



# POWER2YOUTH

## Youth Inclusion through Civic Engagement in NGOs after the Tunisian Revolution

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## Youth Inclusion through Civic Engagement in NGOs after the Tunisian Revolution

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### Abstract

*The Tunisian uprising led to a massive expansion of new civil society organizations. The institutional framework has become more favourable for civic engagement as Tunisian institutions, supported by their international partners, have evolved to comply with liberal legislation guaranteeing public freedoms. After taking an active part in confronting regime structures, youth experienced civic engagement by creating their own organizations after the revolution. Can this involvement in civil society organizations represent an enabling factor towards political, social and economic inclusion? This can happen either as the result of an empowering process that strengthens an individuals' capacity to take part in a given system or from an emancipating process that challenges the inequality of the specific order. The question this paper aims to address is whether the civic engagement of youth in NGOs is an appropriate channel for their political, social and economic integration or for defying domination relationships based on gender, class and generation. The study and its empirical data are drawn from an ethnographic research conducted since 2011 among civil society organizations in Tozeur, the capital of one of the south-west governorates of Tunisia.*

**Keywords:** Tunisia | Youth | NGOs

### INTRODUCTION

The narrative of the Tunisian uprising against dictatorship usually attributes a key role to youth. Since the revolution, collective action theories have moved from the study of civil society organizations and their role toward democratization of authoritarian regimes (Geisser et al. 2006, Ben Nefissa and Destremau 2011, Bozzo and Luizard 2011) to a resurgence of social movement approach (Hibou 2011a, Geisser 2012, Beinin and Vairel 2013). The relation between relative deprivation and frustration, emphasized by Gurr (1970) as the main rationale behind collective action, has been rehabilitated in the context of Tunisia, which appears to be economically divided. The east and the coast are oriented to international trade and are perceived as dynamic and "useful." While the west, internal and rural parts of the country, where riots blast on a regularly basis, only offer informal economy and migration as options for youth. In addition, the analysis of new technologies of communication as a critical factor to spread the uprising across the country, and beyond frontiers, has contributed to portray youth as the main actor of the revolution (Aouragh and Alexander 2011, Gonzalez-Quijano 2015).

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Youth, in and of itself, as a biological criterion is never a relevant sociological category. In respect with the Arab uprising, one can emphasize urban, educated youth who master communication tools and benefit from international aid toward democracy, while others stress the role of rioters coming from suburban or rural proletariat in the continuity of neo-Khaldounian theories (Ayari et al. 2011). The myth of youth as a consistent social group is jeopardized by the consideration of intersectionality, which invites us to apprehend youth as a relative and relational category.

After 2011, international donors and organizations are massively engaged in supporting the democratic transition in Tunisia. The country is singled out as the main success story in the region after the first free elections held in October 2011 to designate members of the constituent assembly. Strengthening civil society and youth participation has become the main driver for every international organization willing to ground democracy in this country. This objective was established in the agenda of international cooperation with Arab authoritarian regimes (Ottaway and Carothers 2000, Carothers 2002). Tunisia's governments under Ben Ali's Presidency had acquired a perfect command of adopting global agenda by transforming civil society and youth participation into an instrument of power (Camau and Geisser 2003, Hibou 2006). The new context of the revolution and the lifting of institutional constraints inherent to authoritarian regime has prompted international actors to massively redeploy their policy using the same paradigms.

Jostled by this new global thrust and the continuous social and political pressures applying at local and national level, post-revolutionary Tunisian authorities have changed the institutional environment in compliance with liberal legislation related to political and civil rights. Freedom of assembly and association are henceforth granted since the decrees passed by the transitional government and institutions in 2011. They are also protected by the new constitution promulgated in January 2014. Youth participation has also been valued as a core principle and objective that ought to drive policies. This has resulted in a new wave of civic, charities and development organizations, led by or dedicated to youth, from grassroots to national networks.

In this context, youth involvement in civil society organizations must be questioned as an enabling factor towards political, social and economic inclusion. But here the concept of inclusion can be perceived as having several functions. It can be understood as an extension of empowerment: while the latter was originally associated with diverse radical social movements, it has progressively evolved to designate individual capacities to better act within a given system and has become embedded in the "institutional order of development" (Destremau 2013). Inclusion can also refer to emancipation, which, as a search for equality (Rancière 1991), requires criticizing and challenging the existing order perceived as structurally unequal. Approaching youth inclusion by referring to emancipation rather than empowerment implies that inclusion results from the challenge of power structures, based on gender, class and generation.

While dealing with youth inclusion through civic engagement in NGOs, we will then also refer to institutional inclusion which can be defined as a legitimating process of NGOs from their creation to their development within an organizational field composed of CSOs, State, and International donors. As a consequence, the main research question we would like to

address is whether *this institutional inclusion through civic engagement in NGOs derives from an empowering or an emancipating process. Does it come along with a reproduction or a challenge of power and domination structures?*

Our study is based on the in depth analysis of three youth led civil society organizations founded after the revolution in Tozeur, the eponymous city of the region located in the southwestern part of Tunisia. Tozeur was chosen as a research field because it belongs to a rural setting. It demonstrates part of the Tunisian poverty axis with a high rate of unemployment and it is away from globalized scenes. Tozeur is interesting because of its very low density of population, its economy based on agriculture and tourism and the fact that most studies on NGOs are usually in urban settings.

The study and its empirical data derive from ethnographic research conducted since 2011 that resulted in several tens of semi-directive interviews with founders, members and beneficiaries of civil society organizations in Tozeur. Among them, the three youth-led organizations that we take here as case studies fall into different categories of civil society organizations defined by their goals and action repertoire. The first, CHABBAB, targets a very specific group of youth, i.e. unemployed university graduates, applying collective action based on claiming and voicing to advocate for fair and transparent employment by state apparatus. The second, ETTIFAL, aligns with charities by providing assistance to children with school and learning difficulties and the third AFAK<sup>2</sup> relates to development NGOs with no reference to youth as a target group of its action but as a common feature shared by its founders.

