Reclaiming public space for art and culture to fight Alienation and Extremism

"Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world."

Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward A Critique Of Marxist Aesthetic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978. (pp.32-33)

Abstract:

This article discusses how artistic and cultural activism in the context of social alienation can open avenues of creativity and artistic expression to the young generation that is easily attracted to diverse forms of violence and extremism. Stressing Civil society's efforts at claiming the public space for countering extremism through art and culture, the objective is to demonstrate how the fight against extremism is hinged on rehabilitating the sense of community that is shattered in our excessively consumerist realities. This enterprise underscores the importance of taste or aesthetic sensibility which as Emanuel Kant taught us is often coupled with a tendency to sociability. Kant's idea of the "sensus communis" understood not as common sense but as communal sense is based on the assumption that sharing artistic sensibility is a major instrument for the transmission of aesthetic values as every person is supposed to have a certain degree of aesthetic sense. Based on this, the article studies the work of two examples of the transition from political activism during the Arab Spring to cultural/artistic activism, in other words from political action that creates divisions to artistic and cultural action that brings people together. More specifically it is an attempt to study how the initiators and leaders of the 20th of February movement in Morocco (a group of young men and women with no political affiliation) worked to integrate young people from different backgrounds through art and culture.

Keywords: Morocco, post-Arab Spring, public space, extremism, cultural/artistic activism,

Introduction:

In recent years, a rich and intensive debate on the subject of how to curb extremism among the youth resulted in a general understanding that the rise of this phenomenon was due to the lack of opportunity and unemployment.[1] Yet, while these do certainly contribute to youth radicalization, they are not its main reason, as the phenomenon is known to run across classes and makes no difference between rich and poor. Little attention however is given to questions of social and political alienation that causes scores of young people to embrace extremist ideologies or even join armed groups. In other contexts, the same feeling of alienation was behind large youth movements such as Occupy in the USA, the M-15 Movement in Spain, and more recently the Gilets Jaunes Movement in France. Politically exploited by populist leaders and used to feed extremist agendas, the phenomenon translates states of oppression (real or imaginary) wherein large sections of the population feel excluded from the often too visible national wealth, and dispossessed of the control of their own lives and destinies in favour of an exclusive class that monopolizes everything. As a result, the feeling of alienation ends up depriving individuals of their very humanity, equating them with an interchangeable cog in a machine, deprived of control of itself.[2] Young people's responses to these conditions are largely an expression of the perceived disconnection from the established narrative of the nation that no longer has any meaning for them. Hence the need for some of them to look elsewhere for a cause or an alternative even if that entails loss of life, as is the case for the thousands that joined Isis from different parts of the world.

In Morocco, the alienation of young people is concomitant with an alarming lack of access to and/or interest in anything cultural[3] i.e. books, magazines, theatre, cinema, art ...etc. among larger sections of uneducated or poorly educated youth, which is the result of the confluence of many factors such as the inadequacy of the public-school system, economic adversity particularly for the lower classes, mediocre cultural policies, and

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[1] ASDA'A Burson-Masteller, "Arab Youth Survey", 2016.
https://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/pdf/whitepaper/en/2016-AYS-White-Paper.pdf
[2] In contemporary sociology, the concept of alienation is particularly implicit in the theories of symbolic domination and cultural legitimacy see Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel, Jean-Pierre Rivet, Claude Seibel, *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie*, Paris-La Haye, Mouton, 1963.
[3] Aadel Essaadani, Aicha Nouri & Mohamed Sammouni, *Les Pratiques Culturelles des Marocain Etude de Terrain.* Casablanca: Publication de l'Association Racines, 2016.

an impoverished media. The consequential cultural alienation strikes predominantly young people who find themselves cut off and unable to appropriate the shared narrative nor partake in the ideas of meaningful citizenship and collective aspirations to a good life. Consequently, they fall victim to religious extremist ideologies that exploits their rejection of shared beliefs and social values to lure them toward violent action. With little or no media literacy, influence from social networks spur young people to see society as unjust, and perceive themselves as subjected to a symbolic violence on the part of institutions and dominant classes who exercise an invisible but nevertheless oppressive and hegemonic power over the entire society. Hence, the sense of "victimization" that echo conspiracy theories and cynical perceptions of the socio-political realities. Manifestations of such perceived victimization can be seen not only in the upsurge of banditry, hooliganism, crime, and many other forms of violence, but also in the increase of fanatic discourses and diverse extremist agendas.

