dignity, human rights, women's and minority rights and individual freedom in North African and transnational context. The total data collected in France made up to 80 semi-structured and life course interviews in total. The respondents were Moroccan migrants between 22 and 60 years old, both men (N=56) and women (N=24). All respondents were born and raised Muslims, although some of them declared themselves as atheists. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in three different parts of France: in the South (Montpellier), in the North (Lille) and in the capital city (Paris). All the in-depth life course interviews (N=20) were conducted in Paris.

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[1]

The average outbound mobility ration for Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia was 5,3 % in 2012, whereas the global average is 1,8%. UNESCO (2012)

[2]

European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for Research under Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities theme. TRANS-NET project consortium involved research teams in eight partner countries: Finland, Estonia, India, France, Morocco, Germany, Turkey and Great Britain.

Although the respondents had varied migration backgrounds they all held in common that they maintained frequent contacts with Morocco and can be thus described as 'transnational migrants' (Virkama et al., 2012). All of the student migrants interviewed used internet mediated programs such as Skype to stay in touch with the family and friends, whereas the older generation used also telephone. Many respondents had already migrated to other countries before arriving in France, and they had previously lived in countries, mainly in Europe. Those who had arrived with a work contract had arrived before 1974, others had arrived on other type of visas (family reunification, tourist, health...), but the majority of them had arrived as students. General profile of the respondents was tertiary-educated and from urban background. At the time of the interviews, less than a third of respondents had been naturalized as French citizens.

2. When the Personal is Political: Identifying Vulnerable Groups

I first identified from the interview data groups that were particularly vulnerable with regard to the current social, political and cultural context of Morocco. When respondents were asked about their motivations to emigrate the answers generally ranged from the curiosity to see the world to access to a specific professional training programme not available in Morocco. Some respondents named family reasons, such as marriage. But for sexual minorities, individuals with physical handicaps and women living in Morocco it was particularly difficult for the reasons I will discuss below.

2.1. Women: Emigration for Increased Individual Freedom

Although women's position in Moroccan society has improved during the past decades in terms of access to education, jobs and legal rights, women still enjoy considerably less individual freedom than their male counterparts. Women, particularly those who do not fit into the patriarchal ideal reserved for women as mothers and spouses are the ones who face most difficulties in their relationships with others. It is no coincidence that the two cases named in the social media as "Moroccan Bouazizi"are women. The first case happened in February 2011, when a single mother of two, Fedwa Laroui, committed a suicide. According to Reuters News, she became "the first Arab Woman known to have set herself on fire in a protest at social conditions after Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation on December 17"(Karam & Williams, 2011). The second case was a 16 years old girl Amina Al Filali who committed a suicide in order to avoid forced marriage to a man who twice raped her, in order to save the family's honor, as reported by Huffington Post (Schemm, 2012).

For female respondents, the situation of living in a society with strictly divided gender roles can be even harder. Although Morocco has more women in public positions than many other Arab Muslim countries, in many areas of public and everyday life women still feel discriminated. One of the cultural taboos is the inter-religious marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man. Whereas a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman, a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim man unless the latter converts to Islam.

One respondent, Samira[3], an Algerian-Moroccan young woman who had married a non-Muslim man and moved to France with him, described how the situation in Morocco became unbearable for her due to her outspoken personality. She felt that despite growing up in Algeria at the time of the civil war, there was still more freedom of speech and political participation in Algeria than what she found in Morocco. Her way of expressing opinions in a very direct way lead her to conflicts with other people, and she was advised to keep her opinions to herself.

> *I had learned my way of speaking in Algeria, and I soon came to realize*
> *that it was not appropriate in Morocco, as a woman, as a Muslim*
> *and as a subject of monarchy.*

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[3]   To protect the anonymity of the respondents, pseudonyms are used in this article.

Samira had found a way to escape from the situation through work: she was recruited by an international airline company and became a flight attendant. Thus she had the opportunity to become financially independent, leave her paternal hometown in Southern Morocco and to move first to Casablanca, and later to France. Most of all, she became financially independent from her father.