The sampling criteria for our study relies on the fact that these three organizations were the only youth led organizations created in 2011 in Tozeur. This aspect makes them relevant to this study, rather than their significance in terms of volume of activities and number of members or of beneficiaries, which are very small as they are post-revolutionary newborn organizations. Additionally CHABBAB counts only a little over fifty members all over the region, and both ETTIFAL and AFAK less than a dozen. None of these organizations has an annual budget that exceeds twenty thousand euros.

Beyond the *a priori* lack of significance of youth led associations studied, what matters here, when it comes to social and institutional inclusion as a result of an emancipating or empowering dynamic, is the engagement process (Fillieule 2001). We will then focus our approach on the NGO's founders, the relationship between their civic engagement and their political and social inclusion, rather than on the impact of the NGO's action on social dynamics in Tozeur. Internal social dynamics will be also marginally tackled as these organizations are weakly structured and we centre our analysis on the relationships with their institutional environment. We will first explore the preconditions that underlie the rationale of their engagement in relation with class- gender- age based constraints that youth must to overcome. We will then examine the internal and external resources that founders of youth led organizations mobilize to take part in public and formal arenas as a way to gain autonomy and endure their institutional environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Real names of NGOs mentioned in this paper have been changed at their request.

## 1. CONDITIONS TO OVERCOME CLASS-GENERATION-GENDER BASED CONSTRAINTS WITH REGARD TO ORGANIZATION FOUNDATION

Tunisia is considered as the success story of the Arab revolution as all the institutional and political limitations to pluralism were progressively lifted. With respect to youth exclusion, we would like here to examine to what extent the revolution also brought about social change in the capacity of youth to organize themselves.

### 1.1 The Case of CHABBAB: Class Based Domination Wiped by the Revolution?

Even if the uprising was sparked late in Tozeur, it involved, as was the case in the rest of the major cities of the central regions of Tunisia, youth from economically marginalized suburban areas. Facing a double exclusion, due to patriarchal hierarchy that gives a leading position to elders, and to their belonging to marginalized neighbourhoods of disfavoured regions, male youth opted for a specific "action repertoire" (Tilly 1978). This consisted of a direct and violent confrontation with police and security apparatus. Tozeur counted three "martyrs" resulting from riots and repressive operations. Youth mobilization took place according to a traditional labour division where male and young people resort to unconventional ways of protesting while elders are rather in favour of conventional actions. This division was particularly clear during the mining basin movement of 2008 in which experienced unionists were the main engine (Chouikha and Geisser 2010).

Youth movements leading riots during the revolution acme in Tozeur in 2011 did not stop after Ben Ali's flight. The perpetuation of youth activism in other forms contributed to apprehend revolution as a process. During the transitional period, working class youth experienced a form of emancipation due to the revolution that was considered as theirs. But another way to consider emancipation is equality or reciprocity, when youth led activities are considered equal or equivalent to similar activities led by elders. Indeed, labour division in protest movements did not apply after the uprising; the attempts of purging within the administration was conducted by the people themselves and did not involve only youth. Elders also took part in it and in other informal marches and forms of protests. On the other hand, NGO creation was not only in the hands of seniors since some of the young rioters set out to organize themselves by using formal means.

The creation of an unemployed graduates-led organization in Tozeur after the uprising illustrates this phenomenon of youth emancipation deriving from the uprising. The Tozeur section of CHABBAB<sup>3</sup> was founded in March 2011 initially by a majority of young male graduates living in the northern part of Tozeur. This neighbourhood located at the outskirts of the city is occupied by new comers and modest families searching for more affordable housing. It is also far from city centre neighbourhoods that historically concentrated wealthy families and those with political influence.

The creation of CHABBAB in Tozeur resulted from the congruence of two slightly different agendas taken on by two specific groups of young men. The first one is represented by graduates

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<sup>3</sup> CHABBAB is a national NGO created in 2006 in secrecy. It is composed of several local sections coordinated by the national secretary.

from major Tunisian universities, politically socialized or engaged in youth sections of leftist political parties, active on the campus before the revolution. In this regard and on a national level, CHABBAB is an extension of the student union *Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie* (UGET) whose reins have been held by the far-left parties, such as the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party (*Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie*, PCOT),<sup>4</sup> the Left Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste de gauche*, PSG),<sup>5</sup> the "Watad" party and Arab nationalists, more and less gathered since 2012 under a common coalition. CHABBAB resembles the model of mass organization belonging to the "Communist conglomerate" (Ion 1997), as it may notably have existed in other parts of the world. For these activists in Tozeur, the agenda is to advance the interest of the organization by expanding and grounding its presence in all regions in the country. The federal structure of the organization based on local sections, which also applies to other historical Tunisian human rights NGOs such as the Tunisian Human Rights League (*Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme*, LTDH) is adopted as the most effective way to address claims at national level in the context of a very centralized State. In this scheme, local sections are used as mobilization ponds.

The other group of youth involved in the creation of the local section is composed of graduates from the Tozeur technical university with no political affiliation and who took part in the uprising. Their priority after Ben Ali's flight was to defend the interests of martyrs' families to claim compensation since a specific national commission dedicated to this issue was created.

These two groups shared certain characteristics: a common neighbourhood in Tozeur, the same goals to protect the revolution from a RCD<sup>6</sup> come back and the fact that they were male. Maintaining a social movement repertoire at local and national levels, CHABBAB has rapidly been propelled to the front of the national scene by becoming an official intermediary with the authorities. Being young, unemployed, historically active and even decisive against the dictatorship constituted the main social and political resources on which CHABBAB built its legitimacy as it embraced the narrative of the Arab revolution. This led CHABBAB to an active participation in public arenas that will be further examined in following sections.

## 1.2 The Case of AFAK: Opportunism and Class Distinction

AFAK is a development NGO created in 2011 by members who label themselves as a youth organization. Although they claim to be youth led, they do not specifically target youth in their action. The rationale of their commitment in civil society is formulated in their discourse by a willingness to serve the interest of their region. They view development as a holistic concept that covers all sectors of public action.

