



# POWER2YOUTH

## Gender, Intersectionality and Youth Civic and Political Engagement. An Analysis of the Meso-Level Factors of Youth Exclusion/Inclusion in the South and East Mediterranean (SEM) Region

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**Ruba Salih, Lynn Welchman and Elena Zambelli<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*This paper contains a discussion of how gender, sexuality, class and race interplay, enabling or obstructing different pathways and modalities of youth civic and political engagement in the countries of the South-Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region which are part of the Power2Youth project (in alphabetical order: Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Turkey). It is based on the key research findings contained in the meso-level country papers prepared by Power2Youth partners. The first section undertakes an overview of how gender analysis interrogates the binary of inclusion/exclusion and the ensuing liberalism-informed notions of the public sphere, civil society and agency. Based on such scholarship and insights, the second section discusses findings from WP3 country papers that enable a discussion of how gender, generation, sexuality, class and race interplay in shaping patterns of youth dis/engagement from politics, and states' approaches to the containment of youth quests for socioeconomic and/or political change. The third and last section discusses how WP3 papers operationalized intersectionality, highlighting strategies that researchers used to address the challenges of sample inclusiveness in the face of youth subjective and socially situated experience of the interlocking structures of power that shape the contexts in which youth live.*

**Keywords:** Youth | Women | NGOs | Authoritarianism | South East Mediterranean

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper contains a discussion of how gender, sexuality, class and race interplay, enabling or obstructing different pathways and modalities of youth civic and political engagement in the countries of the South-Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) region which are part of the Power2Youth project.<sup>2</sup> It is based on the key research findings contained in the Work Package 3 (WP3)<sup>3</sup> country papers prepared by Power2Youth partners.

In the first section, we undertake an overview of how gender analysis interrogates the binary of inclusion/exclusion and the ensuing liberalism-informed notions of the public sphere, civil society and agency. Hence, we show how these notions affect our gaze on dynamics of youth participation, dis/engagement and protest, for example constraining our vision on the types

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<sup>2</sup> Notably, in alphabetical order: Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> Power2Youth Work Package 3 focused on youth collective agency (meso-level analysis).

of (individual or collective) subjects who are “doing politics,” the spaces where this occurs and the means that they can deploy. Crucially, such notions bear implications for the attribution of responsibility for one’s (self-)exclusion from the liberal public sphere, and also, for the measures that governments might take were they to genuinely foster youth “inclusion.”

Based on such scholarship and insights, in the second section we discuss findings from Power2Youth WP3 country papers that enable a discussion of how gender, generation, sexuality, class and race interplay in shaping patterns of youth dis/engagement from politics, and states’ approaches to the containment of youth quests for socioeconomic and/or political change.

In the third and last section, we discuss how Power2Youth WP3 papers operationalized intersectionality, highlighting strategies that researchers used to address the challenges of sample inclusiveness in the face of youth subjective and socially situated experience of the interlocking structures of power that shape the contexts in which youth live.

## **1. PROBLEMATIZING THE INCLUSION/EXCLUSION FRAMEWORK. AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH**

As already highlighted in our paper on WP2 comparative gender conclusions (Salih et al. 2016), the theoretical framework of the Power2Youth research project, and in particular the binary inclusion/exclusion, reflects a liberal understanding of the factors that can impede or foster the participation of youth in the political, economic or social/cultural contexts where they live; the forms of such participation (or lack thereof); and the spaces they create or inhabit. If before the Arab Spring an inclusion approach could still be used in making sense of young people’s search for better life opportunities, which could enhance their income, education, housing and marriage prospects (Dhillon and Yousef 2009), after the uprisings the same issues remain burning, but the entire political and social frameworks are unsettled and under radical scrutiny.

In particular, in this section we discuss how an intersectional approach enables us to interrogate the public/private divide, showing how gender, sexuality, class and race interplay in shaping the contours and contents of the public sphere, the definition of its legitimate agents, as well as the relative in/visibility of the individuals and/or social groups that are positioned at or pushed to its margins.

### **1.1 Gendering the Public/Private and Secular/Religious Divides**

Traditional political-science approaches to the study of (individuals’ or specific social groups’) political dis/engagement in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) rely on a set of binaries juxtaposing the public and the private sphere, the rule of liberal freedoms in the first and the expression and cultivation of piety in the latter, the secular and the religious, or politics and affectivity.

Feminist theorists have long criticized the division of human life and affairs into a public vs. private sphere (Young 1986, Fraser 1990), because this binary fails to consider not only the arbitrary and political nature of the confinement of women into the latter, but also the

complex interplay (as opposed to separation) between the state and the family, the market and the care economy (Elson 1998), and politics and intimacy (Berlant 1997).

Even if we adopt a liberal notion of the public/private division, however, definition of the contours, norms and contents of the public sphere constitutes a terrain of contention between different social groups that, as feminist scholars have amply shown, generally convey their projects and aspirations through competing imageries of womanhood (Yuval-Davis 1997, Joseph 2000). "Woman," hence, has been (and continues to be) called upon to embody and signify a nation's modernity or tradition, progress or cultural "authenticity" (Khalil 2014a and 2014b, Hafez 2014, Joseph 2000, Negrón-Gonzales 2016), and bound to reproducing it both biologically and culturally (Yuval-Davis 1997). On the other hand, postcolonial scholars have amply shown the central role of the "woman question" in colonialism and Orientalism (Said 1979, Yeğenoğlu 1998), whereby a woman's status and enjoyment of specific (liberal) rights and freedoms has been (and continues to be) used as a litmus test to position a society along an evolutionary line spanning from barbarity to (Western) civility.

Such ambivalences and contradictions complicate the analysis of women's status and rights within any society, and more so in the context of Arab countries where the regime's top-down concession of rights to women, which some scholars characterize as a form of "state feminism" (Hatem 1992, Ennaji 2008:340-41), has been used to project an image of the modern status of the new, postcolonial state (Mhadhbi 2012, Khalil 2014a:192-93, Charrad 2001, Abu-Lughod 1998) against its backward and obscurantist Other - i.e., Islam.<sup>4</sup> Several scholars have highlighted that today, the legacy of these opportunistic forms of state feminism weighs on the capacity of local women's rights activists to promote inclusive public debates, notably due to the widespread perception of gender mainstreaming and women's rights agendas as being tied to the past authoritarian regimes, and against Islam and Islamist political opposition (see for example Hafez 2014:181, Khalil 2014a:187, Morsy 2014:216, Johansson-Nogués 2013:404, Errazzouki 2014:262). Indeed, the perception and portrayal (including by governments in the region) of human rights and gender equality agendas as "Western" and alien complicates the work of locally rooted human rights and women's rights groups and activists (Megally 2006, Chase 2012, Moghadam 1994, Negrón-Gonzales 2016). Such difficulty was for example highlighted in this passage from the WP3 Egyptian paper, where the author noted the assertion of a young Egyptian woman activist that "whenever she discusses the rights of women, people take it from a religious perspective and hence, they turn feminism into anti religion" (Sika 2016:13).

Conversely, awareness of such a complex background, dense with intersecting and at times contradictory gendered and racialized discourses, makes it possible to acknowledge how religiously rooted notions of social justice have played a pivotal role in enabling the fall of some regimes during the Arab Spring. In Tunisia, for example,

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Andrea Khalil (2014a:191) argued that in Tunisia, the Personal Status Code (PSC) served the regime's goal to "dislocate and uproot tribal and Islamic community loyalties," and that in more recent years, before its demise, Ben Ali instrumentalized the PSC to mobilize feminist organizations against the Islamist political opposition (Khalil 2014a:191, 192).

