

## Speakers' bios

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### TASNIM ABDERRAHIM

Tasnim, a Tunisian national, is a Junior Policy Officer at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) in Maastricht. She holds a BA and a Master's degree in English Studies from the University of Tunis. In 2014, Tasnim joined the German-Tunisian research project, "Tunisia in Transition- International Relations" as a research fellow and then worked as one of the coordinators of this project between January 2015 and mid-2016. In this position, she co-edited a book publication entitled "Tunisia's international relations since the 'Arab Spring': Transition inside and out", a volume that studies changes in Tunisia's foreign policy and bilateral relations before and after 2011. She has been involved in several other research projects. She has worked with the The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) on the future of the EU-Tunisia partnership. In general, her recent research focuses on Tunisia's decentralisation process, on EU-North Africa cooperation on migration, and growing relations between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. She also previously taught courses on American history and communication at the Higher Institute of Languages at the University of Gabes in 2014 and 2015. Tasnim is also a civil society activist, mostly active with the Tunisian women's association Tounissiet, and she completed a fellowship on NGO development in the United States in May 2016.



### DEMOCRACY IN THE MAKING: YOUTH AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN TUNISIA

#### Abstract

*The slogans that were chanted during the Arab revolts mainly demanded dignity, employment, and freedom. Seven years later, these demands seem to have been overshadowed by increasing concerns about security and stability. As a result, this seems to have undermined young people's aspirations for building democratic inclusive societies and finding alternative models for socio-economic development that break with marginalisation and exclusion. While one of the key merits of the revolts was opening-up the public space for young people to contribute to the new dynamics, this space is continuously shrinking, fueling this increasing frustration. Besides, the setback in reform processes over the last years has resulted in young people's their gradual loss of trust in governmental institutions and political parties.*

*One of the symptoms of this setback in political transformations in Tunisia's burgeoning democracy is the continuous delay of municipal elections and attempts to assert the influence of central administrations over locally-elected ones in the draft code on local councils. This is particularly alarming for several reasons. Mostly, this represents a setback from the more ambitious provisions on local government in the new constitution. Besides, keeping in place the highly-centralised system will only reinforce youth marginalisation which is a by-product of this system in the first place. Under this system, youth were not involved in decision-making and policies that affected their daily lives. Orders were transmitted from the central to the local level in top-down approach that overlooks young people's concerns in their local communities. Fostering this approach during a country's democratic transition is bound to have serious negative impacts both on young people's human development and on the country's democratic process. Already, statistics on registration for the next municipal elections<sup>1</sup> (before they were cancelled) reveals low registration rates of young people, showing once again their alienation from the country's change processes.*

*Her work will focus on the issue of the participation of Tunisian youth in local governance, examining challenges to their participation, their perceptions of the on-going decentralisation process, and identifying youth-led initiatives to foster youth involvement in local governance. The study will rely on a combination of desk and field research. To this end, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with young Tunisian activists in the areas of elections, governance, and local development. Besides, concrete policy recommendations on including Tunisian youth and enhancing their participation in the country's decentralisation process will be provided.*

## **HUDA ALSAHI**

Huda is a third year PhD candidate in Political Science and Sociology at Scuola Normale Superiore in Italy. She was a visiting scholar at the department of Gender Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the winner of the 2017 Graduate Paper Prize from the Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS). Her research interests include the intersection of gender and politics in the Arab Gulf States and the political use of Information and Communication Technologies, as her current research project focuses on filling the gap in the contemporary scholarly work on social movements, cyberspace and women's activism in the Gulf region, through tracing the gradual evolution of cyber-feminism as a practice and a discursive activity with special focus on Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.



Moreover, she has written several articles about the status of gender in the Arab Gulf States, and gave talks in several academic conference and events including: the American Political Science Association, ECPR, BRISMES, among others.