Contrary to CHABBAB members and to the mainstream representation of youth, the founding members of AFAK did not initially face social and economic exclusion. Indeed, they consider themselves as young executives willing to make the region benefit from their skills and qualification. They are male, employed and some of them are married with children. One would say that they definitely exited the youth world and reached adult age by building family and gaining social and economic autonomy. But youth as a concept must be understood here

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<sup>4</sup> In 2012, PCOT adopted its new name: Tunisian Workers' Party (*Parti des travailleurs*, PT).

<sup>5</sup> In 2012, PSG renamed itself Tunisian Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste*, PS).

<sup>6</sup> *Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique* (Democratic Constitutional Rally) - formerly the party in power.

in generational terms and, in this regard, the Tunisian revolution has been an enabling factor for a younger generation to advance their interest.

The insurrectionary phase has thereafter given rise to a purging phase. Slogans such as “out” chanted in massive demonstrations against Ben Ali and the regime were then directed against civil servants or executives known to be RCD members particularly zealous to defend the regime’s interest. But the “outing” movement also took place in a competing context for access to power between generations. For instance, the chairperson of AFAK was a former executive in the Cyberpark of Tozeur, a public unit dedicated to business creation. He replaced the director when the latter was sacked after the revolution due to an “outing” movement. The same scenario occurred at the higher institute of technical study where the director had to quit his position under the pressure of the teachers’ team and was replaced by one of them who is also the first secretary of AFAK.

AFAK founding members want to assert their own identity around the image of belonging to youth as a social category. In this way, they can distance themselves from other organizations that they consider to be ruled by the same elder’s domination. The explicit motivation behind the creation of their organization is to build a balance of power between generations, both among NGOs and within the local administration. As AFAK secretary states: “You know, we are a youth organization. The average age is 35 years. It is important for us because, you know, youth have not been infected by RCD virus. We are not corrupted.”<sup>7</sup> According to AFAK chairperson:

We also want to differentiate ourselves and provide new ways of working. The oldest, they are slower and they love bureaucracy. It is the national sport. We would like to change attitudes at this level within the civil society but also for the administration. In any way, in many associations created after the revolution, you find civil servants. So as far as we are concerned, it does not matter. If we change things at the level of civil society, it will necessarily impact the administration. You see, and we, the young people, we will win on the two tables.<sup>8</sup>

As Laville and Sainsaulieu (2013:10) propose, “institutional creation corresponds to a differentiation process.” But a desire for distinction does not only apply between youth and seniors but also among young people. In this regard, AFAK discredits CHABBAB action which they consider aggressive and in perpetual protest due to member political agenda. They, on the other hand, define themselves as civil society with no political affiliation, promoting dialogue and seeking consensus for common interest:

Unfortunately, at CHABBAB, people have not been able to evolve after the revolution. They only criticize and they are very restless. We, however, believe that it is necessary to discuss with everyone, calmly and to find solutions together. It is important to know how to make proposals.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with AFAK secretary, Tozeur, April 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with AFAK chairperson, Tozeur, April 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with AFAK secretary, Tozeur, April 2012.



The revolution, that is wonderful! The downside is that anyone can take the floor anytime, anywhere. It is easy to always criticize the administration. We prefer to discuss as we know it from within, the rules and the operation. We know how to present problems. Through our organization, we can be a link between society and the administration.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond a difference of approach and mode of action, class contempt is at stake between the two organizations, one of which is led and dedicated to unemployed graduates living in marginalized areas and the other involves young executives keen on contributing to the development of their region thanks to their advanced social position.

### 1.3 The Case of ETTIFAL: Facing Gender Based Exclusion

ETTIFAL deals with orphans and children with school problems by providing cultural and entertaining activities aimed at empowering them. Like founding members of CHABBAB, ETTIFAL's founders are young graduates or unemployed, coming from disfavoured areas of Tozeur. The patriarchal domination applies all the more here given that the majority of members including the chairperson are women. The choice of the theme and of the social purpose of the organization corresponds to an internalization of normative requirements of the patriarchal system which puts the social role of women in the care for children. Despite this form of compliance to dominant norms, the practice of commitment in civil society organizations among the female members of ETTIFAL testifies to a capacity of workarounds and compromise with regards to these dominant standards.

First of all, it is to be noted that ETTIFAL is structured around a domestic logic that is much more predominant than in the other studied organizations. According to Laville (2002), the domestic logic in civil society organizations proceeds from an indexing of relations on those in force in the private space. In this context, the initiative leading to the creation of the organization is due to a specific person who claims, as much as is entrusted with, ownership of the organization in which a majority of members has been chosen on the basis of primary solidarities of belonging around the family ties and friendship.

ETTIFAL's chairperson is 28 years. She is the main founder of the organization. Alternating periods of inactivity and periods of work of short duration, she is deeply dedicated to what is considered her organization. According to the vice-chairperson who is a close friend of hers, "nobody would want another chairperson because it is her organization."<sup>11</sup> Although she is legally an adult, the chairperson is not married and lives with her parents. She has to deal with their authority for the decisions she makes:

In the beginning, it was difficult for me. For my parents, when I told them that I wanted to create an association, frankly they were not very supportive. But when I told them who would be in it, they felt relieved: there is my sister and friends of family of the neighbourhood. Our parents are getting along together so there is confidence. As they know that we are all together, they support what I am doing. Then my brother also became a member, but it is more to give us a hand from time to time in computer

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with AFAK chairperson, Tozeur, April 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with ETTIFAL vice-chairwoman, Tozeur, October 2012.

science.<sup>12</sup>

Another way to make the participation of women acceptable in activities that go beyond the domestic sphere where they are traditionally assigned is to demonstrate the usefulness of this participation in light of the job search:

My parents know that I have always been a serious girl, with good results in my studies. In addition, I have always managed to find work here and there. And then they know that I have always been active. When I told them that it could help me find work, they encouraged me.<sup>13</sup>

The increase in precariousness and poverty, as well as the access of women to higher education, has rendered the economic inclusion of women acceptable, but even more, necessary. As Périvier (2013) shows, economic necessity is not a driving factor which undermines the relationships of domination based on gender. Linking civic engagement to economic inclusion is on the one hand a tactical move to deal with patriarchal authority but, on the other hand, it is seen as a causal relation that could help youth in their job search (Wilson and Musick 2003). Civic participation is perceived by ETTIFAL's chairperson as an empowering experience favouring self-confidence and autonomy which are skills supposedly valued in the job market (Bono 2013).