The End of traditional public space?

Described by some as the era of "post-truth,"[4] our epoch is characterized by an excess of dis/information accompanied by alarming attempts at mainstreaming violent and intolerant rhetoric.[5] Moreover, the apparent general disinterest in politics that has become the dominant trait of "liberal" societies witnesses to the devastating effects that information technology has had on the public, which explains the widespread anti-elitism and distrust of politics at least as reflected in social media, which put an end to classical models of public space where issues can be publicized and debated peacefully, and where tensions and conflicts can be managed if not resolved. Indeed, in the current social media-dominated context the evident consequence is that the public sphere is taking new forms that have yet to be defined.

Ironically, this is happening just as concepts of public space, civil society, individual liberties and participatory democracy are making their way into

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[4] The term "post-truth" refers to the current political culture characterized by the rise in emotion and conspiracy theories in shaping public opinion. The widespread of the term was so vast that the Oxford Dictionary decided to make it the 2016 word of the year: "After much discussion, debate, and research, the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 is *post-truth* – an adjective defined as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016

[5] see Farnce Culture's podcast https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-chemins-de-la-philosophie/faut-il-renoncer-a-la-verite

our region. These concepts are all still new to the MENA countries and so are little theorized and even less understood by the larger number of the population. However, their importance is less and less foreign to the average citizen, as the popular demands for better policies and more transparent governance are increasing, and as the space for voicing those demands is also widening. As a crucial principle of a democratic society, the idea of public space continues to feed discussions as participatory democracy is considered the guarantor of good governance and the preservation of the public good.[6] Underpinning this postulate is the crucial role of civil society organizations that represent the divergent and even conflictual interests of different groups.

Yet, one cannot help but observe today that public space as historically well-defined and where the actors or players are known, is a concept that is drowned in the overwhelming "noise" of 'alternative facts" or opinions posing as facts disseminated by virtual entities (trolls) and their multiple avatars. Equally, public opinion, once the sure outcome of a healthy publicity of social, political and economic issues is deformed and fragmented by the virtual world of social and digital media.[7] Therefore, reclaiming public space for culture and artistic performance to curb the rampant wave of negativism and intolerance is of the utmost necessity in a country that is emerging from decades of autocratic rule. The importance of this move is based on the idea that sharing artistic sensibility is a major instrument for the transmission of aesthetic values as every person is supposed to have a certain degree of aesthetic sense. Therefore, countering extremism through art and culture is hinged on rehabilitating the sense of community that is shattered in our excessive consumerist realities. This enterprise underscores the importance of taste or aesthetic sensibility which as Emanuel Kant taught us is often coupled with a tendency to sociability; the "man of taste," says Kant, is inclined to share his aesthetic pleasures, to the point of not being able to

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[6] Larbi Touaf, 2008, Introduction to *The World as a Global Agora: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*. New Castle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

[7] A good description of the transformation operated by digital media is found in Byung-Chul Han's book *In the Swarm : Digital Prospects* (2017): "This new medium is reprogramming us, yet we fail to grasp the radical paradigm shift that is underway. We are hobbling along after the very medium that, below our threshold of conscious decision, is definitively changing the ways that we act, perceive, feel, think, and live together." (ix)
"Clearly, we are facing a crisis again today—a period of critical transition that another upheaval, the digital revolution, has occasioned. Yet again, a formation comprising "the many" is beleaguering the standing balance of power and government. The new mass is the digital swarm. Its features distinguish it radically from the crowd— the classical form that the many assumed." Byung-Chul Han, *In the Swarm : Digital Prospects*, translated by Erik Butler. Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 2017. 24.

