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POWER2YOUTH

Assessing Youth Exclusion through Discourse and Policy Analysis: The Case of Lebanon

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Abstract

To assess youth exclusion at the macro institutional level in Lebanon, this paper proposes a methodology that critically investigates discourse production on youth, as well as policy making targeting youth. Two types of discourse that dominate knowledge production on youth in Lebanon are identified and investigated: a policy-led discourse, and an academic discourse. Factors of youth exclusion are further explored through four policy sectors (employment, migration, family, spatial planning). Our findings demonstrate that Lebanese youth are constructed through fragmented lenses and policies that lack an interdisciplinary and integrated understanding of their complex, dynamic and highly differentiated livelihoods. Youth are actively excluded from politics, economics, society and the built environment, through policies that do not prioritize their needs and desires.

Keywords: Lebanon | Youth | Domestic policy | Employment | Family | Migration

1. INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF LEBANESE POLITICS AND YOUTH

For two decades after its independence in 1943, in the eagerness to establish itself as a legitimate nation-state, the Lebanese state invested in public education, social services, spatial planning and infrastructure policies, as well as in policies conducive to public employment (Abu-Rish 2015, Verdeil 2010). Such investments provided many youth with venues to integrate in the social and political systems, producing a youthful middle-class in the 1960s, which contributed to producing an image of Lebanon as the Paris of the Middle East. This postcard image barely shielded the inequalities that characterized the Lebanese society, and its political economy, as the IRFED's report of the early 1960s clearly demonstrated at the time (IRFED 1961), with high levels of illiteracy rates and unemployment, as well as poor access to services and infrastructure – evidently largely affecting youth.

After the collapse of the state during the civil war (1974-1990), developmental policies were halted. In 1977, during the brief two-year peace lapse, the Ministry of Planning was dismantled and replaced by the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), conceived as a supra-structure bypassing the bureaucracy and red-tape of public agencies. The CDR was also entrusted with a planning mission, which it did not fulfil. Instead, it became the receptacle of donor aid, and the coordinator of mostly infrastructural projects. To fill the void created by the collapse of the state, militias and associated political parties organized service provision and access to basic infrastructure, based on a territorial subdivision of power, facilitated by the sectarian "cleansing" of most mixed neighbourhoods in the capital city and other towns. During those war years, the overlap of private business interests and sectarian politics grew

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in scale, and became more entrenched. Sectarian-based political groups controlled seaports and airports, the traffic of illegal goods, and taxed imports and exports – structuring a war economy largely based on the neoliberal market logic (Picard 1999). After the end of the civil war, these warlords became public officials (ministers, parliamentarians, etc.), and continued operating according to the same neoliberal logic prioritizing their private business interests, but from within the institutions of the state (Leenders 2012).

To date, the Lebanese state functions essentially as a political system sealed by hegemonic political-sectarian parties operating simultaneously in competition and complementarity to each other (Harb 2010). Attempts to break this hegemony (from within or outside the system) result in small gains (e.g., municipal elections in 1998, see Atallah 2013), if at all, that do not fundamentally challenge the political-sectarian system's elaborate machinery. Perversely, many attempts get co-opted and end up reinforcing the system's domination (e.g., the labour movement, see Abi-Yaghi et al 2011, or the Independence Intifada, see Clark and Zahar 2015). The election law, which could serve as a substantive channel for political and social change, is another domain where reforms are stopped short. Indeed, the parliamentary elections still obey a political sectarian logic that facilitates the reproduction of existing power groups, and the consolidation of their sectarian territories. The election law excludes from voting people below 21 years of age. It also associates the voting act to the original birthplace of people, even though this is often a remote village or town they left generations ago. Thus, for instance, out of the 1.4 million Lebanese who inhabit the city of Beirut, a mere 400,000 people vote for its parliamentarians and its municipal councillors. The procedure for changing one's place of registration is neither socially or politically acceptable, nor facilitated administratively. The aim is not to debunk the demographics upon which the Lebanese sectarian political quota system is based – even though everyone knows these demographics are based on the 1932 census, and are now obsolete. Everyone thus agrees on this politics of denial.

Within this locked political economy, public officials have two discourses on youth. On the one hand, a public discourse celebrates a specific category of Lebanese youth – those who are successful, and emigrate. These are highly educated and highly skilled young men and women, who are destined to broader horizons, where they carry Lebanon's name to great heights, and if they are really successful, eventually invest their capital in the country. They are not expected to return, or to vote while they are abroad. They are used to market the successful image of the Lebanese professional entrepreneur, doctor, engineer, scientist or scholar [...] On the other hand, another public discourse stigmatizes "the other youth," those who are poorly educated and unskilled, who are seen as potential troublemakers and subversive, and who had best be policed and controlled. Those youth are often the main targets of sectarian political parties, which present them with viable employment and social services opportunities. Alternatives to sectarian politics are often much less rewarding, and incorporate regulatory conditions and institutional setups that keep young people marginalized, and vulnerable. To illustrate this, it is sufficient to mention the (pathetic) contribution of the national budget to public education in the mid-1990s, which amounted to less than 1 percent, while it reached 22 percent during the Lebanese civil war (Chaaban 2015). The youth in this category seek emigration to improve their living conditions, however their options are not as diverse or gratifying as their better educated and higher skilled peers. They often end up in dire working conditions in the GCC countries or Africa, sending remittances to their families. Thus, socio-economic inequalities that are established at the national scale are reproduced within youth,

between haves and have-nots.[2]

This paper undertakes a critical review of sources that have been producing knowledge on Lebanese "youth", assessing their framework and methodology, in order to identify the policy and institutional factors determining the situation of youth in Lebanon. After the first section presenting a historical overview of the political and socio-economic conditions youth in contemporary Lebanon have to deal with, the paper is organized in two sections.[3] Section 2 reviews two types of discourse that have dominated knowledge production on youth in Lebanon, since the post(civil)-war period. First, I explore the policy-led discourse, authored by official stakeholders (ministries, public agencies), international donors and civil society groups. Second, I present the academic discourse, produced by research centres, scholars and think tanks, which will be developed in the next section. Section 3 of the paper discusses four policy sectors, which help identify factors of youth exclusion in Lebanon at the policy and institutional levels: employment and migration policies, family planning and personal status policies, as well as spatial planning policies, concluding with a broad assessment of youth's exclusion in Lebanon.

2. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION ON YOUTH: POLICY-LED AND ACADEMIC

2.1 The Policy-Led Discourse

Establishment and Role of the Ministry of Youth and Sports

The history of the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) is closely related to the history of sports institutions in Lebanon. In its presentation text online,[4] the Ministry highlights the first sports committee established by nationalist public officials such as Habib Abi-Shahla and Riad el-Solh in the early 1940s in the context of Lebanon's Independence, as part of the Ministry of Education. Sports are closely associated to the building of citizenship and of responsible citizens who will build the nation-state. At the time, this sports committee was conceived as an Olympics committee, and participated in the 1948 Olympic Games in London.

In the 1950s, sports became progressively institutionalized into five national federations (*ittihadat*; e.g., federation of table tennis and tennis, federation of basketball and volleyball, federation of swimming, etc.). In 1964, the committee changed its name from sports and scouts to "youth" (note the Arabic term used is *futuwwa* rather than *shabab*), and was consolidated in 1966 into a general directorate of Youth and Sports (*shabab wa riyada*) in the

[2] In its Global Wealth Databook 2014 report, Credit Suisse states that 0.3 percent of the Lebanese population own 50 percent of its wealth. See more on this blog entry: http://stateofmind13.com/2015/02/18/0-3-of-lebanese-own-50-of-lebanon.