This social representation that articulates civic engagement with the job market has been built, in the case of ETTIFAL's chairperson, through a socializing process. This process began with her experience with the Girl Scouts before the revolution and continued after with her participation in international donor programs. Her experience with the Girl Scouts seems to have been decisive in two respects. First of all, mentioning participation among the Scouts in Tunisia shows commitment to "active citizenship" in the "service of others and especially of the society." It expresses the idea of a natural propensity to act for others. Tunisian Scouts is an historic organization officially attached to "the narrative of the national movement" and it enjoys important prestige. Finally, it is an organization in which the chairperson and all the members of ETTIFAL have been active for several years in the implementation of extracurricular, cultural and educational activities with children. Involvement in civic organizations brings know-how and gives legitimacy and sense to action. The acquisition of skills through volunteering is also promoted by the organization and perceived by its members as an asset in the job market.

This combination of skills gained by volunteers on the one hand and promoting discourse on civic engagement by organization on the other also took place in programs developed by international organizations. ETTIFAL's chairperson benefited from activities run by Mercy Corps, an American NGO. This organization relied on the network of UNESCO Clubs, operating in several cities of Tunisia well before the revolution, to carry out programs destined to "strengthening the capacity of civil society."

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with ETTIFAL chairwoman, Tozeur, October 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

This has especially allowed ETTIFAL chairperson to get out of a purely national scene and exposed her to international management standards of associative action. Through Mercy Corps, ETTIFAL's chairperson participated in several training sessions prior to the creation of the organization right after the revolution. They all taught leadership skills, and analysed the role of youth and women's participation in society. They also linked civic engagement with the job market. Being young, and a woman living in a remote area, the chairperson matches the main criteria defined by international organizations to target beneficiaries of their program. As a consequence, it appears that such programs contributed to the creation of ETTIFAL as an achievement of lessons learned in the training sessions. ETTIFAL's chairperson considers her commitment with NGOs as a springboard to find a job as she wishes to integrate social services run by the administration.

#### **1.4 Intermediate Conclusion**

Inevitably, young people dealing with forms of social and political exclusion due to domination relations based on class, gender and age have experienced a certain degree of emancipation after the revolution. Participation in the associative sectors has been one of the most visible markers. Youth explicitly and implicitly took advantage of a dominant social representation of the revolution and of its determinants that is conveyed by national and international institutions and gives a central place to youth. It provides a new legitimacy beyond social origins and traditional gender based discriminations to those who are calling for youth identity. This is especially true for young men and women from working class and poorer neighbourhoods. Some of these young people capitalize on the prestige inherent in the status of revolutionary and opponent, or benefit more easily from the programs of international cooperation. This is also the case for professionally more advantaged young people who rely on youth identity and the new revolutionary context to build a power relationship not only with the older generations but also with the young people of the poorer neighbourhoods.

Young women who find this new context favourable must also cope with the more specific domination relationships. They adopt strategies that allow them to circumvent and legitimize their participation in the public space. Norms transfer from international organizations that articulate civic engagement and job market as a main vehicle for women empowerment and bring about some changes. Evidence shows that women who create NGOs often have previous experience in participating in donors programs. This however does not address domination mechanisms assigning women to specific positions. Volunteerism is at this point more a consequence of economic and political exclusion than an enabling factor toward emancipation.

## **2. RESOURCE MOBILIZATION TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC ARENAS AND GAIN AUTONOMY**

Beyond the institutional creation of youth led NGOs is the question of their durability which derives from the relationship between the organizations and their environment. Although evolving political and institutional context can be an enabling factor for youth emancipation via engagement in new NGOs which can bypass class, geographic and gender classification, it can also result in their integration within the institutional system. This assimilation can reproduce hierarchy and orders that prevailed before the revolution. We will examine the

conditions that allow youth led organizations to design and advance their own agenda by participating in an institutional deliberating arena as a mark of emancipation.

### 2.1 The Case of CHABBAB: Between Cooptation and Autonomy from UGTT

After Ben Ali's flight, administration, authority and legitimacy within Tunisian institutions went through a period of profound destabilization (Dot-Pouillard 2013). At national and local levels new "transitional" or "revolutionary" institutions with no legal mandate and status emerged. In Tozeur, as in the rest of the country, the Local Committee for the Protection of the Revolution (LCPR) replaced the city council as the new local authority.

CHABBAB members, through their national, youth and revolutionary legitimacy, took an active part in the constitution of the LCPR. They worked with elder unionists and human rights activists as the alliance between rioters from the marginalized northern part of the city and the historical opponents to the regime continued (Yousfi 2015).

Since its creation in 2006 at national level, CHABBAB has always had an ambiguous relationship with the Tunisian General Labour Union (*Union générale tunisienne du travail*, UGTT), the historic and most important Tunisian labour union, oscillating from tutorship to emancipation. Coming from the same socializing space to collective action and partnering together during protest events and movements like in 2008 during the mining movement in Gafsa, the two organizations have always belonged to the same "clique" of opponents (Camau and Geisser 2003, Ayari 2009), with members circulating from parties to unions and human rights organizations. CHABBAB leaders see UGTT as a prestigious organization and a source of inspiration. Nevertheless, strategies applied by the two organizations were quite different as UGTT had to compromise with the regime while CHABBAB evolved in secrecy.

After the revolution, the paternalistic relationship between UGTT and CHABBAB strengthened as the former wanted to play a hegemonic role to coordinate the democratic transition by confronting both former regime servants and Islamic movements as well as by taking control over the revolutionary institutions. While the new UGTT executives at national level clearly showed affiliation or sympathy with far left parties, nonetheless executives at local levels, who had previously taken part in the hegemonic RCD system, held their position and sought to keep their power after the revolution.