sometimes enjoy them unless he is in the company of others. Because all men have the same power of taste, or the subjective conditions of the faculty of judging being the same among all men, they can communicate their representations and knowledge to each other and share the same satisfaction; to share this feeling is to form a society, and it is even the beginning of civilization.[8]

Therefore, Kant's notion of "sensus communis"[9] that results from the shared principle of aesthetic judgment --understood not as common sense but as communal sense-- is foundational for the formation of community on the basis of subjectivities that by sharing expressions of their individual tastes prompt the emergence of a space of exchange as each subject is endowed with the same aesthetic sense or capacity to feel the pleasure of contemplating that which is beautiful. Such commonality which is originally lacking[10] and does not require consent, but difference and even dissent is the origin of the sense of community which is continuously undermined in today's digital media-driven hyper-individualistic capitalist society.[11]

The question then is how can we reinvent a sense of community not as the hypertrophied figure of a unity of unities built on the model of an enlarged self, nor that of an individual identity inflated into a collective identity, but as one that provides a space for valid differences and therefore a space to think and debate forms and models of common existence or co-existence?

Indisputably, it is the arts, narratives, films, music, theatre but also dance and poetry as expressions of individual and collective imagination and the

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[8] Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, (5:293).

[9] By "sensus communis," however, must be understood the idea of a communal sense [. . .] this happens by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judging; which is in turn accomplished by leaving out as far as is possible everything in one's representational state that is matter, i.e., sensation, and attending solely to the formal peculiarities of his representation or his representational state. Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. New York: Cambridge University, 2000, (5:293).

[10] According to Roberto Esposito: "the community isn't only to be identified with the *res publica*, with the common "thing," but rather is the hole into which the common thing continually risks falling, a sort of landslide produced laterally and within. This fault line that surrounds and penetrates the "social" is always perceived as the constitutive danger of our co-living." *Communitas The Origin and Destiny of Community* (1998) (translated by Timothy Campbel) (2010) Stanford: Stanford University Press. p.8.

[11] What is meant here by Community (with capital C) is the concept developed by thinkers such as Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, and Roberto Esposito; it is defined away from the notion of communitarianism, which supposes the social division into rival identity communities ("us "vs "others"), in other words where community gathers and binds individuals together, society separates them into rival entities.

symbolic that constitute the glue that puts the pieces together and make us feel more intensely that we belong to a larger body. In other words, the arts whether verbal or visual, connect individuals to one another, making it possible for the sense of community to exist and take shape. Arts and Culture as the creative and innovative energies of individualities that underpin society proceed from what Jacques Rancière calls "le partage du sensible" or the sharing of the sensible:

> *J'appelle partage du sensible ce système d'évidences sensibles qui donne à voir en même temps l'existence d'un commun et les découpages qui y définissent les places et les parts respectives. (...) Cette répartition des parts et des places se fonde sur un partage des espaces, des temps et des formes d'activité qui détermine la manière même dont un commun se prête à participation et dont les uns et les autres ont part à ce partage.* [12]

The "sharing of the sensible" is a mode of perception of the world and a mode of interaction with it. It is also a staging (mise en scene) that gives roles and responsibilities to whoever participates. In the public space, art and culture (street art, murals, street theatre, music and dance performances…etc.) and all forms of community enthusiasm breed and stimulate a prodigious creative force. As Rémi Astruc notes, Songs, poems, slogans, novels, films, performances, are among other forms of invention and expression to manifest and communicate the outpouring that often leads to the convergence of subjects in one organic entity that suddenly becomes aware of itself. This converging is then lived with extraordinary intensity and humans feel very quickly the need to celebrate this excitement and wonderful sensitivity.[13]

Civil society and the reinventing of the community through the arts in Morocco:

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[12] Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible, esthétique et politique*. Paris: La Fabrique, 1998. p.12.
[13] Rémi ASTRUC, (2015) *Nous? L'aspiration à la Communauté et les arts*, Versailles, RKI Press.