[3] Concerning data collection, I looked for sources that explicitly use the word "youth" in English, "jeunes" or "jeunesse" in French, and "shabab" in Arabic. Although there are a very large number of non-Lebanese young residents in Lebanon who for decades have come to Lebanon escaping wars and occupations (Palestinians, Iraqis, Syrians, as well as Asians and Africans), this report will only focus on Lebanese youth – as this goes beyond the scope of the project's timeline and resources.

[4] See the Ministry of Youth and Sports website (in Arabic): http://www.minijes.gov.lb/Cultures/ar-LB/ministry/history.

Ministry of Education.[5] However, the directorate was not provided with the needed financial or human resources, and thus could not operate according to its assigned functions.

In 2000, ten years after the end of the civil war, Rafic Hariri established the Ministry of Youth and Sports in one of his governments. It was placed in the hands of two Armenian ministers, Sebouh Hovnanian and Alain Tabourian, until 2005, after which it was assigned to Ahmad Fatfat (Sunni), Talal Arslan (Druze), Ali Abdallah (Shi'i), Faysal Karameh (Sunni), and is currently led by retired general Abdel-Motleb al-Hannawi (Sunni). The MYS is effectively structured around the directorate, which is responsible for "youth and sports affairs in relation to organizations, clubs, federations, open air activities, scouts, opportunities" camps, volunteer camps, youth groups, scout groups, local and international sports groups, as well as related programmes and centres.

Based on a review of MYS activities reported in *Annahar* Arabic daily between 2000 and 2014, we can confirm that the MYS' main contributions have to do with supporting sports and scout groups, sponsoring their events, competitions, and training activities, which are mostly funded by foreign donors. After 2005, our press review shows a shift in MYS activities towards supporting the elaboration of a youth national policy as part of a youth forum – which will be discussed further below.

The MYS works very closely with the parliamentarian committee for youth and sports (PCYS). A review of their meeting minutes since 2001 shows that the director general of the MYS attends all meetings with the PCYS. This committee has been recently studying how to reform the bylaws of the MYS to meet "contemporary youth needs." It has also been closely associated to the youth forum and the making of the youth national policy.

The MYS can be readily analysed as a public representation of youth associated with sports, i.e., with youthful, healthy, fit and apt bodies. As discussed above, the main concern of the MYS is to support and facilitate youth's sports and scouting activities, in schools, clubs and other organizations. This is clearly a depoliticized representation of youth, and a de-legitimization of youth's role in political and social change. This representation may be changing, though, as the MYS's adoption of the youth national policy document in 2011 demonstrates an acknowledgement of the diverse social, political, economic and environmental issues listed the document.

Other Public Actors

Apart from the MYS, the Ministry of Education provides for youth in the domain of public education (primary, secondary and university), while the Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for child protection and child crime prevention (i.e., youth under 18 years of age – not discussed in this study), as well as for providing support for youth volunteering and NGOs.

Public education in Lebanon suffers from an increasing set of problems, among which are its decrease in relative size, higher costs, limited support, and corporatization.[6] In 2011-12, there were 119,000 registered university students in Lebanon (46 percent males, 54 percent

[5] A French expert was invited to conceive the structure of the directorate at the time.

[6] The following discussion on public education in Lebanon is taken from Jad Chaaban (2015).

females), of whom only 40 percent attend the only public university – the Lebanese University (LU). The share of students in the LU has dropped by 25 percent in the last decade. This is mainly caused by the multiplication of crony private universities and higher education institutes in Lebanon. Annual public expenditures on higher education are very low, reaching 0.6 percent of the GDP and serving merely to cover administration and salary costs at LU – this percentage used to be 20 percent during the height of the civil war. In addition, the LU attracts mostly poor and middle classes, and its graduates face a significant salary disadvantage.

The Ministry of Education housed the Lebanese National Youth Parliament (LNYP) project, funded by the International Organization for Migration between 2009-11. The LNYP aims at familiarizing young Lebanese with the democratic process and the notions of public good. It grouped 64 young people as Members of the Youth Parliament (MYP) from high schools across the Lebanese territory. The project was supposed to work closely with the Lebanese Parliament to propose draft bills elaborated by the MYPs, but it did not succeed. The project led to the publication of a few newsletters, some meetings with MPs and the media, and the implementation of small projects conceived by the MYPs. An evaluation commission judged it ineffective and unsustainable as it lacked ownership, outreach and partnerships (Transtec 2011). Several other donors have also supported similar youth parliament initiatives, but with the support of NGOs rather than state institutions. They all seem to have been short-lived.[7]

International Organizations

This paper looks next at the key role of international organizations that have been long-term partners in public policy formulation in Lebanon. In the youth policy sector, UN agencies have had a high level of involvement. The World Bank and the European Union (EU) are partially mobilized on the youth issue. The EU provides support to the Ministry of Social Affairs through the AFKAR programme, of which part II focuses on youth, via NGOs that work on capacity building, media literacy, dialogue and diversity.[8] They also are active through the Euro-MeD Youth Programme, which promotes exchanges, volunteering, training and networking. The World Bank has some specific initiatives related to youth entrepreneurship, namely through support provided in 2012 to the National Employment Office of the Ministry of Labour. This 2.2 million dollars loan entitled "New Entrants to Work" (NEW) aims to provide unemployed first-time job seekers training, counselling and placement services in a private firm. The World Bank also supported the Youth Shadow Parliament established in 2006, which published a regular newsletter in *Annahar*, entitled *Nahar al-Shabab* (appears to have been discontinued around 2010), as well as Mock Youth Municipal Councils.

[7] In 2007, a EuroMed Youth Parliament was held in Beirut, which led to a German-funded Lebanese Youth Parliament – it is not clear what happened to this initiative. In Tripoli, a youth parliament lobbied to lower the voting age to 18, with a Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) grant. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) supported several youth programmes, among them a parliament monitoring project with *Nahwa al-Muwatiniyya* – an NGO that stopped operating. This was all in the aftermath of the 2005 Independence Intifada in Lebanon, a time during which international organizations were investing significantly in independent NGOs.

[8] For more details, see *Sector 2* in AFKAR website: http://afkar.omsar.gov.lb/English/SiteMenu/Project/Pages/Sector%202.aspx.

UN agencies are more centrally engaged on youth issues. The UNDP coordinated the national human development report (NHDR) on youth in 1998. The NHDR discussed three main challenges facing Lebanese youth, each one detailed in a full chapter. The first is the "[economic] burden of support, placed on the working population" to support the elderly (UNDP 1998 Executive Summary:3). This problem is associated to the need for better public health policies and social security. The second challenge is the "serious issues" of internal rural-to-urban migration that will affect youth, materialized through "urban overcrowdedness" and "labour force depletion in many rural areas" (ibid:4). This implies policies for rural development, more balanced regional development, and a policy for the return of the displaced. The third challenge is international migration in relation to high unemployment rates, and how it affects the skilled and better educated, i.e., the "brain drain" (ibid:4). This entails a policy for international migration, including reducing youth unemployment through more relevant education to market needs, but also through tapping into expatriates' inclusion in the reconstruction process.

More recently, UNESCO and UNICEF led efforts towards the drafting of the national youth policy under the auspices of a UN youth taskforce between 2000 and 2012, as well as the MYS – further discussed below.