The LCPR gradually substituted for formal institutions to fill the space left by the weakened State and became a power issue for political forces willing to assert their legitimacy in the perspective of upcoming elections. When participating in the LCPR, the Tozeur section of CHABBAB was given instructions by national leaders to align with UGTT positions and place itself under its umbrella. In Tozeur, power struggles that occurred to take control over the LCPR opposed several trends within UGTT, between partisans and opponents to the regional secretary who was compromised with RCD. CHABBAB had to deal with manipulation attempts to rally to one side or the other.

After the first free national elections in 2011 for the constituent assembly, the LCPRs officially dissolved as formal institutions such as city council or the local development council gradually took over. Members of the former are elected, while the latter are nominated by the governor.

UGTT as a critical player co-opted CHABBAB members to take part in such institutions.

In the context of municipal elections suspended until the promulgation of a new constitution, “transitional” city councils were designated on the basis of consensus among political parties and civil society organizations. Youth led NGOs were ruled out from the negotiations but some of them such as CHABBAB were co-opted by unionists and human rights activists to be represented in the city council. Once again, revolutionary and youth status were promoted in favour of CHABBAB members.

Due to its participation in LCPR and transitional city council, CHABBAB gained credibility and legitimacy with local authorities. Its capacity to build its own agenda allowed the NGO to gain this acknowledgement. After the revolution, CHABBAB obtained legal status. Its main objective was to expand and become a sustainable national organization. Armed with its new legitimate status, CHABBAB progressively departed from its political and unionist affiliation by designing its own agenda focused on issues concerning unemployed university rather than on regime change and institution building:

It is an organization that must defend the right to work with the demonstrations to expose our claims. The vision of the organization is that everyone has the right to have an adequate job which corresponds to his diploma. That is our vision. First of all, we are trying to advocate for limiting corruption in recruitment. To recruit young people who really need it. Then, we also demand State recruitment. There must be a significant number of recruits in the public service for the Tunisian economy. Currently it is 25,000 per year, we affirm that it should double. In addition, we say that the State must have control over the private sector and that the sector must recruit graduates in good conditions that is to say worthy. Then, for all those who want to do projects and access to credit, there must be less bureaucracy. Finally, we are also defending unemployment allowances. The State must provide it. At least to allow people to maintain their dignity.<sup>14</sup>

The national coordination decided to open membership to all who wanted to stand for its values and objectives, regardless of political affiliation and background:

We have all kind of people now in the sections of the governorate of Tozeur. The politicized people, people who are not politicized, anti-Ennahda people, people on the left, on the extreme left but also the people who are close to Ennahda. There is no problem as long as we agree and accept the common objectives which are those of unemployed graduates.<sup>15</sup>

For an Islamist militant active within CHABBAB and wearing a strict Islamic dress: “It is an NGO that I respect very much, because it really works for the interest of unemployed graduates. There are really all kind of people in the organization. I have never felt conflict or a political ideology. As an Islamist, I have never had a problem.”

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with CHABBAB national coordinator, Tunis, March 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with CHABBAB coordinator in Tozeur, Tozeur, April 2012.

Thus, CHABBAB has an important political legacy because of its links with far left organizations that are still very tied at the level of the national secretariat. Nevertheless, the organization has opened itself to the rest of society and encouraged coexistence of several types of activists. The first type corresponds to members engaged in activist careers by enrolling in a multi-organizational space that reproduces the terms of commitment that predominated before the revolution but in a new context of political pluralism. This is the historical figure of the organization. The second type of member corresponds to young political activists, belonging to other partisan structures, competitors or opponents, and who also engage in CHABBAB by conviction, in respect of the content and action repertoire. Finally, the third type of member is in a sectorial logic. Their commitment is pragmatic and is indexed to the result of action. The search for retribution (Gaxie 1977), namely the acquisition of a job in public administration, is an important source of motivation for commitment as well as a reason for defection (Fillieule 2005).

The section of CHABBAB in Tozeur brings together a wide membership around the problem of unemployed graduates, contributing to define its own agenda and to build a specific identity. Its legitimacy recognized by local authorities has translated in seats in various arenas that are aimed to facilitate dialogue between authorities, civil society organizations and political parties. Such arenas, like the local development council or city council, were in place prior to the revolution but have strengthened during the transitional period to generate consensus in society. In the meantime, the participation of youth and women in civil society has been promoted by international donors as a main vehicle to support democratic transition. International norms have been adopted by national institutions to deal with revolutionary and unstable context. All of these internal and external factors have combined to contribute to the representation of CHABBAB in public arenas.

This has allowed youth struggling for the rights of unemployed graduates to partly emancipate themselves from political affiliation and tutorship. Although CHABBAB has its own agenda and action repertoire that are not always backed by UGTT, it is also used as a mobilization pond by UGTT when necessary. This is due to the fact that historical activists from radical left parties retain a prominent place in its internal hierarchy, thereby skewing the overall strategy of the organization when it comes to its external relations with public authorities, the international partners and national allies such as the UGTT. The local sections such as those of Tozeur remain subject to political guidelines set out within the national coordination that results from the alliance with UGTT.

## 2.2 The Case of AFAK: Dual Role for Brokering Activities

AFAK is in a very different situation as it was created partly as a response to CHABBAB activism. The very large majority of the founding members maintains a discourse that disqualifies politics and considers that civil society is a way to overcome partisan struggles and personal ambitions to deal with the real problems affecting citizens. This discourse singles out civil society as the essence of democracy compared to an opportunistic and corrupt political society. Claiming rejection of politics aims to highlight sincerity in the commitment to the service of the community. It is also a bearer of an "antipolitic" (Schedler 1997) corresponding to "a posture which claims to ban anything which is recognized as political and therefore who wants to give full scope to the actors who say they are external to the policy of investing

this field" (Hibou 2011b:3). It is paradoxically part of a politicization process that is to "[use] the language or the organizational form of the association to openly put in question the legitimacy of state actors and/or policies and request a larger and, if possible, formalized role in the elaboration of public policies" (Abu-Sada and Challand 2011:21).