[f]or Islamist-identified women, the role of religion in the revolution was a motivational factor. Religion, they described, had a primordial role in their participation in the Tunisian revolution. Islamist women described pushing their family members to revolt against Ben Ali because of the imprisonment suffered by the Islamists. (Khalil 2014a:189)

Here, rather than constituting a private effect to be cultivated in the home or specific places of worship, religion prompted ordinary women to go out into the street to protest against a regime that repressed and curtailed its presence in the public, social and political spheres. Furthermore, such acknowledgement shows how the feminist notion of agency as being tied to the pursuit of individual empowerment or resistance to relations of domination (Mahmood 2001), of which religion would constitute a source, is limited for a full understanding of the various ways in which women and men operate in the Middle East.<sup>5</sup>

More recent feminist and queer scholarship unpacks the gendering of the public sphere, interrogating the role of heteronormativity, class and race in the reproduction of hierarchies of value among different femininities and masculinities, that accordingly come to be labelled and positioned as legitimate or stigmatized makers/users of the public space (Amar 2011). Other scholars have shown the importance of class in analysing women's positioning towards the recognition of specific (women's human) rights, arguing that in certain contexts, the salience of the urban/rural divide can override that of the liberal/secular divide (Khalil 2014a:197).<sup>6</sup> Finally, Paul Amar (2011) argues that internationalist feminist agendas promoting human security-centred laws and policies to protect women in war-torn countries<sup>7</sup> can be used by authoritarian states as governance tools promoting a class-based and racialized stratification and moralization of the public space.

## 1.2 Politics Outside of the Liberal Public/Political Sphere

The mainstream Western understanding of "civil society" has failed to capture the role of the family and networks in the Middle East. As Diane Singerman showed in the context of Egypt, family and religious networks operate in all spheres of civil life, as they "distribute scarce resources, facilitate coordinated actions, and promote public discourse" (Singerman 2006:1). Tribal, religious and family ties are crucial in producing selves and subjectivities but also in fostering bonds of trust and solidarity as well as in the distribution of resources and

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<sup>5</sup> Saba Mahmood (2001) criticized the liberal biases underlying the Western feminist notion of agency by discussing Egyptian Muslim women's subjectivities and practices within the context of a "nonliberal movement," notably a mosque movement in Cairo. Contesting normative assumptions of agency as coterminous with resistance to relations of dominations, she suggested that we conceive of agency as "a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (Mahmood 2001:203). Sumi Madhok (2013) similarly criticized such liberal biases equating agency to a person's exercise of negative freedoms and "ability to commit free acts" (Madhok 2013:116), also highlighting how such action-bias relies on a gendered, class-based and racialized construction of the "true liberal humanist/autonomous" self (Madhok 2013:105), i.e., a white Western man.

<sup>6</sup> In particular Khalil argues that class-based differences crucially informed the mistrust that women living in rural and marginalized areas in Tunisia felt for the urban-based, secular Tunisian women's movement (Khalil 2014a:196); and that the urban/rural divide informed women's position towards gender roles and norms, as rural women expressed more conservative opinions than urban Islamist women (Khalil 2014a:197).

<sup>7</sup> In particular, he discusses UNSCR 1325/2000 and subsequent resolutions.

privileges, support and care. There is a need to give more attention to the ways in which family ties, religious networks and transnational solidarities shape youth political sensibilities, affiliations and forms of participation, but also structures of feelings and affective ties that are not necessarily anchored in conventional civil society frameworks.

The need to problematize the civil society approach goes hand in hand with the pressure to analyse forms of mobilization and expression that do not conform to traditional social movement theory. Beinin and Vairel (2011) have contributed to shedding light on how forms of mobilization and protest in the Middle East emerge out of structures of fear and repression rather than opportunities, as conceived by classic social movement theory. Informality and informal networks are particularly crucial contextual aspects. The usual radar screen of what constitutes the political or where politics occur does not pay enough attention to the role of informal networks and the non-openly subversive or challenging tactics and strategies that permeate the landscape of everyday action in the region (Singerman 1995, Hoodfar 1997). In Morocco, for example, protest movements have partly been self-limiting as a tactic of dealing with the repressive response of the regime (Badimon 2013). The local dimension of protest, which some scholars have analysed as a tactic for limiting the exposure of movements to repression, also constitutes a characteristic of social movements in the region that can both limit and empower them (Beinin and Vairel 2011). Other scholars, such as Andrea Khalil, identify a specific modality of doing politics (i.e., "Arab Spring politics") that Khalil characterizes as being "non-institutional", popular, diffused and "atomised", and that takes place both in the street and in cyber space, through social media and blogs (Khalil 2014a:131-32).

On the other hand, the process of transnationalization of social movements has acquired momentum especially since the Arab uprisings, with increased involvement of transnational solidarity networks and diasporic organizations mobilizing across borders (Gerges 2015).

When addressing the issue of political mobilization in the Middle East, one fundamental limit of the conventional "civil society" gaze is that it fails to capture the extraordinary amount of initiatives, practices, forms of resistance and appropriation that take place in non-urban contexts and through and among informal and ordinary people. Asef Bayat coined the term "social non-movements" to denote "the collective action of non-collective actors" (Bayat 2013:15), the non-ideologically guided political practices of ordinary people, particularly women and young people, among the subaltern disenfranchised populations of the Middle East. The concept of "social non-movements" foregrounds how today, a large part of politics in the Middle East takes place outside the formal and institutional space of parties, organizations and formal politics, but rather in the public, informal, daily spaces of ordinary life, what Bayat defined as "street politics." There is also however the "political street" which "denotes the collective sentiments, shared feelings and public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices that are expressed broadly in public spaces - in taxis, buses, and shops, on street sidewalks, or in mass street demonstrations" (Bayat 2013:14).

Overall, then, there is a need to pay attention to political and social formations, identities, networks and (in)actions that are located at the interstices of "inclusion/exclusion" and across the public and the private spheres. This would make it possible to expand the framework of analysis and to capture the multiplicity of actors, forces and networks as they emerge within and across the public/private domains and that do not necessarily make claims for inclusion

in the existing political/structural liberal/secular frameworks.

In the next section we discuss findings from WP3 country papers that enable a discussion of how gender, generation, sexuality, class and race interplay in shaping patterns of youth dis/engagement from politics in the MENA region, as well as states' strategies for containing youth quests for socioeconomic and/or political change.

## 2. DISCUSSION OF MAIN WP3 FINDINGS

### 2.1 Who Excludes Whom? Gendering the "Public" Sphere

As amply discussed in the previous section, the various "publics" in which young men and women participate are gendered spaces. For example, the Tunisian paper discusses the exclusion of youth on religious grounds, and in particular that of young Salafi men and women. The authors refer first to "self-exclusion:"

Religious youth exclude themselves from organizations. They feel better in their restricted circle. *Salafist* boys or girls do not want to mix with others, do not participate in activities of associations if their rules are not respected (sex separation at the scene of activities, respect of the time of prayer, comments on the attire of other youth who are members of the organizations). (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017)

Here, self-exclusion is crucially rooted in different norms disciplining the relations between the sexes, notably in relation to the use of space and aesthetics. Insistence on such rules disrupts the procedures and activities of non-religious NGOs and, eventually, this leads to a "break between these young Salafists and other members of these NGOs" (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017). The public sphere and the political realm are not neutral spaces, but in some contexts like the Tunisian, they are constructed as predominantly secular spheres which rely on the exclusion or marginalization of religious signs and symbols that are highly gendered, the veil (Khalil 2014a:190, 196) and the beard (see infra).<sup>8</sup> An inclusion/exclusion framework that does not analyse the gendered genealogies of space and place may fail to capture important processes, as the Tunisian paper shows:

Young Salafists also reject the rules of democratic life and refuse to participate [in] elections and all activities related to them. At the same time, young Salafists are victims of exclusion and restrictions: some who have obtained jobs in the public sector were asked to cut their beards. "The doors are open to young people who show that they are 'modernists' and unveiled young girls. They are not excluded. They are included in civic and political activities. Organizations defending human rights only defend the rights of the 'Modernists,' but not those of Salafists who are more exposed to controls and abuses coming from the security forces. They end up renouncing all public action..." (One of the participants of the focus group of Medenine). (Boubakri

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<sup>8</sup> Scholarship on Turkey before the advent of AKP rule also highlighted such liberal, secular connotation of the public sphere, observing that the embeddedness of such norms in the state and its military apparatus was pursued through elicitation of men's (politicians, military, et al.) Islamist affiliation through the observation of the dress code exhibited by the women of their families (Arik 2016).

and Bouzidi 2017)

Clearly, religious sensibilities shape forms of political organizing, and stretch the boundaries of conventional notions of civil society. Cognizant of such liberalism-informed genealogies, and against the background of the contemporary Western countries' obsession with youth religious-based radicalization in the Arab region and in Europe, it is possible that organizations or individuals operating according to different frames of reference (e.g., religious) refuse their consent to participate in endeavours that they see as intrinsically flawed or that would put their safety at risk (e.g., by increasing their visibility), *inter alia* affecting researchers' capacity to listen to and account for their voices and concerns. Indeed, the authors of the Tunisian WP3 country paper documented several difficulties they faced in trying to reach some political parties and young activists (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017).

Gendering the analysis of the state also entails looking at instances where its patriarchal prerogatives compound or contradict kinship loyalties, and WP3 country papers provide instances of both cases. The Lebanese WP3 country paper conceptualizes the state as substantially weak and "dominated by fragmented, adversarial and competing forms of clientelist networks that penetrate the state to entrench and reproduce their power" (Harb 2016b:5). Such networks, however, are significantly gendered, and premised on a continuum of patriarchal loyalties encompassing the family, as well as religious and political party affiliations (Joseph 1997, Singerman 2006). Within this context, men are typically better positioned to access work and political power, as highlighted in Lebanon's macro-level country paper (Harb 2016a).

Conversely, the Egyptian WP3 country paper hints at a contradiction between state-based and kinship-based loyalties, specifically in matter of allocation of employment opportunities. As previously discussed, in some Arab countries, independence from European colonial regimes was followed by state policies to promote women's emancipation and equality. Such policies included the provision of government employment, that for long "represented the preferred form of employment for women" (UNDP 2006:20, see also Chicha 2013:28); while job opportunities in the private sector remained biased in favour of men for a number of social, cultural and political factors (World Bank 2013:4).<sup>9</sup> However, with the advent of structural reform programmes from the 1980s onwards, and ensuing cuts to the public sector, women's employment rates shrank (UNDP 2006:92). It is against this background that we can contextualize the words of a young Egyptian woman, registered in a focus group, that hint at (Egyptian) women's expectations that the state should deliver to women what kinship-based networks don't - that is, "equal opportunities for all young people to have access to the job market, especially to the public sector" (Sika 2016:21-22). The Egyptian state's provision of work and educational opportunities for women had reflected the egalitarian spirit of Nasserism (Hafez 2014:180). However, with the retreat of the state, private and kin-based ties have regained their prominence as networks for the allocation of resources, such as jobs. Indeed, many focus groups participants stressed the importance of personal networks and

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<sup>9</sup> The World Bank report suggests that male biases embedded in the private sector job market stem from: constraints on women's mobility and choice and discriminatory legal frameworks; 'mismatches' between their education and private sector demands; unequal distribution of the socioeconomic cost of maternity between the state, the market and the family; and chastity norms.

connections (*wasta*) in finding a job (Sika 2016:22); however, for women, the viability of such modalities of access is likely reduced, as discussed above in the context of Lebanon.

## 2.2 Youth Subjectification and Agency: The Interplay of Gender, Class and Sexuality

Most Power2Youth meso-level country studies are based on the assumption that agency entails assertiveness in public - whether by exercising voice or participating in marches and actions, etc. Even if, as mentioned above, this is a problematic and narrow definition of agency, it is still crucial to analyse it through a gender lens, by considering how different forms and spaces of participation both reflect and affect gendered construction of youth as im/moral subjects; and how, in turn, such construction enables or obstructs their pursuit of personal and/or social aspirations (Jabiri 2016).

The gendered connotation of liberal forms of agency, and their consequences on young women's and men's subjectification, come out clearly in the following two quotes from the WP3 Egyptian country paper. Assertiveness is a socially valued attribute for (adult) men; accordingly, young men can feel encouraged to express their creative agency, and quest for participation and change, as for example stated by a young Egyptian man during a focus group: "I feel young, because I am 28 which is the definition of youth, but also because my attitude reflects being young. I always want to change and make things better, every day I wake up I want to use my power to change" (Sika 2016:16).

By contrast, docility and obedience constitute the normative ideal for women, and the following words from a young Egyptian woman during a focus group convey the gender-specific constraints shaping young women's experience of youthfulness, and the frustration that some of them feel: "[I] feel young, but the context in which I live in doesn't make me feel young. I want to travel and go see a lot of different places, but the social norms and family traditions want me to get married and be responsible. I don't want that" (Sika 2016:17).

As the quote above foregrounds, for women the exercise of (such liberal-defined form of) agency entails defiance of the social expectations attached to their gender role, that prescribe their confinement in domesticity. These expectations constitute a further field of power that women have to face in fulfilling their personal and/or political aspirations, whether individually or collectively pursued. Gender, therefore, crucially affects both the processes of subjectification of young men and women and their agency, shaping their perception of being more or less entitled to express their demands and desires, including those concerning the redistribution of political, economic and social power in the contexts where they live.

Several Power2Youth WP3 country papers note that the majority of young men and women who participated in interviews or focus groups were aware of, and criticized, prevailing patterns of discrimination against women in the sphere of work, politics and mobility - with the exception of the Turkish paper, which highlighted that pro-government youth considered women in their party to be ancillary to men (Akyüz et al. 2016).<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, awareness does not necessarily or uniformly translate into praxis; and, similarly, it is not necessarily rooted

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<sup>10</sup> In particular, authors observed that youth considered that women were "only capable of communicating suggestions to the main (male) decision-makers circles" (Akyüz et al. 2016:15).

in, and does not necessarily entail a desire to comply with, specific normative assumptions, judgements and/or ideals. Hence, for example, young men's awareness of women's risk of suffering gendered and sexualized violence as a consequence of their participation in public protests can be rooted in, and/or entail, a quest for gender equality in political participation. However, it can also be rooted in patriarchal assumptions that engender the public/domestic division, and posit women's proper and safe space in the latter sphere only. The difficulties intrinsic to such analyses are evident when trying to unpack the meanings underlying the following excerpt from the WP3 Egypt country paper, which states that out of all the "organized youth" interviewed, "only two young men in the whole sample discussed gender issues, and both of them discussed the problem of harassment, not gender equality per se" (Sika 2016:21).

Perhaps, as Sika seems to suggest, men's awareness of women's gendered, sexualized harassment does not stem from their assumption of gender equality as a desirable goal, but from the perceived threat to women's chastity, to which kinship honour is typically attached (Abu-Lughod 1986). Such complexity, however, is best approached through in-depth qualitative interviews, and hence possibly by the Power2Youth WP4 papers (the micro-level analysis).

More broadly, several country papers reported that young women lamented the gender-specific constraints they experienced. For example, in Egypt a young woman expressed her yearning to be perceived as equal in worth and capacity to her male peers: "I wish I was free, I wish the person in front of me would trust my decisions and give me the same benefits as [that of] young men. I wish I would be able to travel, the family perception is always 'how would you travel alone? You have to have someone to take care of you'" (Sika 2016:17).