### **CONTESTING TOP-DOWN LED WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: THE CASE OF SAUDI ARABIA**

#### *Abstract*

*Much of the current scholarly work on "women in the Middle East" tends to homogenize their experiences while placing them under one umbrella. This tendency of historical reductionism contributes to epistemologically ignoring the crucial different conditions that women face elsewhere. Hence, these 'other' experiences remain somehow peripheral to the core of women's movements.*

*Echoing this trend, Alrasheed (2013) argues that most of the commentaries that dominate the discourses about women in the Middle East in general and in the Arab Gulf States in particular, tend to lament the victimhood of women or highlight few cases of exceptional achievements, while neglecting emphasizing the diversity of women who are at the beginning of a process whereby they constitute themselves as individuals on the right path to claiming their denied rights. Thus, it is clear that there are still certain voids that have not been sufficiently addressed in this regard especially in relation to situating women's movements in the Arab Gulf States. Therefore, she finds that the existing literature on women's movements in non-Western contexts does not manage to examine the evolution of women's on ground feminist activism nor the cyber aspect of it over time.*

*Consequently, patterns of change, its direction and magnitude, and insights that might emerge from such analyses are lacking. Taking all of this into consideration, she aims to explore this untapped territory and investigate the characteristics of the women's movements in the Arab Gulf States with particular focus on a set of women's rights campaigns that took place within Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as these countries vary in terms of cultural openness, legal frameworks, the magnitude of civil society activism, and the sociocultural structures.*

*Accordingly, using data from multiple sources, her work will focus on tracing the gradual evolution of women's activism on the ground and online, in addition to the emergence of cyberfeminism as a discursive activity and a practice by examining the role of social networking platforms in initiating feminist movement messages and directing them towards the public sphere. By doing so, she aims to unpack the different old and new discourses on women and capture the shift in feminist discourse by tracing the emergence of and changes in the ways feminism has been discursively constructed,*

*and how might such discourses have shifted over time due to the potential impact of new emergent forms of public sphere that are driven by changes in digital media and communications technology.*

#### **FATMA KHATTAB ELDESOUKY**

Fatma took an MBA at the University of South Wales and majored in Political Science at Cairo University. Over the last few years she managed to research different political, socioeconomic and humanitarian topics; she has also focused on educational, industrial, environmental and health projects.

She worked on different policy research studies, and is currently engaged in a research group under Drugs Research Institute in India, working on a fundraising project with a news agency in Puerto Rico. She has also experience with business management work, and worked on tech-startups online content creation for AMD Law Group in Atlanta, GA, USA, and donors' communication work as handling the marketing plan for Seaside Sustainability organization in Essex. Her career goals revolve around being a policy maker, project management strategist and human rights activist.



#### **UNEMPLOYMENT AND LABOR MARKET REFORM - EGYPT CASE 2010-2018**

##### *Abstract*

*Not much is known about Egyptian president Al-Sisi's national plan for Labor market reform. Yet, many initiatives connected to it were launched by the government starting with Sharm El Sheikh Economic Youth forum and through the opening of another tranche of the Suez canal to double its revenues.*

*The Suez Canal revenues seem to be increasing. However, after the Egyptian pound devaluation, there seems to be no definite percentage by the government to how far its revenues are increasing.*

*On the other hand, climate change impacts on Egypt range from rising sea levels, drought and drowning in food security, shortages of drinking water for generations to come. Water salination, rationalizing water usage is not working and there are no enough regulations to combat current misuse of available water resources. While renewable energy investments are not promising enough to bring more businesses in the field.*

*Regardless the fact that there are many ongoing developmental projects to preserve rare species, natural resources especially the historic forests, and the historical archeology sites, none seem to be directed towards one goal. At the same time, many capacity building activities are trying to enhance the youth abilities to engage in more profitable economic activities, and many others are raising awareness on cultural industries, paying attention to using more renewable resources of energy. No local or global seem to fight enough the rising tension of climate changes, the social and economic challenges that face the community especially in Egypt.*

*Therefore, her work will try to address these economic and political reasons behind the current status of the labor market in Egypt: What are challenges towards job creation from a local perspective, not a global one? What are more locally intense efforts done to study the current economic changes of the country Egypt towards facing future challenges? What are economic policies offered to the country to bring about a more inclusive growth, if any? What are other innovative means to create more sustainable jobs for the youth in Egypt?*

#### **MANAR SARIE**

A Palestinian citizen of Israel, originally from Haifa, Manar earned an undergraduate degree in environmental and water engineering at the Technion (Technological Institute for Israel) and a B.A. in Business Administration and Human Resources studies from Bar Ilan University in Israel.