AFAK, as a civil society organization, is not only opposed to political actors but also to forms of collective action based on protest. AFAK founding members have consistently kept their distance from the types of experiences of civic engagement such as the LCPR:

Concerning the Committee for the protection of the revolution, I was not directly involved but I was a little bit informed. I liked the idea at the beginning, but then they have slipped; some wanted to take control and seek power, sometimes by using aggressive manners. I did not like it. We created our NGO on the exact opposite, in the purpose of collaborative work, without conflicts or to resolve them nicely. That was the main objective of our association. If someone thinks he has an idea or can bring something then he is welcome. This is our vision.<sup>16</sup>

After the revolution, personally, I have not participated in the committee for the protection of the revolution. First of all I was in Tunis, but I could hear that the people who were inside it had short-term goals. Sometimes these were very opportunistic. If there is an election, I am with it. But here, we do not have a tradition of elections. Here, elections always take place at night: The day after, people find out by surprise that they are elected without knowing there was something going on.<sup>17</sup>

AFAK seems to adopt a radically opposed view from CHABBAB although it claims the right to participate in decision making related to development issues in the region. The rationale of the creation of the NGO lays in this objective. Whereas CHABBAB counts on youth, revolutionary capital and its alliance with UGTT, AFAK mobilizes other types of legitimizing resources.

First of all, most of AFAK founding members already hold seats at the local development council due to their professional responsibilities. Consequently they enjoy "a dual institutional membership" that offers multiple margins of manoeuvre by playing the role of screen and interface (Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk 1993). The presence of certain officials in civil society organizations such as AFAK allows the latter to have a source of information on the operation, the calendar, the organizational structure, and the activities of administrations. It also allows organizations to have qualified persons, university graduates who can read and write in French as well as in Arabic. Civil servant's profiles are considered to be more able to develop "knowledge derived from usage" (Fromentin and Wojcik 2008). Their presence in sectoral coordination mechanisms, their rich cultural baggage, their advanced education and professional experience, enables them to understand the scientific and technical language mobilized in the context of public action. Most importantly, these individuals know the internal culture of the administration, the codes and protocols that must be respected if one wants to interact with it in order to find a consensus or an agreement.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with AFAK secretary, Tozeur, April 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with AFAK chairman, Tozeur, April 2012.

On the other hand, NGOs are regarded by administrators as a freer space of interaction in which they can take initiatives that the bureaucratized system of the administration prevents them from doing. In the post-revolutionary context, civil servants engaged in NGOs are “translators of meaning” (Nay and Smith 2002) between individuals from different institutional universes. This dual role is the primary resource of AFAK founding members that makes them able to mediate between NGOs and local authorities.

The second resource that they can exploit locally for their participation in public arenas is their access to international development aid. AFAK as a development NGO understands its role and objective as an intermediary that falls within an activity of “brokering.” This is essentially seen as being oriented to fund raising in a configuration that links the centre and the periphery, or the local on one side and the national and the global on the other side (Bierschenk et al. 2000). As far as it concerns AFAK, the development of a region is measured by the amount of investment made. Its goal is to increase the access of a region to State funding and international cooperation. This requires not only a capacity to “connect” on the financial circuits but also to mediate in an exchange that involves actors belonging to different institutional universe.

We are a development NGO. Our objective is to bring projects over Tozeur. In that regard, we are working closely with the administration and civil society. Each needs the other but they do not know each other well. There is a lot of mistrust. But if we want the development of Tozeur, we need to bring everybody together. There is a need for funding. Therefore, we are ready to work with all those who want to develop projects in the region. Foreign donors, State and even private companies. We are here to facilitate their work and to bring people together.<sup>18</sup>

Our objective is to get as much money as possible to Tozeur. For this, there must be projects. So we need to inform on donors’ programs and funding mechanism, to participate in the days of information, training and to be in the networks. If not, you do not know what the donors are up to and how to get their funds. The donors are often forced to go through the administration, through a partnership. But they also want to have partnerships with civil society. Therefore, we must go to see some administrations and settle some agreements so we can move on with the donors. It is complicated but we believe we are in a good position to do this work.<sup>19</sup>

AFAK succeeded in taking part in a donor initiative in Tozeur. The German agency for international cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ) under the trusteeship of the German Department of Foreign Affairs is one of the donors that was, before the revolution, the most active in the region of Tozeur. As with all the cooperation agencies, GIZ works first with local authorities, whilst also maintaining a civil society component. Its investment in civil society is to directly fund projects or to embed civil society organizations in programs designed with state structures.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with AFAK secretary, Tozeur, April 2012.



GIZ has organized a seminar in 2012 bringing together several local NGOs in order to develop a collective strategy in the field of agricultural development, GIZ wishing to finance “initiatives of civil society” while “strengthening their capacity.” In the absence of an office or a representative in Tozeur, GIZ has had to rely on a local organization to coordinate its activities. AFAK was designated to play this role. Although it had no specific agricultural project to propose, it presented itself as a coordinating organization. AFAK was a good choice because it had the support of the administration to adopt this position. Moreover, it also presented the advantage of being a new organization, “led by young people.” The choice of AFAK for the coordination of part of GIZ’s activities in Tozeur therefore fell in conformity with the criteria established in the matter of “support to civil society after the revolution in the context of the democratic transition which must rely on a greater inclusion of women and youth.”<sup>20</sup>

By obtaining the status of single mediator or go-between for the GIZ and assuming a role of coordination between the different stakeholders, AFAK experienced a phase of expansion that brought it to the front of the local public scene. The position of its members within the local development council strengthened since they were recognized as civil society representatives in the context of an international program.

Nevertheless, this success was held only for the duration of the program. The latter had side effects, which affected AFAK’s evolution. By becoming the subcontractor of a GIZ program, the organization did not develop a specific agenda. A year after the end of the GIZ program, AFAK had still not organized activities on their own. Some of the founding members withdrew either to join other more dynamic NGOs, or to put an end to their voluntary commitment.