An Egyptian woman activist complained about the pressure on women to get married within a certain age threshold: "I wish that a woman could say out loud that they don't want to get married before 35. Our social perception needs to change" (Sika 2016:18).

The Moroccan paper highlights that most male and female participants in focus groups were aware that women have to "fight on a daily basis for their rights," for they are more discriminated against than men (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:17).

Recent waves of youth mobilization in countries of the Middle East and North Africa show evidence of changing patterns of gendered forms of participation and leadership (Kandiyoti 2014). Hence, for example, the WP3 Lebanese country paper stresses that many women occupy leadership positions in these new movements (Harb 2016b), while recent scholarship on contemporary social movements in Egypt and Morocco highlights that local/national anti-harassment initiatives, which typically constituted a women-only domain of mobilization, are increasingly gender-inclusive (Skalli 2014:246, 249-50).<sup>11</sup> Conversely, the Palestinian WP3 country paper foregrounds the ironic stance of some young male focus group participants in relation to coverage in the Palestinian media of women's participation in the current flare-up:

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<sup>11</sup> Skalli also highlights that such collaboration is facilitated because women's organizations are stressing the human rights (versus feminist) discourse and dimension of their activism (Skalli 2014:255-56).

It was also acknowledged in the media that young women are participating in the front lines. To what extent this is the case is not clear, as some of the young men pointed out that when 100 men and two women demonstrate, the cameras will be on the two women. (Birzeit University 2016:23)

One might speculate on the reasons underlying young men's irony. Part of it could arise out of frustration over their belittled role and/or bravery, affecting their fulfilment of a key performative requirement of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Another part could be read as a mockery of Palestinian media's internalization of the Western, Orientalist gaze on Palestinian women, according to which amazement at, and emphasis on, these latter's participation conveys the media's underlying assumption that in so doing, they are defying their "naturally" submissive role and status.

However, WP3 papers did not provide substantial grounds for discussing the social construction of masculinities and femininities in relation to the form and content of youth political dis/engagement. Although some country papers such as the Lebanese and the Turkish include the voices of individuals and organizations explicitly fighting for LGBTQI people's rights in their countries, broader youth attitudes towards homosexuality were not systematically or thoroughly addressed.

As we will discuss further in the final section of this paper, few WP3 papers discussed in depth the role of class in shaping youth avenues and forms of political dis/engagement as it interplays with other axes of difference and power; however, many papers provided instances that support the salience of adopting a fully intersectional analytical approach. The authors of the Moroccan paper, for example, observed that class plays a role in shaping women's experiences of freedom or lack thereof, reporting that "the majority [of focus group participants] think that financial independence plays a role in women's freedom within the family and within society" (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:17). Some WP3 country papers highlighted instances of the interplay of gender and class in shaping women's participation in NGOs activities in the city and/or in mixed organizations. The Tunisian paper observes that "young women cannot easily join organizations, such [as] in distant region[s] where fathers do not allow their daughters to participate in NGO activities," and that "in some poor urban areas, [women members] represent just 20 percent of these organizations" (Boubarki and Bouzidi 2017). The Palestinian paper highlights gendered mobility constraints and use of space, observing that "young women in the villages complained about society's negative perspective on the group's social activities, in which young men and young women participate, which were sometimes seen as not conforming to the society's conservative customs" (Birzeit University 2016:9).

The Turkish paper also highlighted how gender and class interplayed in shaping the context where young women's subjectification and agency unfold, notably including the following quote from a young woman who describes the constraints she faces living in a patriarchal context further characterized by a precarious economic situation:

We don't feel young. It is about class, gender. As a girl, and the only granddaughter, I grew up in a very controlling family. We experience a feminist attitude in the Sociology department at college. Then I go home and face something completely opposite. Theory doesn't work in reality. I went to Sweden, there I was coming [home]

and going anytime I want. I felt that I was young for the first time in my life. They are individuals, but we can't be individuals, both because of the family and the education system. We don't question, we don't stand up to our families. We don't struggle to be individuals. When I came back here, I started to struggle. But here, there is a constant competition, will we find a job, will we always study, the work conditions are not letting you. I started working in the municipality, we are working 7/24, even on Sundays. [...] You don't have experience, they gave you the job just for mercy's sake. If you are young, you have to work, no salary, everything is about experience, so we have to be grateful and ask no more. It is difficult to be young in Turkey. It is very difficult depending on your class too. Everyone experiences youth in a different way. (Activist from an Alevi foundation, Focus group with activists from independent NGOs and new social movements) (Akyüz et al. 2016:15-16)

Interestingly, although no WP3 country paper researched in-depth young people's participation in online activism (Herrera 2012, 2014), the Internet might represent a space where women can feel freer to express their voice, and participate more broadly. In fact, recent scholarship on young women activists' use of the Internet and social media showed how the Internet provided a space where social taboos on violence against women and sexual harassment could be broken, opening a public debate on its roots and meanings, and demanding its end (Skalli 2014:246). In this vein, it is significant to report the following quote from a woman in a focus group in Morocco, whom the researchers described as being a "member of a mainstream political party who was always silenced during party meetings:"

When you are on Facebook, you end up saying all the things that you don't dare to say in a meeting or a conference; there is no one who will tell you why you are saying this or that. On Facebook, you have the total freedom to say whatever you want, to say everything. (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:21)

Access to the Internet, however, is shaped by gender and class. Hence, in Egypt, gendered mobility constraints contribute to the existence of a strong digital gender gap,<sup>12</sup> as women are more likely constrained in their capacity to go to cyber cafes (Ahmed Ali and Muthoni Macharíá 2016:362-63); while more broadly, access to technology (and sometimes, electricity) is predictably lower in rural and marginalized areas. Furthermore, the possibilities for youth activism engendered in their use of Internet and social media are being constrained by increasing state "oversight of online activism" (Spencer and Aldouri 2016:25).

Finally, the Tunisian paper (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017) reveals how class shapes both youth perception of exclusion from the organizations which ought to represent, or respond to, their voices and needs; and the perception of the members of these organizations of why, for example, lower-income youth do not participate in their activities. In fact, it records that young people from a poor neighbourhood in Tunis labelled CSOs as "of caviar," affirming that they could not participate in such activities because since they were unemployed, they could not afford transportation or accommodation; also, leaders of some youth organizations "argue that many young people from the lower classes think about income at first" (Boubakri

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<sup>12</sup> I.e., 37 percent women versus 63 percent men.

and Bouzidi 2017).<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3 Gendered, Sexualized and Class-Based State Disciplining Techniques

Patriarchal power is mainly structured on axes of gender, generation and sexuality, and controlling this last plays a pivotal role in its orderly reproduction. Feminist scholarship has extensively shown that states attribute different values to the same behaviour on the basis of the gender of the agent or the victim, and also that in matter of control and discipline of especially women's sexuality, states substantially reinforce paternal, patriarchal control (Mir-Hosseini 2010, Zuhur 2005, Warrick 2005, Charrad 2001). Scholars have also shown how states adopt family-based metaphors of rule, for example taking up the self-ascribed role of the "father" of the nation/people (Joseph 2000).