The Making of a "National Youth Policy"

The UN-led policy process was initiated in 2000 seemingly via a UNESCO-led research project on Lebanese youth and children, shared in a large-scale conference gathering 200 youth organizations. In the aftermath of that conference, a recommendation was made to the Ministry of Youth and Sports to develop a national youth policy. Thanks to funding by the Swedish agency SIDA, the policy formulation process was launched, facilitated by UNESCO and UNICEF, which established in 2004 a UN-youth taskforce, bringing in UNDP and ILO. The first phase (2001-02) was research-based. The taskforce commissioned two studies to profile youth in Lebanon, which were not published until 2012: the first produced a "Situation Analysis of Lebanese Youth" (coordinated by Riad Tabbara), and the second issued "Youth Participation in the Lebanese Law" (coordinated by Nizar Saghieh). The taskforce also initiated a lobbying effort entitled "Youth Advocacy Process" (YAP). Masar – an NGO established in 2002, which targets youth capacity building – led this Youth Advocacy Process.

In 2007, the Council of Ministers issued a decision entitled "National Advice over the Youth Policy" which included a set of recommendations to pursue the elaboration of a national youth policy document. These included recommendations for the organization of workshops with youth groups and experts across Lebanese regions, and the establishment of a "Youth Forum for National Youth Policies," launched in 2009. This Youth Forum (*muntada al-shabab*) includes 36 youth NGOs, as well as youth wings of most Lebanese political parties (across March 8 and March 14 factions). Again, Masar coordinates the Youth Forum, which is organized as follows:

1. five task forces (demography and migration; labour and economic participation; education and culture; health; social integration and political participation);
2. Coordination unit (grouping the coordinators of the five task forces);
3. General assembly (formed of the youth NGOs and youth wings of political parties);
4. Secretariat.

Each task force was responsible for commissioning background studies from policy experts on its study theme. Building on these background papers, the Youth Forum drafted an integrated document for youth policy that details recommendations across the themes of migration, employment, education, health and political participation. The authors of these documents involve young activists, men and women, as well as established scholars and policy experts, and a number of NGOs working on LGBT rights, personal and civil rights, domestic violence, gender-discrimination as well as Palestinian youth in Lebanon.

The Youth Policy was finalized in 2010, approved in April 2012 by the Council of Ministers, adopted as the "State Vision of National Youth Development", and as a "roadmap" for the Ministry of Youth and Sports (Youth Forum for Youth Policy 2012). The Youth Policy documents focuses on five policy sectors: i) Demography and emigration; ii) Education and culture; iii) Social integration and political participation; iv) Employment and economic participation; and v) Health. It defines youth as the category of people aged between 15 and 29 (about 28 percent of the total Lebanese population).

A critical reading of the document reveals that this is not really a "youth policy" per se, but rather a generic wish list of a range of policy issues that ought to be addressed. It very much seems that the contents of the document were intentionally diluted under very general terms to maintain consensus among the authors of the "policy". Indeed, what remains from the Youth Advocacy Process and the Youth Forum that grouped 36 different NGOs is a small group of a maximum of dozen NGOs, and all the youth wings of the political parties. Thus, the Youth Forum today is mainly composed of the youth wings' members rather than of the NGOs, and they seem to have drafted the Youth Policy document in a way to comfort their political patrons, removing all possible contentious reference to divisive politics. Accordingly, the youth advocacy process ended up becoming – like other initiatives that sought to bridge sectarian politics (Clark and Zahar 2015) – depoliticized and co-opted.[9]

The Private Sector

The private sector holds a specific discourse on youth predominantly related to entrepreneurship, business and competitiveness. Some banks have developed financial packages specifically for youth that encourage them early on to become future savvy entrepreneurs, sometimes at a very young age. Within private universities, business schools are actively involved, often in partnership with private firms, corporations and banks, to promote this role to youth. For instance, the Saint-Joseph University has developed Berytech, an organization through which innovative business project incubation takes place, as well as training and advising on successful business, financing and management strategies. Businessman-politician Robert Fadel established Bader Foundation – an organization that also trains young people to become savvy entrepreneurs.

[9] During our work for Power2Youth WP2, we invited Masar to a workshop we organized, and they suggested sending the invitation to the Youth Forum. People who showed up for the workshop were only the political parties' youth wing members – none of the NGO members came. In addition, in our review of the meeting minutes of the PCYS, whenever the Youth Forum was mentioned, it was in relation to the youth wings of political parties. One last item that may be revealing of the "Lebanonization" of the Youth Forum: one of the Youth Forum's main projects was issuing a youth card that would provide benefits for young people. It seems the card was never issued because of sectarian political meddling.

In recent years, a few co-working spaces have emerged in Beirut, also seeking to encourage start-ups and the establishment of small enterprises, as well as NGOs such Co-working961 (also supported by Bader Foundation) and AltCity.[10]

In sum, the policy-led discourse on Lebanese youth predominantly focuses on two main issues: youth unemployment and youth migration. Other issues are sometimes addressed, such as education and entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, salient issues relevant to youth such as job creation, income inequality, knowledge production, gender discrimination, civil rights, political rights, rights to public space and leisure are conspicuously absent from policy debates, and hence from public policy-making.

2.2 The Academic Discourse on Youth

Academic knowledge production on Lebanese youth is mainly produced in the English and French languages. We only identified minor sources in Arabic.[11] The English and French sources on youth are more diverse in the themes they address as they include analysis based on economics, psychology, health, sociology, anthropology and politics. As expected, sources in different languages seldom cite each other. Even within the same language, there is compartmentalization within each discipline, and scholars in one discipline are often unaware of findings in another. Indeed, sources are quite differentiated methodologically and conceptually in close association to the discipline of their author(s). In what follows, I present academic discourses on youth in Lebanon, organized as per the four policy sectors investigated in this paper.

Before doing so, I note that academic studies can also be distinguished according to three methodological approaches – differentiated on the basis of discipline. First, scholars of economics and psychology (as well as some sociologists) investigate youth through quantitative tools, yielding a macro-level understanding of youth issues: they measure unemployment, education and migration rates, proposing indicators and costs; they evaluate values and assess related impacts on belonging; and they calculate participation in media. Second, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists studying youth sometimes use both quantitative and qualitative methods, conducive to meso- and micro-levels of youth analysis: they work on youth-led civil society organizations, youth's agency in participating in public life (online and political) and youth's negotiations of norms and practices. Third, public health researchers adopt a policy-oriented approach to analysis of youth's practices, mixing quantitative and qualitative methods, conducive to policy recommendations: they examine youth's (particularly adolescents') relation to drugs, alcohol and sexuality, and to mental health, well-being and happiness – focusing on school and university students rather than "youth"[12] (Karam et al 2004 and 2010, El-Kak 2013).

[10] These will be further discussed in the meso-level analysis component of Power2Youth.

[11] In Arabic, we only identified the edited volume by Maud Stephan-Hachem and Azza Charara-Beydoun (2011) on youth and cultural production.

[12] See also the conference paper of Ghandour et al. (2014) on sexual practices, values and perceptions of Lebanese youth.

