



POWER2YOUTH



Varieties of Youth Civic and Political Engagement in the South East Mediterranean: A Comparative Analysis

Nadine Sika,
American University in Cairo (AUC)



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1. Structural Context	5
1.1 Islamist Youth and Exclusion	
1.2 The Political Context	
1.3 The Gender Context	
2. 2. Types of Youth Participation and Activism	12
2.1 Being Young Activists in Authoritarian Regimes	
2.2 Main Interests of Organized Youth	
2.3 Unemployment, Education and Migration	
3. Youth and Social Change	19
Conclusion	22
References	24

Varieties of Youth Civic and Political Engagement in the South East Mediterranean: A Comparative Analysis

Nadine Sika¹

Abstract

This paper comparatively analyses the research carried out in six South-East Mediterranean countries (Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territories [OPT], Lebanon and Egypt) on the transformative potential of youth civic and political engagement. The report is divided into three main sections; the first is devoted to understanding the structural factors that favour and/or constrain youth participation in their polities and in their respective organizations. Here the analysis is based on understanding how gender, class, "race"/ethnicity and urban/rural differences impact participation. The second section is concerned with analysing the different types of youth activism and forms of youth mobilization. The third part analyses the transformative role of organized youth, in different areas, such as their role in influencing public policies on employment and migration.

Keywords: Youth | NGOs | Authoritarianism | South-East Mediterranean | Turkey | Tunisia | Morocco | Palestine | Lebanon | Egypt

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the Power2Youth project, the meso-level analysis is based on identifying and understanding the role of organized young people belonging to political parties, networks, trade unions, charities, social movements and youth initiatives in advancing social, economic and political change in the South Eastern Mediterranean countries (SEM). In seeking to understand the extent to which young people in the SEM are able to influence their respective polities through conventional and unconventional means from below, this report analyses three major questions:

1. What are the factors that favour or constrain youth participation in their polities in general and in the organizations to which they belong in particular?
2. What are the different types of youth civic and political engagement, youth activism and forms of youth mobilization?
3. What is the transformative role of organized youth in various socio-political and economic areas within their respective polities?

According to past research, young women and men have been largely excluded from mainstream social, economic and political organizations in the SEM countries, leading to their marginalization and exclusion from the labour market and from civic and political participation (World Bank 2010). The authoritarian structure, in conjunction with its associated nepotism and crony capitalist system, has led to further social, economic and political alienation and exclusion of young women and men in the region. Youth in the SEM have also been largely excluded from the mainstream trade unions, teachers' unions and business associations (El-

¹ Nadine Sika is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the American University in Cairo (AUC).

Mahdi 2010). In some SEM countries, political parties have been venues where youth are a rare occurrence. For instance, in the case of pre-2011 Egypt, only two of the then functioning 26 political parties had youth divisions, namely the ruling National Democratic Party and the Democratic Front Party (Sika 2012). In Turkey, young people below the age of 30 do not have any leadership roles in any of the mainstream political parties (Uysal and Topak 2013, Akyüz et al. 2016).

Only young women and men who accepted the authoritarian system were included in these small venues of formal participation in public life, whereas the rest were to some extent marginalized (Jamal 2007, Gengler et al. 2013), or resorted to informal means of collective action, which helped bring about protest movements, challenging the incumbent rulers either directly as in the case of Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, or indirectly as in the case of Morocco in 2011, Turkey in 2013 and Lebanon in 2015 (Shehata 2012, Sika 2012, Vairel 2013, Beinini and Vairel 2013). Recent developments in the region have shown that youth can have a major impact on the political, economic, social and cultural spheres through conventional means like being part of mainstream civil society organizations, or through unconventional means, especially through activism, protests and youth initiatives. Since the spark of the Arab uprisings in 2010/11, young people have been adept at developing new youth initiatives, like Love in the Times of Apartheid in the OPT, the Parallel Youth Government (*Le gouvernement parallèle des jeunes*) in Morocco, the You Stink movement in Lebanon, and the Kassbeh 1 and Kassbeh 2 in Tunisia (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016, Birzeit University 2016, Harb 2016c).