Some WP3 papers substantiate these analyses further. For example, the Egyptian country paper observes that notwithstanding the 2011 revolution, the state maintains a paternalistic attitude towards youth, whose participation in shaping political and economic development processes it attempts to constrain under its fatherly guidance (Sika 2016).<sup>14</sup>

The Moroccan country paper observes that "young people believe that there is a gap between law and practice, between the discourse and the reality" (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:15), and this emerges strikingly in the sphere of sexuality. In fact, some focus group participants pointed to their ambivalent experience of living in a permissive environment that can however suddenly and arbitrarily twist into its opposite.<sup>15</sup> Although the paper does not comment on the gendered consequences of such ambivalences in the matter of the discipline of sexuality, these are likely harder to cope with for young women, especially in the case of unplanned pregnancy outside of marriage, which would prompt their stigmatization as promiscuous, immoral women. This was for example highlighted by the WP2 country papers on Tunisia and Morocco (Paciello et al. 2016a, 2016b) in relation to the stigma and vulnerability experienced by single mothers. The WP3 Morocco paper further highlights that such ambivalence in the regulation of sexuality can inform state strategies to repress internal dissent (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Interviewees conveyed class differences among youth by means of their residency in different areas of the city: "In Sidi Hassine, a poor suburb of Tunis, young people do not participate if there is no money, the first question they ask whether the organization provides money or not. The NOG [ONG] leaders don't find this problem in rich districts like Hay (City) Ennasser" (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017).

<sup>14</sup> For example, in recent years president Abdel Fatah al-Sisi has addressed the students of Cairo University as his "sons and daughters" (Sika 2016:7).

<sup>15</sup> Hence, they reported that "some Moroccans can freely buy and consume wine, or dress in very sexy ways, while others practice prostitution without any constraints. However, the law hangs over individuals and at any moment can be instrumentalized against people on the basis that they are undermining 'public morality' and thus may be prosecuted for illegal behaviour" (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:16).

<sup>16</sup> In particular they say that "a number of participants pointed to the ambiguities that exist in the legal system, whereby individuals can be accused of sexual offenses at any time. They believe that the law is selective, and some even mentioned that it especially targets opponents of the political system. This is in fact a pattern that can be observed by looking at the different cases that have involved journalists, members of the Justice and Charity Movement and activists from the February 20 movement, who were accused of sexual abuse, adultery or molestation" (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:16).

Although the interplay of gender and sexuality underlying such strategies is not brought out, the content of these strategies likely depends on the gender of the person targeted, and reflects different standards of heteronormative sexual morality for men and for women. Hence, when chastity is coterminous with women's social worth, their de-legitimization will typically entail proving their promiscuity; when virility is posited at the core of masculinity, proving a man's feminized status would be the goal (HRW 2004, Puar 2004, Nagel 2000). Indeed, recent feminist scholarship on the Egyptian state's political repression during and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring has shown that women protesters have been not only sexually assaulted both in public and in jail, but also constructed as immoral and deviant (i.e., as "prostitutes"), in the attempt to depoliticize the meaning of their actions and undermine their class-based "respectability" (Amar 2011:309, see also Hafez 2014:174, Skalli 2014:48).<sup>17</sup>

An unexplored area of investigation in WP3 papers was the study of the gendered consequences of youth activism, especially when it entails defiance of state authority. Scholarship on youth and activism in Palestine during the first Intifada, for example, showed that for young men, "beatings and detention [were] construed as rites of passage into manhood," entailing the experience and reversal of "relations of domination between occupied and occupier" (Peteet 1994:31). More recently, several scholars have observed that such meaning and value have been diminishing in the post-Oslo period, whether due to the lack of opportunities for young demonstrators to use the "masculine credentials and political capital acquired" by moving into leadership roles (Johnson and Kuttub 2001:35) or, more lately, due to the "absence of the Palestinian emancipatory project" (Giacaman and Johnson 2013:54). However, gender norms attaching a family's honour to the chastity of the women who are part of it suggest that detention could not function as a socially valued stage for Palestinian women as it had been for men. In fact, a young woman's family's fear of her arrest and sexualized, racialized violation by Israeli soldiers typically constrains her participation in public demonstrations (Hasso 2005:29). In this vein, the Palestinian WP3 paper observed that young women might feel family pressure impinging on their participation in political parties: "Imagine if I won the nomination for my party at the student elections, what would my family say? And will they allow me to take that position?," asked a female student attending a workshop on political participation organized by a local youth organization (Birzeit University 2016:7).

The authors relate this young woman's hesitation to the Israeli occupation and to her family's fear of their daughter being "detained and abused while in detention" (Birzeit University 2016:7). Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that the threat and consequences of Israeli occupation interact with patriarchy in gendered ways. In fact, Palestinian men are also vulnerable to sexualized and racialized violence during detention by the Israeli occupier (Peteet 1994:45). The plausibility of such forms of violence against men is attested by scholarship discussing the tortures inflicted upon Arab and/or Muslim detainees by Western countries' security apparatuses in the context of the "war on terror" (Briggs 2015:22-23, Puar 2004, 2005), and also by some recent feminist scholarship on state repression during and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (Amar 2011:313). Hence, the different perception of risk

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<sup>17</sup> Amar also recounted how women and men protesters skilfully played with gendered and class-based norms of respectability by strategically deploying middle-class women and professionals in the marches, so as to shift the perception of the group from a "mob" of "thugs" (highly connoted through Islamophobic, gendered and class-based tropes) to a "respectable" gathering and march (Amar 2011:309).

attached to young women's and men's political participation does not stem from differences in the likelihood of being exposed to sexualized abuses if detained, but from the different forms of shame attached to such violations of their bodies. However, the risk of men's sexualized and racialized violation is so terrifying and dreadful, for the forced loss of gender identity it would entail,<sup>18</sup> that it remains unspoken, as if elided from the realm of possible effects. Analogously, albeit with lesser intensity, men's "risk" of feminization is inferable from another excerpt from the Palestinian paper: in discussing how the older generation looks down on contemporary Palestinian youth, the authors report that these latter are called "the 'Facebook,' the 'coffeeshop,' the 'sagging trousers' generation, or even the '*fafiyat*' (roughly translated this means something like 'not real men')" (Birzeit University 2016:8).

#### 2.4 Formal, Substantive or Transformative (Gender) Equality? Reforms, Authoritarianism and Arbitrariness

All meso-level country papers (WP3) include a section describing how gender equality is more or less fully and/or consistently enshrined in a country's legal framework, encompassing the country's constitution, penal and civil codes, and family law (and so covering for example the laws on domestic violence, sexual harassment, adultery, nationality, inheritance, and so on). Moreover, papers of countries whose institutional assets were significantly revolutionized as a consequence of the Arab Springs (i.e., Tunisia and Egypt) discussed the extent to which gender equality has been institutionalized in the post-revolutionary legal framework.<sup>19</sup> Generally however, there is less analysis of gendered dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, as they interact with other axes of difference and ensuing power relations, across different spaces (home, work, leisure), arenas of engagement (political participation, employment, etc.) and life-course trajectories.

Yet, a state's compliance with formal gender equality requirements (e.g., non-discrimination law provisions) is unlikely to be a sufficient indicator of its commitment to promote substantive changes in people's behaviours, attitudes and practices towards women's rights. The Egyptian case is dramatically exemplary not only of the possibility of there being a clash between formal compliance and substantial efforts towards social change, but also of the possibility of states hijacking the gender equality and women's rights agendas for repressive purposes (Amar 2011, Kandiyoti 2014). In fact, post-Arab Spring egalitarian reforms notwithstanding, men's violence against women remains very high, ubiquitous and perpetrated all across the state and society (Ahmed Ali and Muthoni Macharíá 2016:362, EMHRN 2016). Feminist organizations such as Nazra for Feminist Studies (2014) argue that it actually increased after 2011. Moreover, as argued by a young Egyptian woman who participated in a focus group organized in the framework of WP3, the police do not enforce the anti-harassment law, and the media seem to espouse a victim-blaming approach: "The media talks about what a girl

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<sup>18</sup> Virility is a core, defining attribute of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Such status is performatively (Butler 1990) enacted and crucially maintained through the act of penetration, but when a man penetrates another man, this latter takes on a passive position (Foucault 1987). In a heteronormative context, where sex/gender is structured on the basis of a set of binaries juxtaposing man/woman, agency/passivity, desiring/desired being, a man's forced penetration by another man can also be guided by an intention to impose on this latter his shift into man's opposite, i.e., woman.