3. EXPLORING FACTORS OF YOUTH EXCLUSION

Lebanon is notorious for its sectarian politics, and its construction of public policy problems in relationship to sectarian considerations. Sectarianism in Lebanon is inscribed into its constitution: the president of the Republic should be maronite, the prime minister Sunni, and the president of the parliament Shia, while the parliament itself is distributed according to sectarian quotas – as well as a number of other public positions. These quotas are set on the basis of the 1932 census, which calculated an equal proportion of Christians to Muslims. The census has not been subsequently revised even though the Lebanese population has undergone severe population shifts – linked to forced displacements, wars, influx of refugees and migrants, and emigration – that have drastically altered this proportion, thus threatening the basis upon which the Lebanese political system is built. Demographic figures place Muslims at a net advantage (depending on sources, the number varies between 54 percent and 59.7 percent), over Christians (39 to 40 percent).[13] The typical narrative thus associates the youth bulge to be strongly associated with Muslim groups, and more specifically with Shia groups, who are said to have higher fertility rates – while Christians have more propensity for emigration. The LIC report (2013:4) shows however that more Muslims (53.36 percent) left Lebanon during the 1975-2011 period than Christians (46.64 percent). But it also reveals that fertility rates for Muslims (1.82 children/woman) are slightly higher than for Christians (1.5 children/woman). And, although fertility rates for Shia dropped significantly, reaching 2.1 children per woman in 2004 (vs. 6.64 children in 1971), they remain the highest among other sectarian groups.

Despite the fact that these figures show that the Christian population in Lebanon has stabilized, that Muslims are emigrating as much as Christians if not more, and that fertility rates of Christians and Muslims are much closer to each other, perceptions still construct demographic issues as being in favour of Muslim groups at the expense of Christians who are under the constant threat of being outnumbered and victimized as a "minority". They also represent Muslim demographic growth as being "Shia", especially since the rise of the "Shia crescent" regional narrative, and the national shift in politics as a Sunni-Shia rivalry in 2005-06, after the assassination of Rafic Hariri – fuelling the fear of the Shia demographic spectre that will "swamp" Lebanon.

These demographic constructs and fears are now undergoing a new phase with the Syrian war, and the influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon since 2011. Figures place the number of Syrian refugees at 1 or 1.5 million. In a country of 4.5-5 million inhabitants, already paranoid about demographics, one can only imagine the exponential growth of social tensions, and often violence, over public policy issues, especially those related to service provision, employment, education, health and housing. Young Syrian men and women are especially vulnerable in this configuration, and have been suffering from violence, harassment, racism and abuse, in addition to basic livelihood and health concerns.[14]

[13] See LIC 2013 and IndexMundi Lebanon Demographics Profile for 2014: http://www.indexmundi.com/lebanon/demographics_profile.html.

[14] This discussion goes beyond the scope of this report. For more information, readers can refer to the 2014 UNFPA report on youth in Lebanon, as well as this interview with Moe-Ali Nayel (2014).

3.1 Employment and Migration Policies

Employment

Many reports and studies, mostly conducted by economists, investigate Lebanese youth unemployment, which is presented as a major policy issue. There is a major concern identifying numbers related to youth unemployment, which significantly vary from source to source, and depending on the definition of the youth age bracket. The national youth policy document endorsed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports places unemployment at the alarming figure of 66 percent, for a definition of youth aged between 15 and 29. Other studies place this number at radically different rates: 15 percent (YEF 2012, for the same youth bracket of 15-29); 19.7 percent (Chaaban 2008, also for the youth bracket of 15-29); 34.3 percent (Chaaban 2013, for a youth bracket of 15-24, and vis-à-vis a general unemployment rate of 15 percent); and 24 percent (Kawar and Tzannatos 2013, for a youth bracket of 15-25).[15]

Another quantitative concern is the proportion of youth inclusion in the labour force, which is often differentiated according to gender. According to the UNESCO report, Lebanese youth form 41 percent of the labour force in Lebanon (UNESCO 2012:19). The report underscores two contradicting trends related to youth participation in the workforce. On one hand, Lebanese youth are spending more time studying, and on the other hand, more young women are entering the workforce. Less very young women (15-19) are working than 34 years ago: 7 percent today as compared to 16 percent in 1970. But, more of the 25-29 year-olds are working: 38 percent today as compared to 20 percent in 1970. Overall, the proportion of young women who are in the labour force is only 20 percent.

Such numbers, of course, mainly quantify formal employment. They count young people officially employed in firms and public agencies, thus they do not acknowledge informal labour, contractual labour and/or part-time labour. The numbers include graduates and non-graduates. The Lebanese Central Administration for Statistics reports that levels of education vary among working people: a quarter have low qualifications while a quarter are highly skilled, and some of the highly skilled are in basic jobs (Yaacoub and Badre 2011:2). The World Bank assessed the informal economy in Lebanon to account for 36.4 percent of its GDP in 2011: the informal economy is said to be highly heterogeneous as it "[ranges] from subsistence farmers to high-level self-employed professionals" (Jaoude 2015:4). With the high numbers of foreign migrant workers in Lebanon, including Syrian workers, even prior to the Syrian war, there is strong labour market segmentation in Lebanon. Generally, Lebanese have access to a wider range of sectors of employment, while Syrian workers are "limited primarily to low-skilled sectors, which do not require high literacy or numeracy skills," given significantly lower education levels among Syrians, with strong gender variation as by far fewer females are employed, and at much lower salaries (ACTED 2014:1 and 22).

Many reports investigate the causes of youth unemployment. Several relate it to the limitations in the legal framework governing the labour policy sector. The Youth Policy document (Youth Forum for Youth Policy 2012) argues that youth are excluded from the job market because of poor job opportunities, the lengthy period spent identifying a job, job insecurity, low wages and an unfair labour law resulting in poor work conditions (long working hours, lack of incentives

[15] Check the Power2Youth online bibliographic database on Zotero for a full listing of such reports and studies.

and social benefits). The Youth Economic Forum mentions the high energy and ICT costs, as well as the poor infrastructure that prevent the creation of a wide range of jobs (YEF 2012). Providing more specific details, the Lebanese Economic Association (LEA) underscores how the Lebanese Constitution "lacks all references to the right to work, the individual's right to work [...] based on equality or to an unemployment indemnity as is the case in most of the countries and in accordance with the General Principles and International Conventions published in this area" (LEA 2014).[16] This poor legal framing of labour rights exists despite the fact that Lebanon has ratified more than fifty Labour Conventions, including the right to organize and collective bargaining (No. 98, signed in 1977), the elimination of forced or compulsory labour (Nos. 29 and 105, signed in 1977), the elimination of discrimination of employment and occupation (Nos. 100 and 111, signed in 1977), the fight against child labour (Nos. 138 and 182, signed in 2001 and 2003), and the freedom of association and protection of the right to organize (No. 87, signed in 2012).

Gender-based discrimination is seldom mentioned, except by LEA (2014), which considers it a main exclusion factor, highlighting how single women are favoured in the job market, at the expense of married women (the former have 59 percent greater chance of finding a job than the latter whose chance reaches 34 percent). In addition, women are paid 75 percent of the same salary paid to a man, in the same job and conditions. But, as noted by the 1998 UNDP NHDR, Lebanese female youth have higher participation rates in the labour force than their counterparts in other Arab countries. In the service sector, the proportion of women is superior to that of men by 25 percent (UNDP 1998 Ch 5:61).