However, even though these unconventional methods are important in raising the issue of youth participation and exclusion, one should not only perceive youth participation and activism from a progressive perspective. In fact, youth activism might also lead to a further institutionalization of authoritarianism (Jamal 2007, Gengler et al. 2013). For instance, the majority of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Egypt have been co-opted within the authoritarian structure to advance socio-economic development, without questioning the legitimacy of the authoritarian system under Mubarak (Abdel Rahman 2002). In Lebanon for instance, civil society organizations have been important in institutionalizing the sectarian political system, through re-enforcing the power of the political elite within each sect (Harb 2016c). In Turkey and Egypt, young people belonging to the AKP in the first and to the Mustaqbal Watan Party in the second are examples of young people who work for the institutionalization of the status quo (Akyüz et al. 2016, Sika 2016).

Field research for this report was based on 30 semi-structured interviews and five focus groups with organized young people aged 18-30² in six SEM countries (Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territories [OPT], Lebanon and Egypt) from April to October 2015. In Tunisia focus groups were held in five urban cities (Tunis, Tataouine, Medenine, Sousse, Greater Tunis). In Morocco, they were held in four cities (Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier and Marrakech). In the rest of the SEM countries, focus groups were held in only one major city: Istanbul, Cairo, Ramallah and Beirut. Participants in these focus groups did not necessarily reside in these major cities; some were either migrants from other areas, or had been invited by the research teams specifically to attend the focus groups.

² An exception was in Morocco, with one 40-year-old participant.

Young participants in these interviews and in the focus groups were members from development NGOs, human rights NGOs, protest movements, Islamist movements, political parties and student unions, as well as business entrepreneurs and young people who have established various campaigns and initiatives in the social, economic and political fields.

The report is divided into three main sections; the first is devoted to understanding the structural factors that favour and/or constrain youth participation in their polities and in their respective organizations. Here the analysis is based on understanding how gender, class, "race"/ethnicity and urban/rural differences impact participation. The second section is concerned with analysing the different types of youth activism and forms of youth mobilization. The third part analyses the transformative role of organized youth, in different areas, such as their role in influencing public policies on employment and migration.

1. STRUCTURAL CONTEXT³

Clientelism identifies relationships between different economic, social and political actors in the SEM. It is also largely associated with youth exclusion from the economic, social and political spheres. It is associated with the particularistic use of public resources and with the electoral arena in the political realm. It entails that votes and support for a political contestant are exchanged for jobs or other benefits. This can become a useful strategy for winning elections and for building political support, through selectively releasing public funds for supporters. It is therefore a strategy of partial political mobilization that differs from more universal patterns, such as programmatic appeals or mobilization motivated by a certain political party's achievements (Roniger 2004). In the SEM context, formal rules are not applied arbitrarily. Rather, they are applied in a way that ensures and promotes the interests of the already existing social alliances, or of the political and private economic elites. According to Oliver Schlumberger (2008:634), these are precisely the social groups that organize and develop the legal and institutional frameworks of Arab countries. Moreover, the economic system in SEM countries is characterized by informality, the absence of generally applicable rule of law and strong political control over the economy through informal modes of interaction between the regimes and the business elites. A symbiotic relationship develops between political rulers and socially dominant businessmen through networks of patronage. In this system, business elites develop their own clientele networks by embedding the system of informality and weakening the rule of law (Schlumberger 2008, Luciani 2007). These practices precipitate an infringement on the economic and political inclusion of the middle class who do not have access to this cycle of informalities. As Robert Springborg (2011) asserts, these countries developed a crony capitalist system that was unable, and in which political decision-makers were unwilling, to include the quickly eroding middle class and the high number of socially and economically excluded youth.

The conceptual point of departure here is that political participation may occur not only as a form of contentious politics toward authoritarian regimes, it may equally well include collective action within the confines, and even in support, of those very regimes (Albrecht 2008). In early twentieth-century Europe, youth were also linked and affiliated with

³ The first part of this section is based on Sika and Albrecht (2015:8-9, 10-11).