> *For me, it was also a way of escaping from this system where girls are expected to sit and wait for the Prince Charming. ---the submission: let's put it how it is. An education to be submissive.*

For other female migrants, too, decision to migrate may have been triggered by the desire to break free from the society's expectations. One female respondent's family planned to marry her to a close family member without her own agreement when she was 19 years old. She was supposed to join her future husband at the airport in Paris, but took advantage of him arriving late and escaped to join her relatives in another city of France.

> *I asked a couple I met in the plane to host me so that I can meet my family members in X* [a city in Central France] *and I escaped with only 100 euros in my pocket. That was the beginning of my adventure towards the struggle, independence and success.*

Highly educated women can have more personal freedom than uneducated women, but at the same time they have to compete with men for jobs in already saturated labour market. Yet, even satisfying professional situation does not make up for limited personal freedom, as when the level of education rises, the aspirations tend to rise as well. As one female respondent put it:

> *My travels to this country* [France] *have allowed me to discover another culture, another way of life, another way of working and freedom to act. I am Moroccan, I used to live and work in Morocco with a good salary compared to many other professional categories, but I had the impression that we are not really living there. The economical situation is catastrophic and for young people, the future is blocked. They just serve to support the walls in Casa* [Casablanca] *and Rabat and other cities.*

With regards to individual freedom of women, she added: "...and for us, the girls, outside of working hours and school we could not go out, to go for a walk, to a party, to live, in other words."

2.2. Homosexuals and other sexual minorities

The interview data also revealed experiences of persons belonging to sexual minority groups. Their situation is complicated as they feel their personal lives and freedom restricted in their home country and often see emigration as the only option towards better quality of life. Homosexuality, considered *haram* in Islam, is officially banned in Morocco and there is a strong social stigma attached to homosexuality.

From the whole data set, two men identified themselves as homosexuals. One of them, a 35 years old man, expressed that living with his same-sex partner was impossible in Morocco, and for that reason he had applied for a student visa to France. He told in the interview that his close family was aware and did not judge his sexual orientation, but living in Morocco openly with his partner would have been impossible..

> *I admit I am very lucky with my family, because although they are Arabs and Muslims they accept the fact that I am homosexual. But to me it would have been impossible to live a satisfying life over there* [in Morocco].

In this case, it is not the question of being persecuted, but the unwillingness to live hiding his true identity and to live openly with the partner of his choice.

Other respondent, Karim, had different experience, as his homosexuality was not accepted by his family, and he in fact described himself as living in France as a"symbolic exile".

> *I could not stay in Morocco anymore. I knew some people have started to have doubts about my sexual orientation. I was afraid my family would find out. I was horrified by this idea. It's good I could leave, this way I can keep my secret.*

Karim had relatives in France, but he deliberately moved to different region and maintained as little contact with them as possible.

The shame and embarrassment related to their sexual identity would probably prevent homosexuals to build a mass movement or to claim visibility. But the narratives about the acceptance of the family suggest that the homosexuals can at least, in certain cases, influence the way their family members perceive homosexuality. Although the rights of the sexual minorities were not high on agenda in the Arab Spring protests they may have still helped to break the discursive silence about the topics such as homosexuality. In Egypt, for example, reports the *Foreign Policy* magazine, "a quiet social revolution" is taking place: women leaving hijabs and more and more people dare to discuss taboo topics such as atheism and sexual minorities, defying not only the Islamists, but also the "establishment" Islam represented by the current government (Debeuf & Abdelmeguid, 2015).

2.3. People with physical disabilities or chronic illnesses

A third group of people I could identify from the data who did not feel that their rights were respected in Morocco or who could not live satisfying life there were persons with physical disabilities or chronic illnesses. Although living with a sickness or disability can be a burden in any country in the world, especially if there is no access to appropriate care, in the case of North African societies it is also about the socio-cultural factors such as discrimination.