Later, Manar moved to Denmark for a non-certificate study program for a year. While in Denmark, she toured Western Europe and broadened her global perspective via the studies





and organized visits to national NGO's like OECD and UN agencies. Back in Israel, she moved to live in a Kibbutz (Communal-living, environmental and culturally pluralistic village-like) in the Negev Desert, joining the study program at the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies which is located within kibbutz Ketura.

Following her year at the Arava Institute, Manar continued her studies for a Master's degree at Ben Gurion University (BGU) and then got a Fulbright scholarship to continue her higher education (PhD studies) at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). Her thesis at BGU focused on solar water heater adoption and uptake in the West Bank, and at Carnegie Mellon she looked at water policy and climate change in Costa Rica. In both cases the studies involved traveling to the research study area, conducting interviews and working with various stakeholders. Currently she is working as researcher and teaching assistant at CMU mainly at the Tepper School of business and Heinz School of Public Policy (courses include but not limited to: managerial micro-economics, product marketing, organizational behavior, organizational design implementation, R&D management).

In parallel Manar is also working to provide and improve medical language accessibility within the city of Pittsburgh and it's hospitals; the work is aimed first and foremost to assist the newly resettled refugees in the city (i.e.: Syrian, Iraqi etc.). Volunteering wise, Manar is involved in many peace and coexistence groups in Israel and Palestine (e.g. Build Israel Palestine; Eco-Me) as well as in Pittsburgh (e.g. Jewish community Center, J-Street).

## **ARTICULATING THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE LOOMING RESOURCE CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND PLOTTING A PATH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### *Abstract*

*Climate change is catalyzing monumental transitions in resource use, economic imperatives, and political strategy. Few regions will be impacted more negatively than MENA, where long-lived conflicts, demographic expansion, and resource mismanagement are stressing highly fragile ecosystems. While some research has analyzed pathways to sustainable regional development, existing analyses are highly inadequate. Most glaringly, they pay only lip service to multi-disciplinary approaches and miss important dynamics which only integrated analyses can reveal. This paper will summarize a recent integrated analysis of the energy-water resource challenge in MENA, shedding light on the technical, economic, and political opportunities and challenges that the region faces in light of climate change. It will outline the dramatic extent to which regional practices in energy-water extraction and consumption need to change for MENA to secure a more sustainable future.*

*Using a combination of scenario analysis and multi-criteria decision making, we illustrate a range of possible futures for the region. These analyses rely on copious existing data from climatology (e.g. weather prediction models), engineering (e.g. energy system models), economics (e.g. engineering economic models), and the social sciences (e.g. role of institutions in sustainable development). We assess the possible futures up to the year 2030, which covers the enrollment of the region's youth into the workforce, that of its millennials into key decision-making posts; and the growth in climate change refugees. Moreover, we present results from a sensitivity analysis that delves into the most optimistic and most pessimistic scenarios, exposing the scale of the risks, but also shedding light on brighter futures that would emerge if prudent actions are taken in pursuit of sustainable development.*

*While the commonly referenced "resource curse" is an entirely man-made catastrophe, our paper lays out the case that a second resource curse is coming, and is far graver and more urgent. This second curse will be precipitated both by nature and by developments in Middle Eastern societies that have already been locked-in—such as demographic expansion. The only way to overcome it and avert major damage will be to radically transform behavior. We will highlight a number of current, youth-led initiatives in MENA that demonstrate how environmental challenges can be tackled through, for example, sustainable agriculture, trans-boundary watershed management, and renewable energy initiatives. These examples show that a brighter future for the region is possible.*