conservative organizations. Youth who belonged to different organizational structures like churches, political parties or school unions were also closely linked to the dominant political forces in their respective societies. These youth had an important impact on persistent social and political problems associated with nationalism and imperialism within their respective countries (Sukarieh and Tannock 2014). In the SEM young people who are part of the main established NGOs are more welcomed in the political sphere and are a part of the minority "included" youth. The problem with such youth, however, is that they form a backbone of the authoritarian structures in society, through becoming tied to the state. For them, being tied to the state with its corruption and authoritarian structure would advance their own social, economic and political gains (Jamal 2007, Gengler et al. 2013). For example, Gengler et al. (2013) found that youth in Qatar who are part of civil society organizations and have high social capital, are directly linked to the Qatari ruling elite. On the other hand, youth who belong to the opposition do not participate in any form of open protest, either civically or politically. They only voice their opinions via social networking. It is therefore no surprise that Arab governments, especially those in the middle and lower ranked economies, like Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon, have

consistently promoted civil society organizations that promote social services to fill the gaps the government is not able to fill in terms of education, health care, and services. On the other hand, civil society organizations that promote human rights or entertain any political discourse have remained rather weak [...] because they face severe government interventions and grave hostility (Sika 2013:54).

SEM regimes have been intervening in trade and labour unions to increase government domination in society. Funding sources for NGOs are highly restricted and must be first approved by their governments. Ministries of the interior have the right to investigate civil society organizations' staff; and in Gaza, civil society organizations have to submit the personal biographies of their founding members to the Ministry of the Interior (Hawthorne 2004).

Field research in the six SEM countries proves that this authoritarian system did not change in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. On the contrary, the structural barriers to youth inclusion remain the same. The regimes' strategy to further a neoliberal economic system through developing NGOs which could fill the gap of government non-intervention in the market, led to the establishment of many NGOs concerned with entrepreneurship and small business enterprise start-ups, in addition to the already existing developmental NGOs present in these countries since 1990s. However, these NGOs and initiatives are examples of the neo-authoritarian adjustments that undermine the welfare state vis-à-vis balances of power, and that contribute to fragmented and polycentric policies (Guazzone and Pioppi 2009, cited in Catusse and Destremau 2016:12).

One of the regime's strategies in Turkey, for instance, was to reinforce the hegemony of a single party system through the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which directly funds youth initiatives and organizations that are close to the regime, while neglecting and obstructing the functioning of other organizations which are not in favour of the ruling AKP (Nemutlu and Kurtaran 2008, Akyüz et al. 2016). In Lebanon, the regime reinforces the sectarian system through the encouragement and development of NGOs affiliated to each

sect. According to Harb (2016c:6-7),

The main *sectarian groups* that constitute the state (or the political system) are in agreement that youth matters are better taken care of within their own structures: their political parties, their foundations and their NGOs. Thus, all the major sectarian political groups in Lebanon have their own “youth wings,” which are organizations targeting youth, socializing them through sports, leisure and cultural events, and ultimately mobilizing them into their partisan structure. Some parties have more elaborate and professionalized youth wings than others, such as Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces.

In the OPT the problems associated with NGOs are two-fold. There has been an influx of NGOs since the Oslo accords in 1993; however, these organizations are present in response to foreign funding alone. According to young Palestinian interviewees, NGOs work on a project-to-project basis, which is donor-driven and not organic. Accordingly youth working in these organizations, rather than initiating various topics of their own interest, rely on what their funders require them to do. For example, according to one interviewee, “Many of the newer organizations focus on youth just because it allows them access to funding, while there is no real interest in the welfare, development or needs of young people” (Birzeit University 2016:14). In Egypt, the Sisi regime encourages young people to develop start-up business initiatives. It also encourages young people to participate in various youth sports clubs. Yet, only young people who are connected to civil servants or young people who belong to the mainstream political elite have access to these clubs. Young people who belong to human rights organizations or to the political opposition are obstructed from being included in the public sphere (Sika 2016:12). In Morocco, since the ascendance of King Mohammed VI to power, there has been an increasing tendency to build issue-oriented organizations and political parties. However, these NGOs and parties are under tight control from the monarchy. The regime promotes and sponsors pro-regime organizations, while young people from the opposition are repressed. Nevertheless, according to Maghraoui (2008), since the regime enacted certain reforms, especially the Decree on the Right to Establish Associations which came into effect in 2008, young people have been more likely to participate in independent human rights and cultural organizations.