One female migrant with a physical disability had been helped by an association for disabled people to achieve a resident permit in France, and despite many administrative struggles she had to go through she said:"The situation of disabled people in Morocco is shameful. There is no real state policy to improve the situation, and that leads to hopelessness and suicides [of the disabled persons]."

This problem was even brought up by Khaled, 38 years old migrant who had no disabilities, but dealt with the issue in his work as a doctor. He had intended to return to Morocco to live and work there, but finally he ended up going back to France as he did not like the way the patients were treated there:

> *Here* [in France] *you learn to work a lot, to be present and to do things with your hands, to be available for the patient, talk to him, respect his rights. Colleagues who stayed in the country* [in Morocco] *have never seen how things are done elsewhere, and unfortunately, they don't do this...*

The discrimination is not only related to the ways how disabled people and their capacities are perceived by the society, but also to questions such as who is entitled to treatment and therapy.

A 28 years old female respondent was moving to France to treat her infertility problem. In her opinion, corruption in the health care sector was a wide spread practice and a problem in Morocco: "We know that here [in France] a doctor will do his best to help you. There [in Morocco] it's not necessarily the case, if you don't bring him presents..."

Not only was infertility hard to bear in a cultural environment where motherhood, is sacralized but in addition she did not feel that the doctors treat their patients equally. Therefore, the situation of disabled people or people with chronic diseases is difficult for many reasons. First, dealing with an illness may as such be consuming, leaving very little energy for political or associative activities. Second, as medical care without social protection might be costly, the sick

and the disabled often suffer from economic exclusion. For the third, certain medical conditions such as mental problems, infertility or HIV/aids carry such as strong cultural stigma that claiming one's rights in public may come with high social costs.

As in case of homosexual migrants, for disabled people living in other cultural environment may open the eyes to see the rights they could in Europe, or in the US. Considering the social remittances perspective, migrants may be influential in changing the views of their peers in the home country. After seeing that in other countries, with right support a different conditions an individual with real or perceived incapacitates can success, can change their attitudes towards the group and increase acceptance of their political rights.

2.4 Ethnic and Religious Minorities and Cross-cultural Relationships

The issue of ethnic and religious minorities and multiculturalism remains a taboo in the whole Arab world (Ennaji, 2014:5). Despite the fact that before the founding of Israel in 1948 Morocco had the largest Jewish population of the Arab world, the country's Jewish history is not familiar to many Muslim Moroccans. Therefore it was surprising how many respondents had close relationships with Jewish persons in France and how some of them were curious about the Judaism as a religion. Only in France they had started to think about the Jewish heritage in Moroccan culture.

It is possible that the individuals who decide to migrate are already initially more open towards other cultures, but migration experience and minority position may also influence the way how people perceive diversity. At least the data showed that many migrants were open-minded towards other cultures and religions, and towards multiculturalism in general. This was, for example, the case of Lamia, who despite of being a young Muslim woman was studying Hebrew literature in France: a discipline she did not find in Morocco. She said: "The Jewish culture is not very much talked about in Morocco. We totally ignore this part of our culture".

Also other respondents showed curiosity towards Jewish and Israeli culture. Yasmina, 28 years old IT consultant and practicing Muslim, was working in a multinational company where cultural diversity was a norm. She was celebrating holidays of other cultures, including Israeli national holiday -something that she would have been unlikely to do in Morocco:

> *When it was an Irish fest, we celebrated that, and when it was an Israeli national holiday, we celebrated that too. When it was Ramadan, we brought some cakes, and we also celebrated everyone's birthdays.*

Inter-religious relationships were not only limited to the professional and academic fields, but they were also part of intimate friendships. Maryam described how when she arrived in France she settled down in the Jewish neighbourhood in Paris and received help from her neighbours when she was raising her children as a divorced single mother.

> *In Morocco, my family had lots of contacts with Jews and my aunt lived in Mellah* [the Jewish quarter] *so here* [in Paris] *I had my* [Jewish] *aunt upstairs and another aunt downstairs, and they liked to have me around.*

For her, socializing with Jewish persons was natural due to her family background, but she often felt that she had to justify herself to some other Muslim migrants.