### 2.3 The Case of ETTIFAL: Adapting to Persistent Exclusion

ETTIFAL’s founders, as those of AFAK, overtly formulate an anti-political discourse, which renders the commitment in civil society organizations as disinterested, in opposition to the commitment in political parties. For ETTIFAL’s chairwoman:

In 2012, after the revolution, I have noticed that lots of new NGOs were created, especially in the cultural sector, in charities and in development but nobody worked for children. I can also tell that NGOs chairpersons often are in political parties. I wanted to create an organization that is only concerned with children through outreach work. NGOs should not be involved in politics. We are interested in children, not politics. I see all these NGOs that talk a lot but do nothing.<sup>21</sup>

For ETTIFAL’s founders, civil society organizations should be a civic alternative in which people can engage to “contribute to solve the societal problems and provide solutions to the people;” “politicians do not have this concern.”<sup>22</sup> It is an anti-political vision of collective action that underlies the approach of new NGOs since political parties are judged as morally corrupt, being too preoccupied with power. ETTIFAL members consider that the questions they deal with are far too important to leave to politicians.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with GIZ team leader, Tozeur, October 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with ETTIFAL chairwoman, Tozeur, October 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with ETTIFAL vice-chairwoman, Tozeur, October 2012.

The NGO creation by young women after the revolution is not linked to a pre-existing political inclusion as is the case of CHABBAB nor does it promote an institutional inclusion as is the case of AFAK. Contrary to the latter that also emphasizes anti-political views, ETTIFAL founders claim no participation in public action and local decision-making mechanisms. The organization only focuses on its outreach work without seeking a seat at the local development council. This latter appears too political because of the presence of members of parliament and of political activists.

The rejection of politics translates a form of exclusion in a context of domination based on gender, class and age. To the extent that the creation of a NGO initiated by young women had already been subject to various strategies of circumvention, a wider participation in the public space, and in particular in an arena of dialog involving political actors, seems hardly conceivable in a patriarchal system. In the discourse, ETTIFAL founders' rejection to these spaces refers to an opposition to politics. But it also translates into an internalization of patriarchal norms that exclude women from political arenas.

The practice of participation in the public space is not only performed within institutional spaces, such as in city council or in local administrations. Consultation processes, arrangements and consensus reaching are also conducted in informal and gendered spaces of sociability, such as coffee shops, which are almost exclusively reserved for men. This is particularly the case of the cafes in the city centre. These are considered the economic, cultural and political backbone of the city, where social meetings, essential to city affairs, are held. The few cafes allowing mixing of genders are all located in what is called the tourist area. Originally designed for foreign tourists where local social rules do not apply, these spaces have been little by little invested by families and young "tozeuresians" due to the crisis in tourism. Members of ETTIFAL meet in these cafes. Nevertheless, they are considered recreation areas away from the bustle of the city rather than strategic areas linked with local political life.

Political exclusion, traditionally faced by women as well as by ETTIFAL members, can be observed when it comes to accessing public funding. While many NGOs in Tozeur have benefitted either from an annual funding from the governorate as a support to cover costs of operation or from a provision of premises or even of staff, ETTIFAL seems to be dependent on its own resources:

I have made requests for public funding to the governor and the municipality, including a request for office space. Yet I have had no response from them. Once the governor organized a meeting with all of the NGOs so they can present their action and some obtained funds thereafter. Me, I have still not received a reply. Although they do nothing, the other NGOs receive support in terms of premises, money etc. They are all involved in politics and it is for this reason that they have the money. We do not. This is not normal. We are interested in actually carrying out the fieldwork with children, and nobody helps us.<sup>23</sup>

The chairperson of the organization explains the situation, emphasizing the explicit forms of discrimination based on several criteria:

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with ETTIFAL chairwoman, Tozeur, October 2012.

You know, the people here, they were surprised at the beginning to see a girl like me to be the chairperson of a NGO. For many of them, a chairperson is a prestigious position, used as a showcase, designated among respectable persons of a certain age and with a good situation. As far as I am concerned, I am unemployed; I am not yet thirty and I come from a working class district of the city. At the beginning, I was taken for a trainee. With time, some have become accustomed, others have not. I believe that it scares them. I am sure that it is for this reason that we have not received the support we deserve.<sup>24</sup>

In this context of marginalization, the NGO will again apply strategies of circumvention. One of them is to connect to the networks of international donors. The chairperson of ETTIFAL continues the experience she had with Mercy Corps in the wake of which she created the organization. Her profile as a young woman from working class districts of cities located in a poor region of the country, chairperson of NGO, thus exercising a “role of leader” or “change maker,” corresponds perfectly to the criteria of international donors used to target beneficiaries of their program of support for civil society and democratic transition. ETTIFAL’s chairperson explains that she managed to participate in several international organization-training sessions thanks to a human rights activist, member of CHABBAB, who lived in her neighbourhood. The purpose of these courses was not only to provide knowledge on themes pertaining to human rights or project planning and management, but also to facilitate the constitution of civil society networks at the national and local level.

Some of these courses were held in Tozeur and were attended by several local NGOs. Her attendance contributed to publicizing the existence of ETTIFAL. After the courses were over, participants continued to meet regularly. Their main motivation was that it could help raise funds or at least be profitable in terms of skills and social network development for individual purposes related to job market.

Nevertheless, these initiatives that ETTIFAL members participated in were disconnected from the social purpose of the NGO. Although the meetings were destined to boost the organization’s development, they also turned out to be irrelevant to raising funds. The focus on outreach work and charity toward children did not seem to match with the “rights-based approach” or with “result-based project management” promoted by international organizations.

The second strategy to overcome the risk of marginalization that ETTIFAL had to deal with was to develop informal collaborative relations with structures providing public services.