The field research also shows that the educational system adds to the structural impediments to young people’s inclusion in the region. In Morocco for instance, there is a wide discrepancy in the educational attainment of young people in urban areas compared to those in rural areas: “We tend to always forget about the child of the mountain, he doesn’t have the means to study, he doesn’t have a kindergarten, there are no roads, no hospitals, the child is missing basic things; he doesn’t know what exists beyond the mountain” (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:18). Young people who are from affluent backgrounds and have the monetary capability of entering the private education system have more chances of employment compared to those whose parents do not have the economic means. In Turkey, the same problem of rural versus urban discrepancy is reported, in addition to the problem of unemployment which is mainly associated with the lack of good tertiary education (Akyüz et al. 2016). In Tunisia, young people who live in rural areas and in the south are socially and economically excluded compared to the rest of the population. According to young people from rural and coastal areas in Tunisia, there is no interest on the part of the authorities to develop the infrastructure

and the education systems in this part of the country. This leads to two major problems, the first concerning employment opportunities. Young people in these areas are more likely to be unemployed compared to other regions in Tunisia. Young people who live in Tatouine, for instance, argue that they do not have the opportunities of business training sessions like their counterparts in big cities. In addition, the lack of infrastructure leads to the non-engagement of young people from these areas in NGOs or in civil society (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017).

Apart from education and underemployment, unemployment problems affects young people, especially rural and young women. As Sika (2016:10) reports,

There is a trend of exclusion amongst young people in Egypt based on their socio-economic background. Exclusion in this sense is based on two main factors: (1) economic and social well-being - the more wealthy and the more educated a young person is, the less likely he or she is to be excluded; and (2) area of residence, with young people living in urban areas and large cities being the least likely to be excluded.

1.1 Islamist Youth and Exclusion

Young people belonging to Islamist movements have shown different types of exclusion, depending on each regime's historical relations with the Islamist movements. For instance in Tunisia, where secularism was promoted under Bourguiba and Islamists were consistently cracked down upon during Ben Ali's presidency, it was reported that young people from the Salafi movement do not want to be in contact with other young people, and they are not interested in participating in associational activities, if their rules are not accepted. These rules include the separation of young boys and young girls in activities, or praying at the correct prayer time. This causes a schism between young non-religious and young fundamentalist people. According to young people belonging to non-religious organizations, "religious extremists can never be members of non-religious associations" (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017). Moreover, these young people are also excluded and discriminated against in the public sector. They are not allowed to have beards and they have to show signs of "modernism" (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017).

On the other hand, in Morocco, whose monarchical institution has gained legitimacy through its Islamic heritage and has tolerated political Islam, Islamist movements mobilize and integrate young people into their ranks. The Sufi and the Salafi movements are important in this regard. Sufi movements in particular have been encouraged by the regime, as they promote religious tolerance. Recently Sufism has been attracting more young people, as they gather to pray, and debate social and political issues. The Salafi movement has also been tolerated by the regime for the past decade. The monarch granted political pardon to Salafi leaders who were believed to be linked to the 2003 Casablanca bombings. This developed a new pact between the monarch and the Salafists. They accept and support his legitimacy while he accepts their integration in moderate Islamist parties, like the Renaissance and Virtue Party (Masbah 2013, Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:10).

In Turkey young people belonging to the Islamist movement and to the ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) are among the most included in the various social, economic and political spheres. In Egypt on the other hand, research was distorted due to the crackdown

on Islamists, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood after the 2013 Rab'a affair and the ensuing violence against Islamists. Young people who are affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood and/or Salafi movement were reluctant to participate in the semi-structured interviews, and only one former Brotherhood member participated in one focus group. This shows a direct exclusionary policy by the regime against these young people.⁴