In this respect, I will discuss the rise of civil society in Morocco and how it contributes to create shared values and social change through civic engagement and art. Needless to say that those forms of social activism are paramount in the grounding of a democratic praxis and this is more pressing in societies that are slowly and hesitantly emerging from political and social authoritarianism and their concomitant totalitarian ideologies. Such a context is favourable to uprisings and social-political unrest as the world witnessed with the wave of protest that swept over North-Africa and that is known as the "Arab Spring". Even though Morocco did not experience the violence that characterized the Arab spring in the neighbouring countries, yet the political and social context has been immensely impacted by the youth-led demonstrations that demanded change. Today the country, like the rest of the Arab world is at a crucial moment in its history; protests led by a collective of young people known as the February 20th Movement has challenged a previously held view that the young generations are apolitical and totally detached from the concerns of their society. Ironically, it is these same young men and women who have triggered a process which many hoped would lead to a more democratic state.

However, the evolution of Morocco's civil society predates the uprisings of 2011. Since independence, civil society has existed in different forms, but it is only since the 1990s that it started to play a role in influencing the political and social changes that have taken place in the country. One of the major characteristics of Moroccan Civil Society in the 1990s is that it replaced the state in many areas both urban and rural through providing social services that the government failed to guarantee, and this became problematic as it opened the doors for massive proselytizing that was later on used for political purposes and even extremist agendas. However, after the terrorist attacks of 2003 and 2006 in Casablanca, the state weighed down heavily on organizations that it suspected of collusion with the terrorists that perpetrated attacks. Since then, Civil Society organizations were closely watched and their actions severely limited. But, with the events of the Arab spring, a "political opening" took place bringing with it some advances in civil and political rights. Particular attention was given to cultural rights, especially Amazigh language and culture, women's rights and the right to education and health.

The initiators and leaders of the 20th of February movement, a group of young men and women with no political affiliation, learned the lesson that

political action may trigger political reform but not social change. Real social change needs social/cultural awareness and activism. Hence the emergence of a number of NGOs in Morocco but also in Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon whose aim is to open avenues of creativity and artistic expression to the young generation whose alienation is conducive to diverse forms of violence and extremism.

In Morocco, among the many and varied experiments of claiming public space for social innovation and change, the one that catches attention is the increasing presence of NGOs that advocate for art and culture in the streets of the country's main urban centres. Therefore, I will consider how civil society through the example of one association (Jodours/Racines)[14] and a "street theatre" group (Masrah El-mahgour) "Theatre of the Oppressed" [15] work to create the basic foundation for public space in the midst of a general feeling of confusion and hopelessness among Moroccan youth.

In launching its ambitious programme "Culture is the Solution", "Racines" which in 2014 released its first report titled "The General States of Culture in Morocco,"[16] intended to initiate a "national action plan for culture," based on the comprehensive study carried out by the NGO and its partners and the recommendations made by professionals, individuals, and institutions during their survey campaign. Thus, in 2016, the same NGO launched its 2nd Edition

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[14] On April 16, 2019, the Court of Appeals in Casablanca ordered the final dissolution of the Racines association after a series of trials. A verdict pronounced to punish the NGO for hosting on its premises a three part talk show/debate titled "Un dinner 2 cons" with the subtitle "The epic of the nihilists" (published on Youtube in August 2018) where the participants treated in particular the convictions pronounced at the end of the Rif "Hirak trial" and the royal speech of the 20th August (2018). The court's decision followed a motion filed by the public prosecutor of Casablanca to ban the association for holding an activity of a political nature which the law of associations prohibits.