The minority question is not only related to religious minorities, but also to the ethnic ones. In Moroccan context particularly the Berbers (Amazigh) are an important ethnc minority, although according to Ennaji (2014) the Berbers in Morocco and Algeria refuse to be defined as minorities. However, the Amazigh cultural movement refers to the historical fact that North Africa was, before Arab conquests, a Berber region (Ennaji, 2014:7). However, the recognition of the Amazigh language alongside with the official Arabic language was one of the demands of the 20th February movement.

A Berber musician, 43 years old man, came to France as a marriage migrant, but at the same time emigration opened up more professional opportunities than in Morocco.
This, as he saw it, was closely related to his identity as a Berber musician:

> *In Morocco, all the doors are closed for Berber singers, they are excluded from the TV programmes and due to the complicated bureaucracy it is very hard to organize concerts   unless you are a big star.*

Another aspect related to the emerging political identities in transnational space is the increased contact with other North Africans, mainly Tunisians and Algerians. Due to many border conflicts between the countries in the past and the ongoing border conflict between Morocco and Algeria in Western Sahara, the travel between Maghreb countries has been limited. Many respondents mentioned that during their study years in France they have found many friends from other Maghreb nationals, which they did not have when living in Morocco. In a multicultural study environment many students found it easier to socialize with other North African students than with the French ones. They gathered together for traditional celebrations such as Ramadan meals. Being in a foreign country with different culture and religion had helped respondents to become aware of many similarities the Maghreb countries share with regard to traditions and gastronomy. The respondents reported increased awareness of identity as North Africans, but also as Arabs. This awareness also encouraged them to follow the current political events and developments not only in their own country of origin but also in the whole Arab region.

3. Role of Transnational Communities in Political Transformations

I have now identified some issues related to sexual, ethnic and religious identities from the narratives of Moroccan transnational migrants. In several cases, emigration decision was motivated by search for more personal freedom, dignity and more rights as a person belonging to a minority. The next question is: can the transnational community contribute into the transition towards democracy and human rights in the country of origin? If yes, how?

Until today, Moroccan residents abroad do not have right to vote in homeland elections, even if their eventual right to vote has been discussed for already three decades. According to Moroccan website *Yabiladi*[4] in 2014 three law projects have been proposed to allow the diaspora not only the right to vote but also to have their own representative in the parliament. But, as the emerging research stream on transnational political activities attempts to show, cross-border political activism does not have to be limited to overseas voting.

Seen from the historical perspective, France has for long offered a fertile ground for migrant political activities and associations. According to Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad (1999: 145) the political or "militant" emigration from Maghreb started to emerge after the second World War, at the same time with the *en masse* labor migration to France. Among the migrant workers, who were mainly agricultural and industrial low-skilled workers, some were politically active already before emigration whereas others politicised when abroad. In colonial Algeria, where the colonial subjects were denied all kind of political expression and participation, the metropolitan France was still perceived and idealised as the country of freedom of expression, human rights and liberal politics. The anti-colonialism and different leftist, or communist, movements were the main political orientations of this first generation of Maghrebi militants.

Since 1960s, Moroccan state has in fact actively stimulated emigration from certain regions for political and economical reasons. The mountain area of Rif, for instance, is known for active resistance to government, as well as being the centre of drug trade. By encouraging the emigration of the potential 'troublemakers', Moroccan power elite ensured its' dominant position. The state initiated migrants' associations, like 'Amicales' for example, were created to build cultural, economic and juridical bridges between Moroccans in the country and abroad, but at the same time the organization served to control and prevent anti-regime politics among migrants. Yet,

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[4]   http://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/32684/representation-parlement-consensus-politique-suffira-t-il.html

migrants' loyalty with the country of origin has been encouraged as the remittances and other forms of economic participation of transnational migrants has been a structural aspect of the national economy. (Salih, 2003: 60-62). For the perspective, it is good to remember that also European states have, in different stages of history, tried to either encourage or inhibit people to emigrate (Sassen, 1999:30).