1.2 The Political Context

Politically, the structure of authoritarianism is constraining to political participation of young people in general, and to young people who are in the opposition in particular. The political situation in Lebanon, for instance, reinforces the sectarian divide through allowing young people's inclusion in the various political parties and youth wings of the different sectarian structures. There are ten main sectarian political parties, which have their own youth institutions. These work on and try to engage young people at very young ages to their ranks, to maintain the sectarian system intact. By contrast, initiatives with non-sectarian agendas or with the hope of crossing the boundaries of the sectarian divide are marginalized. In Morocco, new political parties were established in the 1990s, due to internal rifts within existing political parties - for instance, the Front of Democratic Forces whose leading figures left the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS). Others emerged as a result of the integration of different parties into one entity, like the Party of Justice and Development (PJD, 1998). Since the ascendance of King Mohamed VI to power in 1999, there has been a tendency to develop small, issue-specific political parties, concerned with the environment or Islam. This system is based on a multiparty structure in which the monarch retains all political control and serves as an arbiter of political feuds between these parties (Zerhouni and Akasbi 2016:7). To further complicate matters, a whole range of trade unions⁵ have "contributed to additional segmentation of the political scene and subsequently to the reinforcement of the centrality of the monarchy" (Zerhouni and Akasbi 2016:8). In Tunisia, since the ousting of Ben Ali a plethora of new political parties have emerged. Nevertheless, young Tunisians argue that they do not trust leadership in political parties or in old social movements, since this old leadership is not interested in defending their interests. The political elite do not provide young people with employment opportunities or social and economic opportunities. They are excluded from the decision-making process, both at the organizational level and at the state level. For instance during the 2014 parliamentary elections, young members of the majority Nidaa Tounes political party were excluded from the preparatory stage of the elections, and were not present on the party's electoral lists (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017). Similarly in Turkey, young members of various political parties, like the Republican People's Party (CHP) for instance, argue that they are not fairly represented within their own party. Even in the youth branches of various political parties young people are not represented, being limited to rote functions such as poster campaigns prior to elections (Akyüz et al. 2016).

⁴ Although there are some young people who belong to various religious minorities, like the Copts, Shia and Baha'is in Egypt, it was beyond the scope of this study to analyse these young peoples' grievances. Even though there were Coptic young people in focus groups and semi-structured interviews, they were mainly inclined to discuss exclusion/inclusion in general, and did not venture into points specific to religious issues.

⁵ The most important union organizations in Morocco are the Union of Moroccan Workers (Union marocaine du travail, UMT), the Democratic Confederation of Workers (Confédération démocratique du travail, CDT), the General Union of Moroccan Workers (Union générale des travailleurs du Maroc, UGTM), and the Democratic Federation of Workers (Fédération démocratique du travail, FDT).

The fieldwork also confirmed that since the Arab uprisings, many freedoms that had been gained during the previous decade have been curbed by the SEM regimes. In Turkey for instance, the Gezi Park protests were a manifestation of the conflicts between the ruling AKP political elite and a newly emerging pro-democracy movement (Tuğal 2013). In response, the AKP “rejected any criticism from a democratic perspective via a discourse of ‘there is no alternative’” (Gençoğlu Onbasi 2016:275). In addition, many young activists were arbitrarily detained and arrested, while the regime continues to crack down on political dissent and media freedoms are being curtailed.⁶ Since the 2013 coup in Egypt, a large number of young activists have been arbitrarily detained and imprisoned, and the media has been constrained through military and security officials’ interventions.⁷ In Morocco, the regime utilizes various forms of political oppression against young dissidents. Young activists belonging to the February 20 movement have often been detained and imprisoned, however, based on non-political charges. For instance, “An activist may be caught using drugs [...], or cheating on his/her spouse, or charged with supporting terrorism” (Meknassi 2015). During their focus groups discussions, young people in Egypt and Morocco have argued that there is no due process of law, while the law is selectively applied against the opposition.

1.3 The Gender Context

Personal status laws are discriminatory against young women. For instance in Lebanon, women are not able to pass their nationality to their foreign spouse or to their children. In Egypt family law also discriminates against young women, while in Palestine, customary law as well as civil and religious laws “intersect in deciding the access to rights in Palestinian society. Family law is based on religious laws that vary between Christian, Muslim and Jewish precepts. Civil marriage is not legal [...] Palestinian law does not allow for inheritance and/or custody of children across religions” (Catusse and Destremau 2016:20).

Despite the 2014 Constitution’s affirmation of the equality of the sexes, however, this has not translated into practical improvements for women in Egypt (Freedom House 2016). Various articles in the Egyptian penal code concerning rape, harassment and sexual assault (including Articles 267, 268, 269 and 289) have failed to address the current wave of sexual assault and rape in Egypt. Women and girls in Egypt have been consistently exposed to a range of physical and sexual violent crimes, by both non-state and state actors, in the public and private spheres (Nazra for Feminist Studies 2014). Rates of violence, harassment and rape perpetrated against women have increased since the beginning of the uprising in January 2011 as a result of the surge in men and women entering the public sphere (Nazra for Feminist Studies 2014). Violations against women enacted by the authorities have also increased since the beginning of the 2011 uprising. These include general violence against women carried out by security forces, and virginity tests performed on women by the Military Council in 2011 (Omar 2014).