Another main cause advanced for youth unemployment is access to education and quality of education. A high number of studies on youth access to education are available. I do not synthesize their findings in this report as it would go beyond the scope of the project. I will only present some of the key issues characterizing this sector. Public education in Lebanon is a sector suffering from major hurdles as discussed above (see section 2.1), resulting in a poor quality of education, which attracts only those who cannot afford private schools and universities. Public education is also compulsory and free up to the age of 15 only, although there is considerable breaching taking place with children dropping out at an earlier age (YAP 2010:11). The UNDP's NHDR (1998) had already noted the strong relation between low levels of education and youth unemployment. However, in a more recent study, Kawar and Tzannatos (2013) argue that high levels of youth unemployment are closely related to the *unequal* access to education, to poor linkages between education levels and types of education, as well as to the absence of an effective employment policy associated with private firms. The study also focuses on the missed opportunities for vocational and technical education, which enrols about 100,000 young people (about 26 percent of the student population) and which is generally weak and not geared to job market needs. They also note the ineffective role of the National of Employment Office of the Ministry of Labour.

Youth's access to jobs is also substantively impacted by corruption and clientelistic practices, commonly referred to as *wasta* (Makhoul and Harrison 2004). Youth very commonly invoke this issue as one of the main ailments of securing their livelihood in Lebanon – although no study documents this specifically.

[16] Annex I lists the Lebanese laws where this right to work is referenced.

In this context of drastic lack of employment opportunities, but also frustration and anger (Proctor 2015), an important issue to underscore is a particular source of employment for young men – namely military enrolment in armed forces associated with political parties, militias and/or private security, as well as employment in the national army and police. These young men have a strong presence in streets and public spaces, which they control, patrol, police and secure, either officially or unofficially, but most often visibly. Obviously, the military "wing" of Hizballah comes to mind as it employs young Shia men drawn to the ideology of resistance and martyrdom. But also many (ex-warlord) political elites, across sectarian groups, similarly employ such young men who find this opportunity to be a secure option that also gives them access to large clientelistic networks. Other young men are drawn to the national army and police for the same reasons. No studies document this source of employment for Lebanese youth.

Migration

Migration and emigration is not a new phenomenon in Lebanon. Before the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920, people emigrated to the Americas, Europe and Australia in search of a better life. Waves of emigration increased during times of drought and famine, as well as during conflicts and wars. The Ministry of Emigration in Lebanon maintains a policy supporting Lebanese emigrants in their host countries, helping them find jobs, celebrating their successes publicly, and encouraging them to send home remittances and to make investments in their home country.[17] However, they are excluded from political or economic decision-making in Lebanon as they cannot vote in national or local elections. Today, Lebanon is among the top ten countries in the world in terms of remittances, reaching about 20 percent of its GDP (Kasparian 2010), with a diaspora said to total 7 million people (by far exceeding the country's population).

Figures on migration place the outflow of migrants in Lebanon at 15.3 percent of the total population, and the inflow of migrants at 21.6 percent (De Bel-Air 2016:6). Simultaneously, Lebanon has always attracted migrants and refugees: Armenians in the 1920s, Palestinians as of 1948, Syrians in the 1950s, Iraqis in the 1990s, more Syrians as of the 2011 Syrian war, in addition to Syrian, Asian and African migrant workers as of the 1980s. Foreign workers, especially migrant workers and domestic workers, work under labour laws that have been frequently denounced by human rights organizations as discriminatory (HRW 2010). Many work without legal papers, and are thus prone to deportation and inhumane treatment. Labour laws for hiring foreign workers, even those who are skilled and highly educated, are also restrictive as employers are constrained to a quota when they seek to employ non-Lebanese (1/6), and need to demonstrate these workers' extraordinary qualifications which warrant employing them over their Lebanese counterparts.

As with economic analysis on youth, migration studies are suited to statistical analysis, and are keen on quantifying the rates and causes of migration, including youth migration. Studies also differentiate their findings according to gender, with an increasing focus on single female

[17] De Bel-Air (2016) confirms that migration policies across the Arab world promote emigration, are pro-active in organizing the employment of their nationals abroad, foster strong ties with expatriates, and abide by policy constraints imposed by host countries.

emigration. The main study on migration widely referred to in the consulted sources is the work conducted by Saint-Joseph University. The study provides information on emigration between 1975 and 2001, and between 1995 and 2007, with a focus on youth between 18 and 35 years old. Its author, Kasparian (2010), states that emigration rates between 1997 and 2007 for people with university diplomas reached 20.4 percent of the active population. Most of them left for either professional reasons (59.8 percent) – this was mainly the case for young men (76 percent), or for family reasons – mostly the case for young women (53 percent). Emigration was mostly towards the GCC countries (50 percent), the United States (21 percent), Europe (18 percent) and less so to Africa (6 percent). Most those who emigrate are young men and women aged 20 to 34 years old (68 percent). Many of them are engineers and technology experts (32.5 percent of men) or business graduates (32 percent of both women and men), or experts in human sciences, law and political science (35 percent of women). They all reported maintaining strong ties with Lebanon, visiting it regularly (80 percent) and often sending remittances (47 percent). Half of those who left said they would not return, while 32 percent were undecided.

Other numbers from the UNESCO study on the state of Lebanese youth place the rates of emigration, between 1997 and 2004, at 50,000 people, of whom 57 percent were males and 43 percent females. Amongst those, 44 percent were young males (15-29 years), while females were more distributed in terms of age range and thus young females did not constitute the bulk of emigration (UNESCO 2012:17). The average percentage of youth in this total emigration was 28 percent. Additionally, young single women tended to migrate at a later stage in life – in their 30s. If youth is defined to incorporate the 30-34 year-old bracket, the proportion of youth emigration rises to 40 percent.

A closely related dominant narrative when discussing youth in Lebanon is that of the "brain drain". The UNDP NHDR (1998) highlights how the emigration of skilled workers during the war was massive, leading to a "brain drain" among 20-29 year-olds. The narrative also notes how this brain drain is mostly constituted of highly educated young men going to study or to work (85 percent). The UNESCO report reiterates that narrative, specifying that this brain drain involves the highly skilled, highly educated youth, such as engineers, business experts and medical doctors who, in majority, do not have plans to return to Lebanon (UNESCO 2012:17). A closely related youth issue is the skewed balance of young men to young women, placed at 85 percent in 2004 (UNESCO 2012:29).

High-skilled migration, which largely characterizes Lebanon's migration, can be argued to be about "maintaining socio-political stability," and "exporting [the] looming discontent" of youth's potential political competition (De Bel-Air 2016:26).

3.2. Family and Personal Status Policies

Most studies that tackle family and personal status issues do not address youth as a separate group. However, such analysis is highly relevant to understanding policies that affect youth in Lebanon, and to unravelling the social, cultural and normative situation that impacts youth's definitions of present and future selves.

Lebanon is notoriously known for its plural religious structure, grouping Christian, Muslim and Druze populations. Officially, the country counts 18 religious sects, and 15 personal status laws regulating marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption. This judicial pluralism has historical roots in both the Ottoman and French-mandate legal texts (HRW 2015:19). Scholars agree that personal status laws have one common feature: they discriminate between the rights of men and women, as well as rights of adults and minors: civil law applies to all citizens but also differentiates according to gender and age (Mikdashi 2013:351). The citizenship law is a notorious example as, to date, Lebanese women still cannot pass their nationality to their foreign spouse or their offspring. Women face significant discrimination in cases of divorce and retaining child custody, which is aggravated as well by complicated and extensive religious courts' procedures, high legal fees and the unavailability of financial support and legal assistance. In addition, women (and children) subject to domestic violence do not have adequate legal recourse. Some studies point to these constraints, documenting women's activism in this sphere and noting the barriers they face due to the interests of the sectarian political elite (Kingston 2013, Khattab 2010).