[15] another prominent association that made a big difference in the booming art scene in Morocco is EAC-L'Boulvart (Arts and Cultural Education), a non-profit organization that advocates for the promotion and development of contemporary music and urban culture in Morocco. Since its creation in 1999, it has continued to organize activities that aimed at the discovery and accompaniment of the young alternative music practitioners, giving them multiple opportunities as concerts, trainings, workshops, meetings and festivals (L'Boulevard, Le Tremplin, BoulevarDoc ...). In 2010, the association created "Boultek", the first center of contemporary music in Morocco. The association also publishes *L'Kounache*, a collector's edition dedicated to alternative creation, all disciplines combined. The "Boultek" is a place dedicated to artists of alternative and contemporary, underground and urban music and cultural performance, where they can meet, exchange ideas, repeat, and play. The center has 3 equipped rehearsal studios, a concert hall, a radio studio, two training rooms and a recording studio. Since 2013 EAC-L'Boulvart launched a public painting programme called *Sbagha Bagha*, a festival of street arts, but also and above all, the opportunity to involve the inhabitants and integrate them into a local cultural program anchored in the public space. Since 2015, the association initiated *Jidar*, street painting festival that brings together artists from Morocco and around the world to compete in using public space as a canvas.
Other avenues such as *L'uzine, l'atelier de l'observatoire, les abbatoires de Casablanca…* have turned into unavoidable cultural hotspots.

[16] the outcome of two years of research, inventory, diagnosis, professional and regional meetings, as well as field studies concerning a large number of artistic disciplines, and cross-sectional studies on cultural governance, training, art education, cultural diversity.

of "Les Etats Généraux de La Culture."[17] For three days, the public in Casablanca and from other parts of the country had free access to a varied artistic programming. Tens of associations and professionals of arts and culture, were invited to communicate and exchange ideas through a space of networking, but also to participate in workshops on reflection and discussion around the state of the cultural life and its impact on the people. The events targeted and sought to integrate young people from the slum areas where the young terrorists of 2003 and 2006 originated. Thus, the old Art Deco Slaughter Houses of Casablanca were transformed into a space for all genres of performing arts; music, theatre, painting workshops, dance, graffiti, circus, parkour and art exhibits. "Racines" took that opportunity to publish the results of its vast study of what it termed "the Cultural Practices of Moroccans", a nation-wide survey of the citizens' access to culture or lack thereof in order to evaluate cultural policies and monitor the implementation of its previous recommendations. This was the second phase in its long-term programme focused on the cultural practices of ordinary citizens in different regions of the country.

One of the major takeaways of the report was that even though the state spends large sums of money on big cultural events such as music festivals, the construction of youth centres, museums and massive theatres, the impact on the average citizen and young people is insignificant. One of the many outcomes of the survey was that top-down cultural policies are inefficient and the policy of infrastructure cannot replace a real cultural policy. Another takeaway was that the public needs to be empowered to exercise its right to control or at least have a say in public policies. Therefore, the association's aim was to provide citizens with relevant criteria and indicators so that they can assess, on their own and at the local level, the actions of the Ministry of culture and other public administrations in the field of cultural policies. That way the citizens can appropriate cultural action as a universal human right and as a duty to be accomplished and supported by the public institutions.

In short, the idea is to make citizens evaluators, not just commentators, of public policies in general and those of Culture in particular, by asking the right questions and demanding accountability from decision-makers and requiring from them that they explain their choices or lack thereof, while

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[17] The 3rd edition of Les « Etats Généraux de la Culture » took place in the city of Tiznit (621 Km south of the Capital Rabat) in November 2018.

also highlighting bad decisions whether deliberate or the result of incompetence. The origin of this initiative is certainly to be found in the general dissatisfaction with the work of the Ministries of Culture, Education, Youth and Sport, in particular in the fields of cultural action and its proximity to different audiences. It is also related the frustration of the general public in its incapacity to articulate with precision its needs and proposals. This way Culture will no longer be exclusively the business of specialists whose authoritative discourse and sophisticated aesthetic judgment represent and assert the supremacy of scholars over the others, and of confirmed artists on novices.