## SEMUHI SINANOĞLU

Semuhi is a policy consultant and civil society leader from Turkey and currently based at McGill University as a resident fellow of Jeanne Sauvé Foundation. He is the founding president of the Co-Opinion Network, a World Bank partner, which mobilizes more than 30 institutions across six countries in the Middle East & North Africa, to tackle youth unemployment in the region through multi-stakeholder collaboration between the private sector, universities, and civil society. He is the co-founder of CityInclusive, a digital platform that promotes social inclusion for smart city applications in Canada. Besides his university-based research projects, he worked for more than two years as a social policy analyst at a London & Istanbul-based consultancy company. He has been to Armenia, South Cyprus, and Iraq to contribute to peace-making and conflict resolution efforts. In 2016, he lived in Palestine and served as a researcher at Al-Haq, Ramallah, one of the first human rights organizations in the region. He was the editor of several nationally-distributed magazines/journals, which aim to promote freedom of expression and cover the stories of the subaltern. He pursued his double major program in Political Science, International Relations, and Economics at Bogazici University, Turkey. He spent one semester at Columbia University, NY during his undergraduate program. He completed his MA in International Relations at Koc University, Turkey. His university-based research projects focus on political clientelism, welfare regimes, and the political economy of development in the Middle East & North Africa. As part of his policy-related work, he is interested in labor market integration of refugees and the implications of 4th Industrial Revolution for developing countries. In 2017, he completed an executive education program in leadership at Harvard University Kennedy School. He received an Outstanding Success Scholarship from the Turkish Educational Foundation. He is a change-maker at Ashoka Foundation, a young scholar at Global Relations Forum, an associate of the Al-Sharq Youth Forum, and a fellow at the Open Society Foundations Human Rights & Governance Program. He is also passionate about singing, writing poems & stories, and believes in their transformative power.



### **FOSTERING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE MENA REGION IN THE WAKE OF 4TH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES**

#### *Abstract*

*Youth unemployment is one of the most pressing issues for the Middle East & North Africa (MENA), one of the youngest regions in the world with almost 60% of its population being under the age of 29. Youth unemployment rate reaches 30.6% in the Middle East, and above than 29% in North Africa, which is more than double the global average. As the balance of employment generation is tilted towards the public sector, neither labor-intensive, high-quality private sector jobs can be offered, nor can the workforce attain the high skills necessary for the private sector. The findings of the World Enterprise Survey indicate that 50.1%, 36.8%, and 34.2% percent of firms identify an inadequately educated workforce as their primary constraint in Egypt, Algeria, and Iraq, respectively. As unemployment tends to increase with educational attainment throughout the region, the current education systems and industrial policies result in a skill mismatch.*

*Two different crises loom on the horizon. Firstly, to absorb the new entrants into the labor force, more than 4.5 million jobs need to be generated each year for the next decade<sup>3</sup>. Given the current (jobless) growth trajectories, this seems impossible to achieve. Secondly, the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) will entail automation that can also cost workers jobs. A McKinsey study estimates that almost half of work activities globally have the potential to be automated<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, 4I poses an additional challenge to the education systems. However, the use of augmented/virtual reality, drones, and 3D printing also presents an opportunity for the MENA economies. A rapidly growing, young, tech-savvy population can quickly adapt to the needs of this burgeoning age. Collective impact initiatives and multi-stakeholder engagements are warranted to achieve this transformation.*

*His work aims to scrutinize current social initiatives implemented by companies, civil society organizations, and social enterprises in a bottom-up fashion that get young workforce prepared for 4I concerning three fields: STEM education, training programs, and technology investment. He will map out 4I-focused, youth-targeted projects in 7 countries: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco to measure the extent of cross-sectoral*

cooperation. A survey will be sent out to randomly selected organizations from different sectors to identify the main features of the programs they implement, and their impact will be evaluated based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of these data. He will pinpoint possible intervention areas based on the current landscape and emphasize the vital role of multi-stakeholder engagements.

## BILAL SUKKAR

Bilal is an independent Syrian researcher focused on conflict resolution, post-conflict state building, youth and civil society.

He also works with Syrian civil society organisations on advocacy and policy framing. Bilal recently completed an MA in Conflict Resolution in Divided Societies at King's College London.