<sup>19</sup> For example, integrating a clause of non-discrimination in their constitution, adopting laws to protect women from family violence, to criminalize sexual harassment, etc.

should and should not wear, so that men do not harass her. Why does the media look at the victim instead of trying to solve the problem?" (Sika 2016:19)

As the Egyptian paper highlights, young women lamented that the fear of harassment severely curtailed their mobility and capacity to spend leisure time outside their home (Sika 2016). The paper does not discuss to what extent such mobility constraints affect women's agency and participation in public protests, though it is fair to assume that this is likely the case. In fact, several scholars have shown that in Egypt, sexual harassment is being used as "a political tool of repression" against women of all age, class, religious and ethnic belongings (Ahmed Ali and Muthoni Macharíá 2016:362, see also Hafez 2014:173, Skalli 2014:244). Additionally, Paul Amar (2011:321) suggests that, under the authoritarian rule in Egypt, legislation on sexual harassment might lend support to the arbitrary criminalization of young working-class men anywhere engaged in any kind of mixed interaction in a public space.

Indeed, authoritarianism and arbitrariness strongly affect youth activism in Egypt. Egypt is currently witnessing an intense crackdown on NGOs, including prominent Egyptian human rights groups such as the El-Nadim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture, identified by Paul Amar as a "primary articulator" of the "alternative feminism" articulated and performed by Egyptians in the face of the "gendered respectability politics of the security state" (Amar 2011:310, 312). Carapico (2014:113) has also explored the intricacies of gender empowerment projects, describing "gender programming" as a "relatively" absolute discourse. She presents an intimately complex picture: "Human rights institutions or machineries for women could draw feminist energies away from social justice movements toward national or transnational governance projects, or provide some space for counter-hegemonic activism, or all of the above" (Carapico 2014:148-49). An intersectional approach to gender in the WP4 studies may uncover surprises in how young women in the different countries under examination perceive and respond to the "political field." In fact, several young Egyptian women and men active in different organizations and interviewed in the context of WP3 voiced their perception of being constantly under state scrutiny, surveillance and at risk of being arbitrarily put under investigation. For example, a young woman active in the field of the promotion of women's rights said that "no one can work on the streets anymore," and lamented that she and her colleagues are now "afraid to put people under security investigations. You never know if the police will break into your organization and charge you with illegality or not" (Sika 2016:18).

While the case of contemporary Egypt foregrounds the contradiction between the state's formal and substantial compliance with gender equality commitments, other country papers highlight states' open conflict with these latter. In particular, the following words from a young Turkish male member of an opposition party convey a harsh critique of contemporary state approaches to gender issues in Turkey:

we live with a prime minister, a president who says, "I don't know if she is a woman, or a girl [virgin]," people who say, "A woman without the veil is like a house without a curtain: it is either for sale or for rent," and a minister of health who says, "Anyone who has been raped should give birth, the state will take care of the child." In this kind of paternalistic, capitalist state reality, of course the condition of women is grave. (Akyüz et al. 2016:15)

He then continued arguing that male sexual offenders' punishments are reduced on grounds of their female victim's presumed immorality, conveyed by her attire or attitude: "the courts are only paving the way for new murderers when they reduce the punishment of murderers who rape women and say, she had a piercing, she was wearing jeans, she looked at me and all" (Akyüz et al. 2016:15).

Scholarship on the politics of gender and sexuality in Turkey indeed confirm that such statements on gender accurately illustrate the contemporary political landscape (Korkman 2016:112-13, Seckinelgin 2016:271). Nonetheless, and consistent with WP3 findings, some scholars observe that in some cases, feminist groups in Turkey have succeeded in obtaining specific reforms (or stopping undesired ones) in the sphere of sexual and reproductive rights, although noting that such achievements were enabled by the EU's external pressure on Turkey in the context of this latter's as yet unresolved accession to the EU (Negrón-Gonzales 2016). Still, however, there is no law granting protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Seckinelgin 2016:272). More broadly, in most countries in the region, same-sex sexual activities continue to be criminalized, and there is little legal protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation (Needham 2013:299, Hamzić 2011:259).

## 2.5 Depoliticization, or Different Forms of Engagement?

Consistent with existing scholarship on youth political dis/engagement in the post-Arab Spring period (Spencer and Aldouri 2016:3, Herrera and Mansour 2015), WP3 country paper findings show that young people harbour a highly critical stance towards traditional, formal spaces and forms of political participation, a stance that often channels a self-exclusion from processes, political structures and institutions that they consider flawed. Indeed, WP3 papers overwhelmingly highlight youth dissatisfaction with formal political organizations and NGOs, foregrounding the problematic nature of eliding youth's political social and economic participation with their participation in political parties and/or formal arenas of political representation.

In particular, most WP3 country papers observed that youth are not very active within the framework of political parties, which they criticize for lacking sustained engagement with them, and/or obstructing their meaningful participation and representation. The Moroccan paper, for example, highlights that youth they interviewed and who participated in focus groups

are interested in politics but there is abstention when it comes to electoral participation. For many participants, the elections remain manipulated and political parties are perceived as weak. They think that it is the parties that are responsible for youth disengagement from partisan politics. Indeed, most of the political parties lack internal democracy and do not communicate well with youth. For many participants, youth are largely discriminated against and their voice is not heard even within the political parties to which they belong. (Zerhouni and Akasbi 2016:20-21).

Findings from focus groups with political party members in Egypt highlight similar problems, notably the lack of democratic decision-making processes and dismissal of young people's agendas (Sika 2016). Likewise, the Tunisian WP3 paper illustrates young people's dissatisfaction

with political parties and also, their critique of the value of formal political inclusion vis-à-vis their persistently precarious socioeconomic status:

Most of young people think that political parties did not represent them. The factor that constrains their participation is that they did not trust political parties and associations. They find this useless and a waste of time and energy. Some of them declare that they did not vote because political parties don't defend their interests. Young people of Tataouine (South) have a strong opinion about this subject: no trust in political parties and none in old movements. Old experiments were unsuccessful. The revolution failed to bring something to them: no benefits, no profits. They consider that young people are not those who profited from revolution. For them, we cannot talk about youth participation when basic needs are not provided (income, employment, social status...). (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017)

When the young constitute the majority of the population in these countries (Spencer and Aldouri 2016:10), the inability of political parties to include, listen and represent them calls into question not only their individual efficacy, but also the broader representativeness and legitimacy of the political system as a whole.