Despite this judicial pluralism, and the mixed social set-up, no civil marriage exists in Lebanon. Individuals who wish to marry under the civil code need to travel abroad to marry; they can then register their marriage in Lebanon, which will obey the civil code of the country they married in. Those who resort to this option often choose to travel to Cyprus, which is the most affordable financially. In recent years, supported by lawyers and a legal provision, several couples used an alternative strategy to hold their civil marriage in Lebanon: they withdrew their sectarian affiliation from the religious courts, and thus claimed their non-sectarian belonging which legally allowed them to hold a civil union as per the civil code law. These activists' struggle led to mixed outcomes that are only partly covered by the academic literature (Bray-Collins 2013).

Thus, most marriages and families are established under religious jurisdiction. Religious laws determine marriage age, where each sect sets a legal age for males and females to marry. In Muslim law, this allows girls to marry at the age of 9, and boys to marry at 14 (YAP 2010:9). However, in practice, matters differ drastically. We have some statistics to illustrate this: the first-marriage average age among young women in Lebanon has risen to 29 years old in 2012, from 23 before the Lebanese civil war in 1974. These numbers among young men are respectively 32 and 29. The proportion of young single women (25-29 years old) has thus considerably increased since the civil war, reaching 47 percent in 1996 (and 30 percent for those between 30 and 34 years of age) (UNESCO 2012:16-17).

Most academic scholarship focuses on further framing theoretically the evolving ideas of individuals, including young persons, within this complex landscape and its associated geopolitics, as well as on collecting ethnography about their practices. Faour and Joseph each showed that the nuclear family prevails as the closest group with which Lebanese students identify irrespective of sex, class, religion or piety levels (Faour 1998:92, Joseph 1993). More specifically, Joseph argues that "patriarchal connective construct[ion] of selves" predominates within Lebanese families (Joseph 2004:274). However, as noted by Faour, things are changing with regard to family relations and authority within the family. He underscores a rise in the percentage of middle- and upper-class students who identify with their peer group (which seem to be replacing the extended family and religion). He also notes signs of

higher levels of mother's participation in decision-making concerning family matters, which he qualifies as a democratization of relations, which will lead to structural social change (Faour 1998:11 and 153).

Joseph highlights how in weak states such as Lebanon, familial relations "are often the primary protectors of a person's security," adding that in times of war, people will "intensify familial relationships to secure themselves" (Joseph 2004:274). She also argues that this intensification is conversely associated with a destabilization of family relations due to war displacement, and war stresses – a paradox that opened up in the post-war period "new possibilities for experimentation" and transformation of notions of family, gender, and self (Joseph 2004:276 and 292). Such transformations are documented in several sociological and anthropological studies on youth's social, moral, cultural and sexual practices.

In their work on morality and piety in south Beirut, Deeb and Harb (2013) note how young Shiites draw from several and changing moral rubrics to inform their leisure choices, preferences and practices, which they openly negotiate and justify. In their analysis of cultural practices of youth, Stephan-Hachem and Charara-Beydoun (2011) note the dynamic role youth undertake in defining their livelihood, negotiating a variety of authoritarian structures. Similarly, Gonzalez-Quijano (2003) reflects on the relationship of Lebanese young people to online media, and their agency in determining the content they select to watch and read – disagreeing with other findings that discuss the high levels of youth inclusion in media consumption but their limited input with regard to media production (Melki 2010). A small number of works discuss the non-heterosexual practices of young people in Lebanon. A recent book by Merabet (2014) investigates the lives of gay men in Beirut, exploring how they formulate their sense of identity and the role of the city in informing their sexuality.

In sum, as Saghieh shows, legal texts governing the private and public lives of youth in Lebanon are hetero-normative, gender-biased and sectarian-based, sanctioning norms and practices that do not fit this framework (UNESCO 2012:192). For instance, the Lebanese penal code (Art. 534) states that "sexual intercourse contrary to nature" is punishable by up to one year in prison (YAP 2010:11). Saghieh points to three main consequences of these structural faults: First, youth in Lebanon are strictly framed in relation to their sectarian belonging. Second, the ability of youth, especially women, to organize their everyday lives is largely constrained. Third, young people, especially women, queer, transsexual and homosexual persons, illegal children, offspring of Lebanese women and foreigners, and all those outside the 18 recognized sectarian groups, are largely excluded from the society (UNESCO 2012:192-195).

3.3 Spatial Planning Policies

Urban policies in Lebanon have a direct impact on young people, mainly in terms of spatial mobility, access to housing and basic services, as well as access to public space. Few policy and academic studies synthesize urban policies in an integrated way. I compile below information I have been gathering on the topic for the past thirteen years, and that has been only partially published.

Spatial Mobility

In terms of spatial mobility, Lebanon has no effective public transportation system. The few buses that operate in the main cities of the Beirut agglomeration are in poor condition, and do not follow an effective time schedule. Few people resort to them. Most people, including youth, prefer the private transportation system of *vans* (small buses that can carry twelve to fifteen people), for connections between neighbourhoods, towns and cities – a system that is more reliable, faster and affordable. Vans are illegal in the sense that they are not registered with the Ministry of Transportation, and have no license to function as collective transport. However, long-term operators are closely affiliated to political elites who benefit financially from their returns, and who legitimize their existence. A good example of an effective van line, appreciated by youth, is van No. 4, which connects Hayy el-Sellom in south Beirut to Hamra in central Beirut. I know of it through AUB students who use it to come to university, and who praise its drivers, their driving know-how through busy traffic, its safety and its affordability. Actually, van no.4 has many fans, and its own Facebook page, liked by 10,000 people, where one can read users' anecdotes, jokes and comments.[18]

People, including youth, also resort to *services* (*jitneys*, or taxi-services, a taxi that operates along main routes and picks up several passengers) for moving inside the city itself, although they cost more than vans, as they pay licensing and registration fees, and are thus a legal private collective transportation system. Additionally, they can move around using private cars and motorcycles, accessible to some through a relatively affordable second-hand car dealing service, as well as facilitated credit payments in private banks.

As for walkability, Beirut's agglomeration is less and less walkable. Municipal Beirut's neighbourhoods are much more accessible for pedestrians than the new hilly suburbs conceived to be navigated by vehicles. Even within municipal Beirut, walking is not a preferred mode of transportation as sidewalks and pedestrian crossings are not safe, not shaded and not smoothly connected into a walkable network (such as Ramlet el-Beida and Jnah). Moving in a vehicle is also strongly associated with a higher social status, while walking is associated with lower class practices (Monroe 2011). Some neighbourhoods in the city are more walkable than others, such as Raps Beirut where students, dwellers, expats and tourists crowd the streets, and areas where the urban fabric is close-knit and street life is vibrant (Mar Mikhail, Gemmayezeh, Tariq al-Jdideh, Zokak al-Blatt and Mar Elias).

Physical access is not the sole factor affecting spatial mobility in cities in Lebanon. Sectarian politics and moral norms are also factors that impact youth's choices of navigating the city, as we have shown in our study of moral leisure sites across Beirut and its southern section (Deeb and Harb 2013). Youth choose to go to places where they feel safe and comfortable, among their own, in terms of norms and values. Piety, gender and class, as well as life experiences and personal mood, all come together when they make their choice. Levels of sectarian political tensions are also determining. People, especially youth, avoid going to territories affiliated with the "other" political group in times of heightened sectarian tensions. However, the spatial features of the site itself can trump all these considerations: the public beach, the seaside corniche, the park or the river, all attract youth for their environmental qualities, their openness and their association with the comfort of being outdoors and in nature.