### 'YOUTH' OF SYRIA: AN ANTITHETICAL CONSTRUCT TO AN AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM OF POWER

#### Abstract

*The uprisings of the 2011 Arab Spring signaled an elevation of the role of youth in politics and public participation. They carried a sense of determination among young activists to instigate change and transformation primarily in systems of governance, but also in the social and economic realm. Yet almost seven years later, a rollback of such dynamism has ensued as security discourses of the region's politics became prevalent with the resurgence of authoritarianism. Nowhere has this been more aptly manifested than in Syria, where the persistence of the status of the Syrian regime headed by Bashar al-Assad in power depressingly marks a defeat of a genuine opportunity for socio-political transformation.*

*The push for a liberation geography back in 2011-2012 manifested in youth activist political organisation, youth public participation, and bottom-up governance building has been replaced with a war system based on profiteering and exploitation among war lords and fundamentalists.*

*But what is the connection between that rollback of youth upsurge and the incidental rise of conflict and fundamentalist groups? Using Syria as a case study, he argues that a major challenge to youth potential and development is the de facto structural make-up of the region's authoritarian regimes, which by their centralised and exclusionary nature obstruct genuine opportunities for change brought forward by younger generations. This paper will argue that so long as authoritarian regimes continue to hold power in the region, and manipulatively convince the international community of their necessity to remain in power, 'youth' will be unable to forward its drive for social, political and economic transformation.*

*His research will begin with a descriptive account of the socio-political alternatives provided by the initial period of youth-led activism that revealed the regime's contradictions and vulnerabilities, therefore constituting a major threat to the regime's survival. Through such a perspective he seeks to prove the regime's selective targeting of youth activism and cites of resistance/viable alternatives of governance more seriously than sites of Islamist concentration and foreign funded rebellions connected to geopolitics. By doing so, he hopes to show how the regime was able to marginalise youth initiatives at transformation by steering the path of the rebellion towards fundamentalism and extremism, thus exploiting the international community's insecurities with the 'war on terror.'*

*This analysis serves to recommend treating youth not as "peacekeepers" but as political actors that are able - and must be supported - to open sites of contestations with authoritative structures in order to bring about real socio-political transformations. Youth participation must thus be empowered in critical junctures of political processes, and the facilitation of regional youth interaction and sharing of experiences can serve to do that.*

## AHMED SUKKER

Ahmed was born in the Gaza Strip where he finished his undergraduate education and worked as a junior researcher at Pal-think for Strategic Studies, a think and do tank in Gaza. He holds a double-degree Masters of Arts in social sciences from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara – Turkey and Humboldt University of Berlin. While completing his M.A. in Berlin, he interned at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) and performed research related student jobs at Humboldt University of Berlin and Free University of Berlin. He is currently working as a student research assistant at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient and a research fellow at the research project "Violence, Forced Migration and Exile: Trauma in the Arab World and in Germany" based at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität of Munich. His main research interests are Islam in Europe, political violence and Islamism.



### A PERSPECTIVE ON THE INTEGRATION OF HAMAS'S SECURITY FORCES INTO THAT OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

#### Abstract

*New modes of political activism under Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip present an opportunity for reform on the public policy and government levels. Earlier this year, protesters, mainly constituted of the youth, took to the streets protesting lack of services and misadministration by Hamas government apparatus. In October of the same Year, Hamas movement signed a reconciliation agreement with Fatah dominated Palestinian Authority, its Ramallah based rival. The Palestinian reconciliation process is one that is envisioned under pressure of deteriorating living conditions of a civil population in the Gaza Strip.*

*Yet it is hard to anticipate outcomes of the process giving the intermingling and conflicted interests not only of Hamas and Fatah, but also those of external parties such as Egypt, Israel, and other regional powers, in addition to the US and the international community. However, periods of youth activism in the Gaza Strip should provide an inspiration for a workable reconciliation process that prioritizes service provision and good governing over factional interests that has guided and dominated Palestinian domestic politics for more than two decades. While protesting, youth highlighted a shift from representing factional interests to reflect rather their interests, departing themselves from modes of politicization within the framework of highly polarized Palestinian politics.*