Indeed, many extant laws still preserve inequalities and discrimination between men and women vis-à-vis disputes over personal status, penal provisions, criminal protection and testifying in court (Nazra for Feminist Studies 2014). In Lebanon, the family and religious

⁶ See for instance “Pro-AKP Media Figures Continue to Target Academics for Peace”, in Jadaliyya, 27 April 2016, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/24339>. See also Akyol (2015).

⁷ See for instance Brown and Bentivoglio (2014).

authorities influence young people through religious norms. "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" (Harb 2016a:17). For instance, personal status laws discriminate against women and minors (Mikdashi 2013:351) and, according to the citizenship law, women cannot pass their nationality to either their foreign spouse or their children. Women face significant discrimination in divorce and retaining child custody (Harb 2016c:10). In the OPT, where personal status laws are dependent on Islamic sharia, "women are not entitled to inherit to the same proportion as men, and in Palestinian society they are often denied even the smaller inheritance that is their right according to Sharia law" (Birzeit University 2016:5). Tunisia is the only country in the region with progressive women's rights laws, especially through its Family Code law of 1956. In 2014, Tunisia withdrew its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, thereby increasing women's rights (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017). Nevertheless social inequalities do persist; for instance, the unemployment rate amongst young women is almost double that of young men, 22.5 percent compared to 12.4 percent in 2015 (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017). In addition, according to Article 227 of the Penal Code, a young man is allowed to marry his rape victim, in order to escape imprisonment (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017).

Not only do young women feel constrained due to their legal status, some new laws that have been passed in favour of young women are not implemented. For instance in Egypt, a young activist woman argues that the due process of law is not applied when it concerns harassment against women. There is an anti-harassment law, however the police do not implement it. In addition, when young activist women call for the development of women's rights, they are criticized on the basis of "Islam," and feminism becomes another face of "anti-religion." This hinders the development of more rights for women (Sika 2016:13).

Moreover, family and social restrictions abound against young women. For instance, in the OPT young women have argued that before deciding whether to participate politically or not, they first think of their families and how they would react. A major concern is whether their families would agree to their participation (Birzeit University 2016:7). In Morocco young women participants in various focus groups argued that the public space is more open to young men than it is for young women (Zerhouni and Akasbi 2016:17). In Turkey, young activists argue that the current AKP government discriminates against women and uses the patriarchal social background to reinforce discrimination against them. According to a young woman belonging to CHP,

I want the state to actively develop policies that protect, watch over women and enable them to be active participants of production in the country. [...] We believe that they should see that the courts are only paving the way for new murderers when they reduce the punishment of murderers who rape women and say, she had a piercing, she was wearing jeans, she looked at me and all (Akyüz et al. 2016:15).

As argued earlier, young people in authoritarian regimes are not necessarily democratic, or do not necessarily promote egalitarian ideals, but may on the other hand reinforce traditional ideas. This can also be traced during the fieldwork, where some organized young men were in favour of discriminatory laws against women, and believed in constraining young women to

keep traditional social norms within their respective countries (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:17).

2. TYPES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM

Since the 1990s, the number and scope of non-governmental organizations has increased, in addition to the development of a large number of tolerated opposition parties. Nevertheless, with the “NGOization” of the public sphere, and the hegemony of various governments over these organizations through enacting constraining laws, many young people have resorted to other means of participation. Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and Egypt manifest this move from the organized formal sphere of NGOs and political parties toward the establishment of new initiatives - socially, economically and politically created by young people.

In Lebanon after the end of the civil war, young people became more active in “interest-based” NGOs. These are NGOs that advocate environmental protection, help people with disabilities or mobilize for democratic elections (Karam 2006, McBride and Kingston 2014, Harb 2015). After the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005, another wave of NGOs emerged, largely based in Beirut. These were mainly concerned with humanitarian, reconstruction and peaceful coexistence matters (Clark and Zahar 2015, Harb 2016c). Nevertheless, these NGOs were soon to disappear. In the view of Salloukh et al. (2015:53), “[s]ectarian elite strategies [...] manipulate, co-opt, and neutralize Lebanon’s civil society sector.” They add that aid strategy promotes and accommodates the existing sectarian system rather than seeking to structurally transform it, which demobilizes the associational sector, that is used mainly as a springboard to public office or for networking.