Therefore, it is necessary to underscore that the project of empowering the public is not only about aesthetic judgment, but about giving the citizens access to knowledge and cultural activities as a public service and a civic duty. The cultural activities covered in assessment workshops include a set of actions or policies such as art education, amateur practices, TV or radio programming... so that people can ask questions like what is the purpose of this festival? Why doesn't the only existing youth centre in the commune work? What obstacles prevent it from accomplishing that for which it was established? Or, who decides the cultural programming, and how? Is there a music conservatory in my commune? If so, how does it work and for whom? What are the obligations of the ministry or the commune that manages it? Do we have enough public libraries in our city?

The association's initiative comes at a time when the post Arab Spring phase is replete with all kinds of social strife as trust in the state has reached a record low. That is what compels NGOs to direct the attention of the citizens to public policies and especially cultural policies so that it can target what they consider urgent: citizens, society and the public space. This stems from the awareness of what a cultural strategy could yield in terms of raising the level of emancipation of citizens and the liberation of creativity and positive energies.

One may argue, and justly so, that NGOs also have their own political or ideological agendas, and that a report cannot faithfully represent reality with its statistics, analyses and indicators. However, Racine's initiative is more of an introduction to the basics of a bottom-up cultural policy or action, and even if its take on the situation may prove to be wrong, it's first concern is to launch a public debate on the place of culture in the development of society & country. It is a bold project considering that in societies thought

to be largely conservative or religious, cultural policies are conceived with the objective of limiting freedom of creation and expression (even though these are guaranteed by the constitution) and the safeguarding of security, and moral principles. But, as true artistic creation is unpredictable, it can shake up, to varying degrees, beliefs and habits. Therefore, citizens' empowerment is the only guarantee that the authorities will not put limits to everything, for when the authorities resort systematically to pre-emptive prohibiting, the consequence is not only censorship but self-censorship which is the worst enemy of resolving controversial issues through public debate.

Masrah Almahgour or the "Theatre of the Oppressed"

Perhaps one of the most prominent cultural experiences born from the matrix of February 20, and inspired by its spirit, adopting its objectives and ideas, is *masrah almahgour* or the "Theatre of Oppressed"[18] referring both to a group of performers, and to the concept developed by Augusto Boal based on Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Like Freire who targeted the poor and the illiterate to get them out of the too often normalized condition of economic, social, and political oppression, Boal created this new artistic method that aimed at engaging the public in the conception and execution of performances, giving birth to a popular interactive theatre that rejects the conditions of oppression. In the Moroccan version, the word Mahgour (meaning oppressed or despised in Moroccan Arabic) is an adjective from the noun Hogra (oppression or contempt) that refers to a strong sense of oppression and disregard. The idea of starting a theatre group with this reference came from a former member of the February 20 movement, Hosni Al-Mokhlis, who previously worked as a journalist and studied theatre in Spain. In an interview with Al Qods Al Arabi published on 02/20/ 2016, Al-Mokhlis declared: "February 20th was not only a turning point in the history of modern Morocco, but has a very personal relationship with me as an inspiration and a guide." In Fact, a year after the protests, a group of young people decided to find alternatives and new forms of expression to sustain the rebellious spirit of the movement and to

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[18] Theatre of the Oppressed Casablanca (for there is another group in Rabat) is based at L'Uzine, a decommissioned factory turned into a cultural center by the owner who is also its main benefactor. They also tour the country and perform different shows in public places. Their goal is to take theatre into the open spaces where people can have access to it.

continue interacting with people. Their goal was to transform the act of demonstrating in the street into artistic expressions that are fed by the same motivations to protest, and this by being more attentive to people, and involving them in thinking and seeking solutions through art and creativity.