*Furthermore, those protests took place in a time when all previous relevant studies and surveys predicted that Palestinian youth are in their way to exit politics. To reinforce this dynamic within the social, this trend among the youth should be considered on the public policy level. In other words, it should encourage a tendency towards professionalization of the civil administration bodies (the bureaucracy) and the security sector (policing). He intends to shed light in his policy paper on the potential of this trending political ethos in the governmental sphere. He will focus principally on the issue of the integration of the security sector (Hamas security forces with that of the PA).*

*Further, he will attend to the question of how to empower this dynamic among the youth and how the professionalization of security apparatus could be a constructive factor in this regard in the context of Palestinian reconciliation process. This also requires an examination of the political framework through which policing and administrative tasks of the PA that has identified upon its initial establishment.*

## ABED AL KAREEM YEHYA

Abed is a young professional pursuing a career at the intersection of agriculture, water, energy, and project management sectors. He graduated from the Lebanese University with a Bachelor's Degree in Agricultural Sciences (2014) and a Master's Degree in Environment and Natural Resource Management (2015). Subsequently, he had the opportunity to study overseas to pursue a joint scholarship program between the Lebanese University and the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) in Montpellier, France, earning a second



Master's Degree (2016) in "Territorial Development, Public Policy, and Projects Engineering". He was one of eight students that granted a scholarship for the highly competitive MSc.

While a graduate student, he had the opportunity to complete an internship at the Lebanese Ministry of Environment within the department of ecological systems for three months, supporting forest studies and forest fires. Currently, he is working as a research assistant with the Food Security Program of the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the American University of Beirut (AUB). The Food Security Program is the only interdisciplinary graduate program in food security in the MENA region. This program provides students theoretical grounding in food security concepts, exposes them to current debates on the topic, and offers opportunities for practical learning through both research and real-world interactions. This professional experience is helping him to elucidate his future career path and to gain an in-depth understanding of major issues happening in the MENA region related to food, water, and energy security.

### **ESCAPING WATER STRESS IN THE MENA REGION**

#### *Abstract*

*The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is one of the world's most rapidly transforming regions – politically, economically, demographically and environmentally. Many trends will impact the future development of this region. Trends in absolute population growth, specifically youth population, mean that MENA will surpass China in total population by 2090. Water stress will also have significant impacts on the region. More than 60% of the region's population is concentrated in places affected by high or very high surface water stress, compared to a global average of about 35%.*

*Regional experts warn that climate-related water scarcity could cause regional economic losses estimated at 6-14% of GDP by 2050 – the highest in the world. Additionally, groundwater over-abstraction is recorded for most irrigated agricultural plots, depleting fossil aquifers to critical levels and drawing down renewable aquifers to the point that abstraction is no longer economically feasible.*

*In light of the above, MENA could benefit from youth-led efforts to overcome these trends and address or respond to scarcity of water resources. Outstanding questions remain: Are water resources being optimally managed for sustainability and efficiency? What are the opportunities, solutions, and substitutes for current water practices to maintain water security, and reinforce food and energy security? Can solar energy farming be a feasible substitute to irrigated agriculture? What are the threats of such alternative?*

*As governments search for water security solutions, solar energy farming may be a viable substitute as an income generating activity that simultaneously reduces groundwater abstraction. This substitution could present game-changing opportunities to bolster water, food, and energy security.*

*His work will discuss the pros and cons of adopting solar energy farming as a source of income for farmers and as a water-friendly alternative to irrigated agriculture, looking specifically to a study area from northeastern Lebanon. Reinforced by supporting policies, this alternative could help put Lebanon on course toward water security. Such an approach may require commitment at all levels of society to address cultural barriers delaying change in water use, to bridge institutional and policy divisions, and to revise outdated regulations.*

*Additionally, policymakers must understand the multi-faceted dynamics and opportunities of these recommendations and then implement them. Ultimately, solar farming may be an opportunity for youth to offer concrete and constructive policy recommendations directed at relevant stakeholders – locally, nationally, or even regionally.*