Migrants role in political transition can also be related to the transfer of ideas and values. This may be particularly true when it comes to students and tertiary-educated migrants. In general, scholars focusing on international student mobility tend to think that 'students return home imbued with norms and values of the home country' (Altbach, 1989: 125).

Many Maghrebi intellectuals living in diaspora have chosen various ways of drawing attention to the political situation and human rights issues in their country of origin. Some migrants encountered during the fieldwork had chosen artistic expression as a means of influence. For example, Farid, a 42 years old Moroccan migrant from underprivileged background, had moved to France as a graduate student but later gave up studies to live for his passion for theatre. He was working on a movie project with a political theme. The topic of his movie was to show the background for the phenomenon of *harragas*, undocumented "boat migrants" who leave everything behind to start a new life in Europe. The aim of his film was to show the pain of the family members who stay, and discuss how this phenomenon touches the society as a whole.

The transnational communities have political weight for at least three reasons: first of all, they represent important human capital that can benefit the development of their country of origin. Second, the monetary remittances that migrants send back home bring in foreign currency and can help to improve the standard of living of those who stayed behind, and finally, migrants can perform political lobbying of receiving-country governments (Bauböck, 2003: 709.) In diaspora, many transmigrants form associations in order to help and contribute in the development of their country of origin. Although it may not lead to change or transformation of the political system, it can help to create and maintain stronger ties with the country of origin and raise awareness in the host country. Organizing Moroccan cultural events, conferences or for example collecting old computers to be sent to the schools back in the country were concrete ways how respondents participated through cultural and charity associations.

France, being a "neutral ground" can bring together migrants, especially students, from different Maghreb countries. Increased contacts may help to form new kind of cross-border political movements and identities, amplified by Internet and other new communication technologies. Although the students from Maghreb have traditionally headed to North for studies, the inter-regional mobility in North and West Africa has increased in past years. Many university graduate Tunisians these days move to Morocco or Mauritania, whereas Tunisia attracts Moroccans. As for Algerian post-graduates, both Tunisia and Morocco are attractive options, as well as the Gulf countries. (Kadri, 2012:8.) The increased inter-regional mobility and contacts in diaspora can be seen as factors contributing to collective political awareness, networking and more intense flow of information within the region. What kind of new ideologies or alliances this new horizontal mobility may produce is still unknown.

Internet alone, of course, has brought many new possibilities for the cross-border participation. The role of social media as transnational mean for communication and sharing information has been highlighted in the case of Tunisian Jasmin Revolution, which was even titled as the "Facebook revolution" by international media such as CNN TV Channel (Touati, 2012: 1). Certainly such a massive uprising would not have been possible without physical mobilization of the people on the streets, the emerging of a new virtual space has helped to bring themes such as democracy in the centre of public debate (Kadri, 2012:31). By documenting and spreading the events of Tunisia in their blogs and other social media, Tunisian bloggers helped to provide information to the foreign media, while the information distributed by the Tunisian official media was often manipulated by the government. Considering the censorship and limited internet freedom in North African countries, it is evident that migrant communities in European Union countries have access to more varied information.

It is through the French secular higher education system that most student migrants integrate into the French society and where they make most of their contacts. It is known that students trained in particular societies tend to adapt values, policies and ways of thinking from that place and carry it back to their country of origin. For countries receiving international students this can be a concious policy. For example, Cuba's policy to offer scholarships to train doctors, engineers and lawyers from Middle East and North Africa, was propelled by the idea that the graduates who return back to their home countries to help their communities and bring back the socialist values adopted in Cuba (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010: 138).

In other cases, host country and the country of origin of the students might be linked together through their colonial history, like in case of France and Morocco. The cross-border educational ties have also been an important instrument for maintaining a francophone elite in Morocco.