Since 2009 with the political impasse of parliament and the ensuing stalemate in electing a president, NGOs in Lebanon have become more polarized around sectarian issues. However, with the malfunction of the government, and its inability to resolve daily life problems like cleaning the streets of garbage, young people have resorted to other means of participation, like creating a new protest movement dubbed #YouStink (*Tol3et Re7etkom*). This movement comprises many small coalitions of independent activists and NGOs. According to Harb (2015), new forms of youth mobilization strategies have been developing, especially concerning personal rights and rights to claiming the street and the city. These are loose coalitions of young people who gather around various issue areas like LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual) rights, domestic violence and women’s rights.

In Morocco, associational life has been flourishing since the 1990s. The 2002 Decree on the Right to Establish Associations encouraged the development of NGOs and civil society organizations. The number of NGOs grew from 40,000 in the 1990s to 116,836 in 2014. In addition, a number of “pro-royalist” political parties have been established. Nevertheless, the increase in the numbers of formal organizations did not translate into youth participation therein. On the contrary, young people’s participation in NGOs, political parties and trade unions has been decreasing since the 1990s. With the advent of the new Millennium, young people have shown a preference for participating through civic and political activism in social movements and social media. Young people are more interested in engaging in politics through marches, organizing sit-ins and posting their ideas in blogs. Accordingly, informal participation and participation through unconventional matters are more appealing to these

young people. For many young people, political parties are the institutions they are least interested in participating in. Fieldwork demonstrated that young people perceive political parties to be weak, to be lacking internal democracy. In addition, they believe that these associations do not have the capability to communicate with youth. Even young people who are members of political parties have argued that young people are discriminated against and their voices are not heard within these parties (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016).

In a similar manner, numbers of NGOs and opposition political parties have been on the rise in Tunisia since the 1990s. For instance the number of NGOs increased from almost 2,000 in 1987 to 10,000 in 2010 (Hibou 2006, Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017). Nevertheless, young people have also resorted to unconventional means of participation, becoming part of initiatives such as *Kasbah 1* and *Kasbah 2*, *Itihad a Mouattaline an al-'amal*, *Youth Can* or *'ana yakidh*. These are essentially youth-driven protest movements, developed in the aftermath of Ben Ali's overthrow. One of the major reasons why young Tunisians do not participate in the conventional associations like NGOs and political parties is their distrust in the ruling elite, the directors of the various NGOs and the older social movements such as *Ennahda*. According to a political activist in *Tatouine*, in the South of Tunisia, "Old experiments were not successful" (Bouzidi and Boubakri 2017).

In Turkey, the influence of the European Union, and in particular the EU Youth Programmes of the 1990s, was essential in the development of associational life, especially organizations concerned with youth (Nemutlu and Kurtaran 2008, Akyüz et al. 2016:6). The number of NGOs and political parties has also been on the rise in Turkey; nevertheless, young people still constitute only a minority of such organizations. For instance, only 22.1 percent of young people are members of civil society organizations and only 9 percent are members of political parties (KONDA 2014, Bilgi University 2015, Akyüz et al. 2016:3). Young people however, as elsewhere in the region, have participated in protest movements, even prior to the Gezi Park protests in 2013. The Gezi protests were a manifestation of the enhanced networking strategies which young people had acquired earlier through their participation in other youth initiatives and groups (Akyüz et al. 2016). Most importantly, young activists have continued to flourish after the Gezi protests through developing new urban solidarity movements, and have developed informal organizations which resist urban projects (Akyüz et al. 2016).

In Egypt, NGOs increased from 7,593 in 1985 to 16,000 in 1999 and 15,154 in 2007 (Kandil 2008:65, 67). As in other countries in the region, however, young people in Egypt have adopted other types of civic and political engagement, mainly through the development of protest movements. For the most part, youth movements arose in Egypt after the establishment of the *Kifaya* movement in 2004. This movement was established by various oppositional figures who brought a number of youth to their ranks. The *Youth for Change* Movement was the first youth movement to emerge out of *Kifaya*. It focused on the socioeconomic problems facing youth such as unemployment and housing problems. After the 2005 parliamentary elections, youth participation in protest movements decreased. However, youth participated in cyberspace mainly through blogs. Of these, two anti-regime blogspots were influential in youth networking: the *Egyptian Blogspot*, and the *Misr Digital blogspot*. When in 2007 workers at *al-Mahalla al-Kobra* took strike action against their work conditions and for an increase in their wages, youth activists picked this up to develop a new movement, the *April 6* movement of 2008. In conducting fieldwork in Egypt, the *Power2Youth* research team found that the

majority of youth-led organizations, especially the ones established after the 2011 uprising, were youth initiatives interested in capacity building and political awareness campaigns (prior to June 2013 events).