[18] The Facebook page is at this address: https://www.facebook.com/van4.lb.

Thus, a variety of material and symbolic elements simultaneously facilitate and complicate youth's mobility in Lebanese cities and neighbourhoods. People negotiate their movement in the city, and their navigation of its spaces and places according to sectarian politics, social and religious norms and values, spatial features, as well as gender and class.

Access to Housing and Basic Services

There is no public or affordable housing in Lebanon. Some failed attempts were tried in the 1950s and 1960s.[19] The *Caisse de l'habitat* provides loans for middle-income families who can demonstrate their bankability. Private real-estate developers and contractors provide housing to people from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, according to a caricatured geographic gradient, providing housing for the rich in the capital city and its relatively near peripheries, and for the poor in its distant peripheries and towns. Certainly, a lot of poor people inhabit a number of neighbourhoods in the central city and its suburbs – namely dwellers in informal settlements and refugee camps, amounting to more than 20 percent of municipal Beirut according to 2003 estimates (Fawaz and Peillen 2003:29) – a proportion that has increased significantly today with the growth of the Syrian refugee population. Those people, and their youth population, live in dire conditions of crowdedness and unhygienic life conditions, with limited access to basic services and public space.

Young people live in their parents' house until they get married, and even then some remain in the family house because of the financial constraints of purchasing or renting their own place. The estimated cost of 1 sq.m in municipal Beirut averages 6,000 dollars – a figure that is unaffordable for most youth, given the minimum monthly wage of 450 dollars; rents are also very pricey, reaching 1,000 dollar/month for one-bedroom apartments, which only the well-heeled can afford.[20] There is no rent-control policy in Lebanon, and the few subsidized apartments in Beirut, Tripoli and Saida are now progressively going to be phased out because of the new rent law that has abolished rent-controlled apartments (Marot 2014).

Additionally, access to basic services such as electricity, water and Internet are not effectively secured through public means. Public electricity is not provided 24/7, and electricity cuts can reach up to 8-10hrs per day in some areas. Water (for home use and potable) is also not available on a daily basis, especially after the 2013-14 winter, which caused drought in Lebanon. Internet speed is renowned to be very slow in Lebanon. All these poor public services lead to the proliferation and fragmentation of service provision by an unregulated private sector (Verdeil 2013). Private providers of electricity, bottled water and Internet services sell their services to people at exorbitant fees. Some people elaborate their own alternative forms of accessing service at cheaper prices: some drive up to the river source to fill their water bottles, others install a battery-operated electric system, and still others free-ride the neighbour's Wi-Fi system. However, overall, people are captive to the private providers' system of service distribution, and have limited alternative options.

[19] For more details on affordable housing in Lebanon, see Fawaz and Sabah (2015).

[20] Numbers are taken from Numbeo and are based on 2013 CIA Factbook estimates. See: http://www.numbeo.com/property-investment/city_result.jsp?country=Lebanon&city=Beirut.

Young people are thus very constrained in terms of accessing housing and basic services, which significantly constrains their livability prospects, and their opportunities for a secure life.

Access to Public Spaces

Lebanese cities have very few public spaces, in terms of parks and gardens. Public life often happens in the streets, but the lively streets in the city are becoming progressively associated with a stigmatized working class, threatening male youth who are prone to substance abuse, harassment and unruly behaviour. Urban policies in the post-war period have not privileged public spaces of encounter, and have instead invested in infrastructural equipment and building highways that have led to the consolidation of an urban lifestyle away from public street life. People live in their homes outside of the city, commute back and forth to work, and spend their free time in secure private environments, such as resorts, clubs, shopping centres and malls.

Public parks and gardens have not been a priority of local urban policies. Only recently, in Beirut, did the municipality take up a private sector grant to refurbish one of its public gardens (*Sanayeh*). The municipality also timidly endorsed an NGO's project to establish public libraries across Lebanese cities (*as-Sabil*), albeit without granting them the necessary human and financial resources. Additionally, the Beirut municipality did not find it a priority to open the largest park in the capital city (*Horch Beirut*), which is still closed to the public – for what seems to be political reasons of its proximity to the Shiite Dahiya. Nor did it do anything to protect the public beach of Ramlet el-Beida and the public area of Daliet al-Raoucheh, which are under threat of private real-estate developments. On the contrary, the municipality is facilitating their take-over – although civil society activists have been successfully blocking this development.[21] The municipality is also earmarking its public lands for parking buildings – again prioritizing private vehicle users over those who use the public realm.

Young people in the cities thus have very few public places they can go to, hang out in, socialize and interact within. Those who can afford it go to private clubs and resorts to play sports and hang out, and to expensive shopping malls to consume and spend their free time. Those who cannot, go to the few public spaces available: in Beirut, that would be the seaside corniche, the public beach and the few parks. Young men also patronize street corners, monitoring the neighbourhood, smoking arguileh, playing cards and checking out the passers-by. Cafes and restaurants have become important destinations for youth who spend a lot of free time there, away from their parents' scrutiny, studying, hanging out, meeting, interacting, flirting, smoking arguileh and playing backgammon or cards (Deeb and Harb 2013). Some shopping malls also attract young people, even those with lesser financial means, who come and use their large alleys to roam around, exhibit their bodies and gaze at each other.[22] They often do not consume goods inside the mall, leaving it for the nearby sandwich shop to purchase cheaper food and drinks, and returning to it to continue their procession.

[21] See the forthcoming Power2Youth working paper I am authoring for the meso-level analysis component of Power2Youth on urban activists in Beirut for more details. See also Harb (2013).

[22] Some shopping malls such as City Center, City Mall and Le Mall attract a more working class clientele, which is well known to higher-income youth who avoid them and restrict their outings to more exclusive malls such as ABC.

Youth have been claiming back their rights to the city's public spaces and elaborating creative means to re-appropriate its places. For instance, an active movement of urban graffiti has been actively tagging many city walls, while a group of designers have been painting stairs and walls to enliven the walkable network of Beirut. Dictaphone has been developing public performances in public spaces in Beirut and Saida. Nahnoo has had a steady activist programme to re-open Horch Beirut. This is not the right venue to develop such initiatives, but suffice it to say that despite the lack of public urban policy to activate public spaces and a public urban realm, young people are not sitting idle, and are using a variety of means to reclaim their rights to the city.