However, scepticism and/or disillusion with political parties that appear oblivious to youth, and with depoliticized NGOs (see *infra*), cannot be taken as indicators of youth disengagement from, or disinterest in, politics. Rather, even today, youth maintain "a strong interest in engaging as full and active citizens outside formal political circles" (Spencer and Aldouri 2016:11). Therefore, analysing youth political mobilization in the contemporary MENA countries requires looking at how they reshape forms, spaces and meanings of the political. WP3 papers show how young men and women increasingly express themselves by participating in less formal platforms of activism, both off- and online, and mostly issue-based. The Lebanese paper illustrates such transformations:

Since the Arab uprisings of 2011, new forms of youth mobilization have been taking place, especially in relation to issues of personal rights, and rights to the city. More or less loose coalitions of young people have been coming together around issues of public interest, such as LGBT rights, domestic violence, women's rights, destruction of urban heritage, privatization of the coast, right to affordable housing. (Harb 2016b:19)

One should note that the current post-Spring timing, characterized by heavy repression by security apparatuses and political regimes, is marked by a combination of youth "presence" and "absence" (Herrera and Mansour 2015). The art of absence can materialize in withdrawing from spaces that have been imbued with nationalistic and pro-military values after the uprisings, and in cultivating "resistance" - or an oppositional ethos - in the private sphere, through domestic or non-state education:

In the post-uprising period, possible acts of disruption to the system are occurring through a combination of presence and absence. By absence we refer to ways people withdraw to more intimate, private, and protected spaces, away from the public gaze. Absence can also be used in a more literal sense as in students' opting out of the spaces that the state designates for their participation, such as brick-and-mortar

schools, youth clubs, and universities. Often the two strategies of presence and absence work in tandem. (Herrera and Mansour 2015:7)

## **2.6 What Issues Are Youth Issues? Occupation, Political Repression and the Rejection of the “Youth” Label**

Crucially, in most countries, youth participating in interviews and focus groups refused to single out their problems from those faced by their society at large. For example, the Palestinian paper argues that youth “exclusion” from their society and state is not relevant for Palestinian youth, who do not perceive themselves as being excluded; and shifts the focus instead to the persisting Israeli occupation:

This Palestinian component of the regional comparative Power2Youth study can only conclude that it is the Israeli military occupation that remains the dominant Power AGAINST Palestinian youth. Attempts by young Palestinians to participate and take an active role in assuming power are too often paid by their lives or their freedom. (Birzeit University 2016:26)

The authors of the Moroccan WP3 paper observed that the majority of interviewees and focus groups participants considered not only that “youth marginalization and exclusion from the political sphere is predominant” but also that “for many of them, political exclusion is in fact a common denominator among all Moroccans” (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:22). In Turkey, the paper expressed concern over the exacerbating domestic polarization, violence and authoritarianism. For example, a participant of a focus group with activists from “new social movements” said: “Our original problem is that we can’t get to our own problems. We have to struggle with other problems first” (Akyüz et al. 2016:11).

Many activists also mentioned that their common problem was “not having any (youth-specific problems)” (Akyüz et al. 2016:12). On the other hand, probably also in reaction to the current prevailing discourse and preoccupation in Western countries with “youth radicalization” in the MENA region and related spillover effects (Spencer and Aldouri 2016:4-5), a Turkish urban movement activist stated that: “radicalization doesn’t begin because the transportation is not free; it begins if people cannot do anything about it being not free” (Akyüz et al. 2016:28).

These words foreground how, indeed, for some youth living within such repressive and violent settings, where their socio-economic predicament is highly unstable, and their freedoms and mobility are curtailed or surveilled, it is the broader framework in which they live that needs to change in order for a meaningful and substantive “inclusion” to happen.

Sometimes, awareness of structural economic imbalances within and/or across nations was directly voiced in response to questions as to whether youth (feel that they) can bring about change in their countries. For example, a Palestinian participant in a focus group recounted saying at a conference on a new EU-funded initiative: “What will NET-MED project (2) add to the country? The youth need work and they don’t need awareness about work” (Birzeit University 2016:21).

The paper also foregrounds the limits within which Palestinian NGOs' action is constrained, under the persisting Israeli occupation:

Many of the NGOs working with and for youth recognize the problem of youth unemployment, and consequently some of their projects focus on increasing the chances of young people to find employment, through training in writing CVs, how to conduct an interview, project planning and management, fundraising, and even schemes in which two jobseekers volunteer to work for six months at an institution or business with the aim that one of these two will be hired. The limitation of such projects is that they aim to improve the "marketability" of young individuals, while they cannot influence the structural problems related to youth unemployment (Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the consequent restrictions on the economy and society). (Birzeit University 2016:20-21)

Academic scholarship on the NGO-ization of social movements leaves room to interpret youth presence in these organizations as a more or less disillusioned, pragmatic employment choice, rather than a reflection of their passion and willingness to participate in a collective struggle for a social, political cause. In fact, international aid has played a key role in the transformation of NGOs from a vehicle for an organized, collective voice and agency, to that of an employment market reliant on aid flows; and this phenomenon is underlined more prominently in the scholarship on the Occupied West Bank (Hammami 1995, Jad 2008, Hanafi and Tabar 2005, Allen 2013). Recent scholarship discussing aid flows to youth-focused development programmes in the Middle East and North Africa region highlights that not only were these tied to many conditionalities, but also, that they lacked a long-term vision and continuity, resulting in the early breakup of many new youth organizations which had flourished in the post-Arab Spring period (Spencer and Aldouri 2016:19). Hence, such scholarship foregrounds the politics of international aid, showing how it is politically driven and historically contingent on shifting political priorities. On the other hand, some of the ambivalences intrinsic to the politics of aid are further compounded by, *inter alia*, the EU's sustained support for Israel despite its record of serious violation of human rights and humanitarian law (see for example OHCHR 2016), and the EU's shameful contemporary management of the refugee crisis at its borders (Biondi 2016). Although this was not discussed in any of the WP3 country papers, it is possible that such selective and intermittent interest on the part of Western countries and donors in the human rights and gender equality of other countries, within a wider context characterized by persisting or worsening economic instability and inequalities, as well as internal and regional conflicts, fosters scepticism and cynicism among youth.

Many WP3 country papers analysed the growth, development and, in some cases, decline of NGOs in relation to the intermittent and issue-based flows of Western aid to their countries. For example, the Power2Youth WP3 Turkish paper links the historical development and decline of youth civil society organizations to the country's yet unresolved process of accession to the EU, and anticipates a flourishing of professional NGOs to cater for Syrian refugees' basic needs and services within the context of the agreement between Turkey and the EU on their containment and/or repatriation (Akyüz et al. 2016). Similarly, the Lebanese country paper documents the opportunistic shift of most NGOs from inter-confessionalism in the aftermath of the civil war to humanitarian relief after the 2006 war of Israel on Lebanon (Harb 2016b).

The Palestine study attends directly to a critique of the role of international aid and agencies in promoting youth inclusion and, for our purposes here, the inclusion of young women. Indeed, the Palestinian study begins by identifying “the international community’s policy of non-intervention and lack of influence on Israeli policy” as a significant “structural factor” additional to the Israeli occupation in impacting the prospects for youth participation (Birzeit University 2016:4). A specific series of events (from the first Intifada) are identified as “turning points” for Palestinian youth, one of them the elections of 2006 when

The fact that in 2006 a democratically elected government was to such an extent boycotted by the international community that internal fighting ultimately resulted in the Fatah/Hamas (West Bank/Gaza Strip) division, led to an almost general frustration in relation to internal politics, especially for young people. (Birzeit University 2016:22)<sup>20</sup>

This critique of European and US political reform and aid policies, incisively explored by Carapico (2014), is also noted by other scholars as part of the background to the 2011 revolutions: writing soon afterwards, Beinin and Vairel (2011:237) observe certain common economic and political “grievances” expressed in protests in different Arab countries, with the political ones including “routine police brutality and torture, massive government corruption, and a repressive state apparatus supported by aid and arms from the United States and the European Union.” But this support for authoritarian governments proceeded alongside projects of “democracy promotion” and political reform that included a major focus on human rights and women’s rights (Carapico 2014). Different governments have frequently smeared local human rights and women’s rights activists, as well as more physically (and “legally”) obstructing their work, both before 2011 and since. Stork (2011:86) notes that there was “no base of popular support” for human rights and women’s rights organizations in Egypt before 2011, and that “the increased number of activists in human rights groups over two decades of work reflects more an entrepreneurship in response to the availability of foreign funding than the political demands and moral support of society.” This perhaps has some connection to the Birzeit University’s finding about the “money that comes” – that is, “the funding provided by international donors for youth projects” in Palestine, and their concern as to the possible negative impact of some such funding on youth initiative (Birzeit University 2016:24). At the same time, the Palestine case study notes efforts by NGOs to include young women “in their planning and activities,” and for projects to actively target young women, as a result of donors’ conditions or priorities (Birzeit University 2016:6).