The street as a stage for a meaningful theatre

The experience of *Masrah Al mahgour*, which can also be seen as a version of the Forum Theatre or even "applied theatre",[19] intersects with the traditional practice of public interactive entertainment known as *al halka* or ring of people around one or many performers, story teller…etc. Thus, the theatre of the oppressed, uses the techniques of *al halqa* that allows the artist/performer to involve voluntary members from the public to cooperate in finding a solution to the situation being presented to the audience. However, the difference between the two forms lies in the fact that prior to any performance, the group determines a situation that is close to peoples' daily concerns --violence, oppression, corrupt public administration, or cases of injustice and impunity-- a scene that clearly embodies a state of oppression and injustice. During the performance, the performers engage the spectators and invite them to express their opinion and start a sort of collective brainstorming to find solutions to the situation. The intervention of a representative from the audience in the scene is meant to get the neutral spectator involved in changing the state of affairs by diverting the course of the story to find solutions that often vary with the diversity of the public.

For this type of militant art, finding the spaces to expose oppression, cruelty and injustice transparently and without fear is the first step in the path of change. While it is quite difficult to eradicate these forms of injustice, the stage in a public place attracts people to an indirectly pedagogical form of entertainment that aims at making them see things differently and so exert a social pressure for change. In addition, street theatre in a context dominated by oral culture can be a practical way of opening people's minds to the fact that what affects them individually can be solved collectively provided they feel part of the larger body of the community. The experience

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[19] According to Judith Ackroyd, the diverse varieties of applied theatre have two distinguishing features: "I have identified two features which I believe to be central to our understanding of applied theatre; an intention to generate change (of awareness, attitude, behaviour, etc), and the participation of the audience." Both of these features are found in Masra'h Al mahgour.

of the "theatre of the Oppressed"[20] in India is good example of how such practice gives rise to an important and influential social movement that liberates individuals from their oppressive circumstances, and that empowers them collectively to be producers of their own historical forms of existence. In Morocco, this is just a first step in the process of producing a large and deep cultural and artistic movement that can sustain change.[21]

As a conclusion, the largescale movement or initiative called "Culture is the solution" is the attempt by civil society networks to put forward culture as a viable means of integrating populations with no access to cultural entertainment. It is also a call to turn culture into a productive sector that can create jobs and value where all social policies have failed. As an oppositional echo to the motto of radical Islamists "Islam is the solution," its philosophy is that without cultural empowerment there will be no political awareness nor effective participation. In other words, culture opens the minds and favors critical thinking and creativity; the two main enemies of totalitarian ideologies. The "Culture is the Solution" movement and the Theatre of the Oppressed, therefore, seek with modest and even fragile means to invest the spaces left vacant by the state. What they strive to do is bring forth --through practical solutions and hands-on experience-- the opacity of culture and society in order to fight reductionist discourses of the extremists and social media.

Evidently the project faces a great deal of challenges such as the fierce opposition of religious fundamentalists, but also the state's lukewarm support, the conservatives' suspicion of any idea of cultural and social change, and, worst of all, the indifference of academia. What the latter needs to do is to shake off its apathy and get out of its isolation to find ways and

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[20] See for example Jana Sanskriti Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed (http://www.janasanskriti.org/) whose mission statement goes as follows: "In order to construct a relationship with others, this website is created. Relation means freedom; therefore, relation means construction of power. Dialogue in a relation creates pedagogy where we learn together and the same relation inspires us to go for an inward journey where we discover ourselves. This discovery is what is called an internal revolution, which inspires an external revolution. Our theatre, discovered by Augusto Boal is therefore the rehearsal and the performance of a total revolution. We may have our ideology but one has not to be the slave of an ideology. Dogma cannot create the relation. Let us debate not to destroy the ideas of others but to understand others and ourselves. All of us want to evolve and grow with the objective of constructing a human society.

[21] other leading artistic experiences that preceded the "theatre of the oppressed" in adopting the problems and concerns of the people and that sprung from the social, political and economic interactions is a theatre group called *Daba Ttheatre*, and the experimental *Theatre de l'Aquarium* headed by the famous playwright and director Naima Zitan, who worked especially on issues of women.

means to fill the gap that separates it from civil society in order to offers better alternative to the hegemony of the populist agendas that threaten to rip society apart.

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