Urban Governance

Planning in Lebanon is operated via top-down policies, decided by a few in a small number of public institutions that operate without consultation with the population. The Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR, established in 1977 to replace the Ministry of Planning) is a supra-agency that reports directly to the council of ministers, and that today centralizes all international grants and loans. It mainly decides on and manages infrastructural projects across Lebanon, ensuring their execution through subcontracting. The Directorate General of Urbanism is part of the Ministry of Public Works, and suffers from major limitations with regard to human and financial resources, rendering it an obsolete institution notorious for its corruption and inefficiency, and for its incapacity. Its main function is approving master plans and building permits. Thus, no central institution is effectively conceiving spatial planning policies across the Lebanese territory. The CDR issued a National Physical Master Plan in 2009, which serves as a broad reference for spatial planning and regional development experts and planners, but lacks clear implementation mechanisms.[23]

Local and regional governments have large margins of manoeuvre when it comes to spatial planning, but weak resources (Harb and Atallah 2015).[24] Only large and medium municipalities and municipal federations are able to perform well in terms of service provision. Municipalities are directly elected in Lebanon, and attract a relatively large percentage of population to the ballot boxes.[25] The first post-war elections took place in 1998, and have been occurring every six years. The number of municipalities and municipal federations has been increasing, reaching about 1,000 municipalities and 50 municipal federations, grouping two-thirds of them. Some local and regional governments – especially the ones in medium-sized towns – have been developing creative interventions on the spatial planning level that are inclusive of youth (such as Jezzine, Ghobeyri, Baakline, Dinniyye and Aley). Their mayors are engaging youth in decision-making through establishing committees on specific tasks, encouraging them to become more involved in local politics and development. This practice is worth observing as municipalities could be interesting leviers of political and social change, more accessible to youth than national-level politics – albeit central-level policies that keep constraining the margins of manoeuvre of local and regional governments.

[23] The Plan can be accessed at this link: http://www.cdr.gov.lb/study/sdatl/sdatle.htm.
[24] The next paragraph builds on our work in Harb and Atallah (2015), which provides more details on municipal governance, and local and regional spatial planning initiatives.
[25] The voting age for municipal elections is 21.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Who are Youth in Lebanon?
The "youth" category is defined legally by the Ministry of Youth and Sports as those between the age of 15 and 25. Scholars and policy-makers disagree and expand this age bracket to 15-29 years and sometimes to 18-35. Youth means *Lebanese* youth, and is exclusive of the large numbers of other non-Lebanese youth in Lebanese cities and towns. The attempt by the youth advocacy forum to incorporate Palestinian youth in the youth national policy-making process did not yield results.

The public policy understanding of Lebanese youth is dominated by a generic and normative understanding of youth exclusion mainly focused on issues of youth unemployment, youth emigration, and skewed female-male balance, that should be addressed through policy responses – mostly wishful in nature. International organizations produce relatively more in-depth knowledge about youth exclusion, but they still focus on the same "problem" categories of unemployment and emigration, with some additional challenges related to education and political participation.

The academic understanding of Lebanese youth provides a more substantive and critical understanding of youth exclusion, and more interestingly, some input with regard to their efforts and initiatives to participate socially and politically, despite the numerous hurdles that constrain their inclusion. Scholars have indeed produced a larger range of youth-related issues, albeit with significant fragmentation across academic disciplines and languages.

Across the four policy sectors of economics and migration, family and personal status laws, and spatial planning, a large proportion of youth in Lebanon are actively excluded from the economic, political, social and urban spheres. Public policies are not imagined nor elaborated in ways to actively include youth in policy decisions about issues that concern their selves and livelihoods. For public agents, youth are not a priority social group to engage in the reconstruction and reform processes. They are marginalized into a peripheral ministry – the Ministry of Youth and Sports, where youth issues are reduced to social and cultural concerns, and divorced from politics, under the fake narrative of separating politics and conflict from society. The tentative attempt to develop a Youth National Policy ended up being co-opted by youth wings of political parties, and diluted into a generic policy agenda.

While public policy actors and political elites work hard to consolidate their entrenched hegemony over the Lebanese polity, international donors and the private sector are keener on involving youth groups in decision-making. International donors thus are mobilizing youth, mostly via NGOs, into several political, social and rights-based initiatives. However, as Nagel and Staeheli (2014:242) argue, those donors are mostly advancing their own geopolitical agendas in the region, and perhaps more seriously, promoting youth's depoliticization "by shifting political energies away from 'sectarian politics' and toward pragmatic problem-solving at the local scale." Additionally, the private sector also depoliticizes youth by categorizing them as future successful entrepreneurs, and presenting them with the choice of becoming competitive capitalists in the market economy, as an inherently *good* and *natural* choice.

This, then, is the macro-picture of youth in Lebanon. Youth are depoliticized persons, passive agents, unworthy of being seen and heard, unless they contribute to concrete problem-solving and capacity-building initiatives, generically packaged as non-political and non-sectarian, or unless they provide potentially successful entrepreneurship projects to business incubators. They also welcome to migrate, and to demonstrate to the world the genius of the Lebanese mind, succeeding abroad while investing at home.

Youth as a Problem Generation

Paradoxically, although public policy largely ignores youth or, at best, minimizes their role as active agents of social and political change, Lebanese youth are portrayed as a "problem" in relation to their unemployment, and their emigration desires, which generate a "brain drain". The Lebanese youth who leave are portrayed as the "lost generation," the lost hope of a golden future for Lebanon, and those who stay behind represent a group that is stigmatized, looked down upon and feared. These are also gendered into single young men characterized by low education level and low skills, unemployable, with a propensity to become radicalized or a social burden. They are also gendered into single young women, who will marry late or not at all, and become spinsters – again a social burden on society.

The 2011 Arab uprisings were not a particularly salient milestone for the Lebanese, or for Lebanese youth. Critical junctures in Lebanon were the 2005 Independence Intifada (after the assassination of Rafic Hariri), the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, and the 2008 May events, which made the sectarian conflict oppose Shi'a and Sunni for the first time. The 2011 Syrian war, and influx of refugees, is certainly another critical juncture, which is currently undergoing. These events accelerate the out-migration of highly educated and skilled youth. They complicate further the prospects of reform and reconstruction at the national scale, and reinforce the role of international donors and the private sector in defining the policy agendas of the country.

Youth and Intersectionality

"Youth" and youth "problems" are "constructed" categories, which are significantly disembedded from the complex dynamics of legal, economic, social, political and spatial planning policy issues in Lebanon. They are also often reproduced by a wide variety of policy actors, and sometimes experts and scholars, without taking into account how these problems intersect with wider and transversal policy issues related to, say, personal rights, civil laws, gender discrimination, domestic violence, voting rights, citizenship, labour law, access to housing, public transportation, public space, building law, etc. Instead, youth needs to be unpacked as a category related to other indicators, linked to social relations and experiences, which are able to reveal that being young is a very diverse and subjective experience, which intersects with several other relationships and inequalities.

Moreover, the avoidance of politics and political economy from policy agendas at the national and international levels is mind-boggling given the dearth of studies that demonstrate the extent to which sectarian politics pervades policy-making in Lebanon, and any attempts at youth's social and political mobilization to initiate a process of structural and durable change (Asmar et al 1999, Clark and Zahar 2015, Clark and Salloukh 2013). An ESCWA study (2009:iii) highlights "the alarming trend of social and territorial enclaves among youth and the distrust and resentment powered by intercommunal stereotyping." More recent political

science scholarship has been investigating youth and politics through the study of sports (Reiche 2011) and the role of activists (Härdig 2011), underscoring the structural clientelistic and sectarian-political constraints preventing effective change. Saghieh also notes the major political and economic predicaments impacting public life and public participation in Lebanon (UNESCO 2012:204-210).

In closing, this paper has investigated how categories and problems of youth in Lebanon are constructed via different discourses, produced by policy actors and academic scholarship. It has also examined how various policy sectors include and/or exclude youth in their initiatives and activities. Our findings demonstrate that Lebanese youth are constructed through fragmented lenses and policies that lack a holistic, interdisciplinary and integrated understanding of their complex, dynamic and highly differentiated livelihoods. This is clearly materialized in how youth are actively excluded from politics, economics, society and the built environment, through policies that do not prioritize their needs and desires.

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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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