In this light we suggest on the one hand to explore how youth participation in these organizations might be conceptualized in frameworks of disillusion and pragmatism; and on the other hand, as most of the WP3 papers have shown, it is important to research further youth alternative modes of doing politics within and across the national boundaries within which they live. In fact, for example, the Palestinian case juxtaposes the effectiveness of aid-dependent social organizations, whose youth projects have limited reach, and other autonomous, spontaneous youth initiatives, such as, *inter alia*, Youth Against Settlements and Love in the Time of Apartheid (Birzeit University 2016:7).

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<sup>20</sup> See also Carapico (2014:101-104) on these events as a “watershed.”

In the next and concluding section we discuss intersectionality in relation to the methodology informing WP3 country papers.

### 3. METHODOLOGY: THE CHALLENGES OF PUTTING INTERSECTIONALITY TO WORK

Adopting and implementing an intersectional lens in the research process has been an objective of the Power2Youth consortium. However, the operationalization of intersectionality in research is inherently elusive due to the complex, contingent interaction between multiple differences (e.g., gender, class, race, age, sexuality, disability), each of which is socially structured into interlocking hierarchies of power, and resulting in different degrees and types of privileges, disadvantages and in/visibility (see for example Buitelaar 2006, Hancock 2007, McCall 2005, Phoenix 2001, Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008, Simien 2007). Moreover, whether an individual will take up, for example, a gendered subject position and prioritize his/her experience of gender inequality, or speak from the position of a racialized subject excluded from certain niches of the labour market, can never be predetermined, but rather is always socially situated. In practice, however, researchers can adopt different strategies to integrate intersectionality into the design of their research methods, whether qualitative (e.g., focus groups, interviews) or quantitative (e.g., surveys, polls).

One option requires researchers' selection of the main social differences they want to interrogate prior to the implementation of the research. In this way they can purposefully tailor the sample in order to include individuals (or groups) endowed with such attributes, interests or preferences.<sup>21</sup> Another option requires that researchers restrain themselves from tailoring their sample, so as to allow the ex-post interrogation of the assumptions, hindrances and privileges underlying the observed patterns of representation, participation or lack thereof.

Most WP3 Power2Youth country papers highlight the difficulties faced by researchers in their attempt to ensure the participation of young women in interviews and focus groups. In Morocco, researchers tailored their sample in order to ensure young women's participation in focus groups (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016). In Egypt, the research design did not envisage interference with the choices made by participant organizations and movements; however, gendered dynamics of participation and exclusion were subsequently unpacked and discussed comparatively (Sika 2016).

All Power2Youth WP3 country papers address interviewees' attitudes towards gender equality, and highlight their perceptions and experiences of gender in/equality. Participant observation within youth organizations or social movements, however, was not envisaged

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<sup>21</sup> For example, this can happen by asking the organizations concerned to interview "at least [one woman/man]". However, such explicit sampling modality might not always be a viable option, especially in the case of identities or preferences that individuals or groups can perceive as private, sensitive and/or prone to attracting social stigma, criminalization or violence (depending on the context, these can include: sexual orientation, membership in specific ethnic, political or cultural formations, etc.). In other cases, the inclusion of specific social differences can be approached indirectly, for example by inviting residents of a range of neighbourhoods, each of which is markedly characterized by the socioeconomic status of its inhabitants.

as a research method for this work package, which would have offered empirical material potentially allowing an analysis of the gaps between narratives and practices, a comparison between activists' public statements (e.g., vision, press statements) and their internal practices (e.g., decision-making processes and roles), or the gender dynamics within the groups. Nonetheless, the Power2Youth WP3 Turkish paper aptly highlights that women's participation in focus groups was equally low, whatever the official positions towards gender equality of the different political parties (Akyüz et al. 2016).

For most Power2Youth WP3 country research teams, addressing class differences proved more challenging than ensuring the presence in focus groups of (at least some) young women alongside men. The overwhelming majority of interviewees listed unemployment, lack of affordable housing and basic services, poor public education and geographical marginalization as key factors contributing to youth exclusion (and/or perception thereof). At the same time, research samples seem to reproduce this class bias, both in terms of the organizations surveyed, which are almost exclusively urban, and in terms of their members and constituency, which are mostly composed of young men with at least tertiary education and with a middle-class background. For example, the Turkish country paper highlighted that organizations included in their research reported being unable to reach NEET<sup>22</sup> youth (Akyüz et al. 2016).<sup>23</sup>

As for differences that researchers knew to be particularly sensitive in their context, and specifically sexual orientation and gender identity, some country researches (Lebanon, Turkey, Tunisia) included focus groups or interviews with LGBTQI activists and organizations. Such sensitivity was stressed by the authors of the Turkish WP3 country paper, which hinted at the tensions and contradictions underlying young men's normative requirement to comply with "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), and more specifically at the complex intersection of gender, sexuality and ethnic identities in their subjectivities:

Nowadays, it is said that Kurdish youth are the most aware and organized youth population. Unfortunately, they often and systematically find themselves in situations of violence due to oppression and lack of space and medium for self-expression; whenever they initiate peaceful protests, they find the police and its violence in front of them. Still, expressions of other identities can be problematic for Kurdish youth. It is hard for a Kurdish gay to express himself, even though they constitute a part of the political movement by their own organizations. (Akyüz et al. 2016:27)

WP3 country papers did not investigate the type of masculinities valued and reproduced within, or stigmatized by, the organizations and individuals included in their research; therefore, they do not provide information on the performative pressures on young men to comply with hegemonic, heteronormative masculinity. In some cases, such analysis might be approachable through in-depth qualitative interviews, and hence possibly by WP4 papers.

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<sup>22</sup> Not (engaged) in education, employment or training.

<sup>23</sup> More specifically, "both the respondent from the Youth Union of Turkey [...] and the respondent from the AKP youth organization argued [...] that this group is invisible in their organizations" (Akyüz et al. 2016:24).

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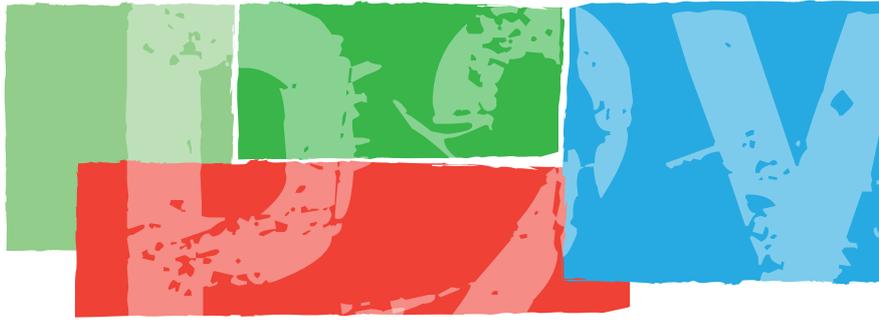
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*POWER2YOUTH is a research project aimed at offering a critical understanding of youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region through a comprehensive interdisciplinary, multi-level and gender sensitive approach. By combining the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres and a macro (policy/institutional), meso (organizational) and micro (individual) level analysis, POWER2YOUTH explores the root causes and complex dynamics of the processes of youth exclusion and inclusion in the labour market and civic/political life, while investigating the potentially transformative effect of youth collective and individual agency. The project has a cross-national comparative design with the case studies of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey. POWER2YOUTH's participants are 13 research and academic institutions based in the EU member states, Norway, Switzerland and South East Mediterranean (SEM) countries. The project is mainly funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme.*

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