4. Conclusions: Emigration as a Political Stance

This paper has sought to shed light on issues related to individual freedom and human rights in the narratives of Moroccan transnational migrants and examined the reasons behind their decision to emigrate. The data suggests that at the background of the migration project of many highly skilled and student migrants there can be other, more personal reasons which are often closely related to the issues of human rights and personal freedom. This was particularly true for women and minority groups. The emigration for studies, for example, was often triggered by important, underlying political motivations. Although these migrants would not self-identify themselves as political refugees, they maintained that in their country of origin they had felt at some point discriminated, subordinated or excluded for being a woman, ethnic or sexual minority or for being physically disabled.

France offers for migrants a neutral ground on which new kind of friendships and relationships can be formed, with more freedom of choice than in Morocco. Living in a cosmopolitan city like Paris opens up new connections and networks, and more movements to identify with. This is demonstrated by inter-ethnic friendships, inter-religious marriages or same sex romantic partnerships. Also, for young couples it facilitated prenuptial cohabiting, something that would not be socially acceptable in Morocco. People with physical disabilities or chronic illnesses could also find better quality of life -not only in terms of care and treatments, but as a citizen with equal rights and opportunities.

Migrants can also increase their awareness of the ethnic and religious diversity in their own country. In other words, migration can widen the spectrum of identities and ways of life. On the other hand, it seems that many migrants already came from a family they described as "open-minded", and therefore it was not the migration as such that made them more open towards other cultures or religions.

How, and how much migrants can influence their society of origin? Female, homosexual or disabled migrants had often gone through many difficulties both in their country of origin and throughout the migration project. Although they may identify with others in the similar situation, it does not mean that they necessarily have the energy or resources to engage in movements to promote their rights as a group. The situation is even more difficult for sexual minorities and other socially stigmatized groups, as they may not want to publicly identify with the cause. For the above mentioned reasons, they are not necessarily the groups that can be found out on the streets to protest, but they still can use more subtle means of influence.

Different aspects affect how the migrants' political messages are received in the society of origin. The socioeconomic position achieved overseas, social status in sending communities and their aspirations to (re)gain prominence at home are all factors that contribute in the reception of the political messages (Boccagni et al., 2014:9). Residence status determines the intensity of transnational activities. A stronger position in the country of residence, for example having a legal residence and a steady employment allows more intensive transnational ties. The migrant sending

states recognize the importance of overseas communities and have established various methods for monitoring and controlling their residents abroad. Sending states' control over the migrant populations extends over social, political, economical, educational and religious fields. Through migrant associations, language learning programs and by nominating imams in the overseas mosques.

While the political activity is traditionally understood as a measurable activity such as voting, the Arab Spring brought up other ways of being politically active. Particularly the role of social media and Internet still needs to be studies more. In societies where information has usually been distributed through official channels the press freedom has been limited, migrants can bypass these restrictions and the state censorship, and have access to more information sources than the home country residents. Migrants can also be early adaptors of political ideas and practices, which they then transmit to those who stayed as the development in communication technologies in past decade has certainly had an impact on the pace and intensity of cross-border communication. Yet, migrants' ideas may also encounter considerable resistance and not all ideas will be accept in a different cultural context.

There are several formal and informal ways how migrants contribute to the development and politics in their country of origin. This can happen through formal associations and NGOs, tor through philanthropic, cultural and artistic activities. It can also happen through spreading and sharing information, through blogging or citizenship activism. Migrants can get in contact with people from other regions and help to diffuse new ideas and ways of participation. These inter-regional connections may also help to create awareness of a shared Maghrebi identity, which has probably been intensified by the events of the Arab Spring and shared political causes.

Although one should not overemphasize the role of diasporas in social and political transformations taking place in post-Arab Spring societies, for sure diasporas have great potential to be influential agents in the democratic transition processes of the Arab societies. This paper has only touched the tip of the iceberg on the topic, but there would be much more to explore for example on the theme of transnational connections of the Islamist movements or on new emerging forms of political activism of young, tertiary-educated migrants. However, moving to another country to help one's personal standing does not automatically lead to willingness or capacity to help the other ones in similar situation. Emigration can also serve one's personal interests only, and not all migrants are willing to change the *status quo* in their country of origin, especially if this involves personal risks.

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