Our principal work consists in outreach to children. But it does not prevent us from working with the administrations. Many of our activities are in partnership with the State structures: the Youth Centre (*Maison de la jeunesse*), the Children’s Centre (*Maison de l’enfance*) and the Cultural Centre (*Maison de la culture*). We can use these spaces and premises for our activities with the children. In addition, sometimes, they have the money to finance activities. For example, we managed to take children on vacation because the Children’s Centre loaned us a bus and gave us enough money to organize the trip. In fact, all these houses are empty most of the time. They are

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

unused. The partnership works well because we have lists of children who really are in need and can benefit from the aid. The administrations have the means but they do not know the children. They do not come out of their office. They are happy to work with us. We provide the lists and they put their resources at our disposal.<sup>25</sup>

By developing collaborations with the administration on an informal basis, without conventions or bureaucratic paperwork, ETTIFAL seems to be able to maintain and sustain a level of activity ensuring its existence without obtaining genuine public recognition for its work.

## 2.4 Intermediate Conclusion

Youth led NGOs studied in Tozeur strive to mobilize internal resources and deploy strategies to sustain their social existence. These strategies are dependent upon opportunities offered by their environment. Participation in the city and local development councils reveal forms of social and political inclusion that can lead to emancipation since it demonstrates a legitimacy to interact at equal level.

This, however, is only accessible to NGOs led by educated young males. Social constraints deriving from gender-based domination are persistent and difficult to overcome. Women's discourse about participating in public arenas in primarily feminine organizations reflects their internalization of exclusion mechanisms.

Although the post-revolutionary context provides opportunities for some youth led organizations to flourish, not all are capable of overcoming dominant social representations. In this respect, the assistance provided by international programs remains insufficient for their survival.

Finally, unemployed graduates with an authentic agenda based on a "cross-comprehension of social problems" (Laville and Sainsaulieu 2013) are not exempt from a risk of demise. They too are subject to domination based on generational differences as they endlessly need to negotiate their autonomy with their political tutors.

## CONCLUSION

Youth civic engagement in NGOs after the revolution in Tunisia can be thought through the concept of emancipation as it implies a struggle against power and domination structures for young men and women founding their organization. No matter the type of organization and/or its general orientation, such as development, charity or human rights, young founders of NGOs have to deal with social orders and norms based on patriarchy. The expression and assertion of youth identity takes place in a form of generational competition as the revolution and its narrative based on youth participation challenge social hierarchies. Power struggles do not only oppose young people to their elders. Young women experience higher forms of discriminative norms and have to develop tactical compromises to legitimize their participation in public spaces. Creating youth led civil society organizations results from an emancipating process as young people have to overcome dominant social norms that exclude

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with ETTIFAL chairwoman, Tozeur, November 2012.

them from participating in public space.

Power competition is also at stake among young themselves, between those unemployed coming from marginalized neighbourhoods, who took an active part in the uprisings, and those in a better social and economic situation who compensate their lack of revolutionary legitimacy by asserting their youth identity and their professional qualification to gain an influential position in the social and political arena.

As a consequence, young people are endowed with different levels of social, cultural and economic capital and must mobilize different types of resources to sustain their organization in an institutional order and participate in public arenas through their organization. Political affiliation and heritage are examples of these resources. The statuses of revolutionary and former opponents to Ben Ali's regime give legitimacy and the opportunity to take part in post revolution institutions. Alliances through political affiliation also ease cooptation and patronage from historic and national organizations such as UGTT. But paternalistic relationships contribute to reproduce power domination based on age and patriarchal models. The capacity of youth NGOs to design and assert their own agenda is key to gaining autonomy and to being recognized as relevant players amongst local authorities.

Access to international funding and programs is another kind of resource aimed to bring a similar recognition. For young women who face intersected domination relationships, socialization to collective action through participation in national civic organizations and international programs is a major condition that has led to NGO creation after the revolution. The rationale for civic engagement refers to social representations deriving from this socialization process. It attributes a key role to individual responsibilities and capacities. Civic engagement through NGOs is understood as resulting from an empowering process. It also aims to a better economic and social inclusion rather than to challenge power and domination structures.

This phenomenon is quite similar regarding other social configurations. The youth led organization founded and headed by young employed men also seek international support, not only to economically sustain their organization, but also acquire sufficient legitimacy to participate in public arenas. Development activity is perceived as brokerage to channel funds to the benefit of the region. Youth identity is emphasized on the one hand to match with the narrative of the revolution and the international donors' paradigm. On the other hand, dual position as civil servants of the administration and civil society activists is enhanced to put forward the intermediation capacity between the society and the administration. Brokering is then aimed to allow greater inclusion by providing opportunities to participate in public arenas.

However, this in depth study showed evidence that benefiting from international programs is not a sufficient condition for youth led organizations to guarantee their institutional inclusion. Capacity building training programs developed by international donors helped young women create their own organization but did not necessarily lead to funding nor did it help women overcome domination structures to further participate in public arenas. On the contrary, civil society organizations led by unemployed young women face a high risk of marginalization, which they handle through their capacity to interact and collaborate, even informally, with

state authorities, due to their outreach activities. Informality maintains the organization in a precarious situation, challenging its development.

Youth led development NGOs focused on brokering activities toward international donors experienced a short moment of glory while being mandated as coordinator on behalf of an international organization. This status provided NGO founders with a dominant position in the interaction with local authorities. But it did not help the organization to sustain its institutional inclusion as it became inactive a year later.

Whereas external resources such as international donors' support or political affiliation act as empowering factors to improve youth social and institutional inclusion through civic engagement, internal and social dynamics to advance and publicize a specific agenda related to the social structure of the NGO are necessary to consider an emancipating process that leads to greater autonomy and a full recognition of its intermediary role to take part in public arenas. Otherwise, youth civic engagement through NGOs relates to a form of individuation process. By incorporating an identity-based analysis on volunteer and civic engagement (Dubar 1996, Kaufmann 2004), we can say that this latter provides the individual with a collective framework to substantiate its identity. Engagement of young men and women in civil society organizations that they founded can be seen as an attempt to reduce the dependence of the individual on different groups, by opening the choice toward a greater number of opportunities, by granting "an undeniable degree of freedom to the individual who can and must act on its own, under its own responsibility, to decide for himself" (Vermeersch 2004:689). This individuation is therefore a way "to stand out of others, to stand on one's own feet and to seek fulfilment of a personal striving in one's own qualities, skills, possessions or achievements" (Elias 2001:141).

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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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