In the OPT, like the rest of the SEM countries, NGOs have increased exponentially, especially after the 1993 Oslo agreement. These organizations are partly dependent on Western funding and encourage young people to participate. Nevertheless, the extent to which young people are reached by these programmes or projects is limited. Although the number of NGOs is large, there are more spontaneous youth initiatives, as for examples the community-based rehabilitation youth groups in the villages, Qawarib, a youth-led charity, and Youth against Settlements (Birzeit University 2016:7). Young people have organized themselves since 2002, after the building of the "Apartheid Wall," in weekly protest demonstrations at Bil'in, Nili'n, Nabi Saleh and other villages, whose freedom of movement and right to land were highly threatened by the Wall. This protest movement and other similar ones are backed by cyber movements; in this case, the Stop the Wall campaign is an online initiative. Young people have become increasingly interested in online activism; one such example is The Electronic Intifada which publishes on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a Palestinian perspective, trying to counterbalance the pro-Israeli media (Birzeit University 2016:16).

2.1 Being Young Activists in Authoritarian Regimes

According to past research on authoritarian regimes in the SEM, civil society and political parties have acted as forces for the resilience of authoritarianism, rather than for democratization. Civil society and opposition political parties are inherently weak and have been persistently manipulated by the state. The autocratic regimes in the SEM were adept at manipulating the electoral processes through building effective patron-client relationships and by liberalizing their autocratic rule to include and co-opt opposition (Lust-Okar 2004, Bellin 2004, Posusney 2004, Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004, Schlumberger 2008). Moreover, opposition political parties, non-governmental organizations and trade unions have been delegitimized by the state corporatist practices of longstanding autocratic regimes, which means that these "representative" institutions are barely credible in their actions on behalf of their members and, hence, deprived of voluntary mass followings - even after they have been liberated from direct dependence upon the state (Ottaway and Hamzawy 2009, Schmitter and Sika 2016:4). Young people with various socio-political and economic aspirations for change have tried to influence the public sphere through other unconventional means, as shown in the previous section.

Fieldwork shows a tendency of increased youth mobilization and participation prior to the 2011 uprisings, however, in the aftermath of the uprisings there has been a surge of unconventional means of participation. Although unconventional participation may start as a reaction to socio-economic events, like the Gezi protests in Turkey which were instigated in opposition to the government's building of a shopping mall, they become political, as they call for certain rights, like the rights to urban space, or they move into opposition to the regime's policies in general. For instance, the Gezi movement was soon to become a symbol of opposition against the AKP, rather than merely a movement for the protection of public urban space. According to one young activist, "Gezi was practically about a tree, but it wasn't about youth; it was about freedom, not about lack of education or lack of something economic" (Akyüz et al.

2016:11).

In Lebanon, for instance, young people who mobilized for various campaigns and demonstrations were mostly interested in the “downfall of the sectarian regime” (Harb 2016c:18), which is the major hindrance to socio-political inclusion of young secular activists. Another campaign, “Take Back Parliament,” was developed in 2012 by a group of young activists who sought to mobilize people into an electoral list that abides by a political programme calling for a secular state, a state based on socio-economic justice and democracy, instead of the sectarian state that is embedded in the Lebanese system (Harb 2016b and 2016c). In similar vein, the #YouStink movement called for “reliable basic services, access to public space, end of the privatized coastline, as well as holding accountable all the political elite across March 8 and March 14 camps” (Harb 2016c:19). These demands and protest movements were developed by youth-led coalitions of independent activists and groups. These were later joined by the traditional labour unions and NGOs. Their strategies for mobilization are also unconventional, through informal mobilization and networking strategies on social networking sites, but also through meetings in various cafes and shared public spaces such as parks and the street. Another unconventional manner for their mobilizational strategies was based on crowd-funding techniques, and young women are highly present in these initiatives and coalitions.

In Morocco, young people have participated through a variety of means: developing new blogs and Facebook groups, tackling issues of individual liberties such as the Alternative Movement for Individual Freedoms (MALI) and the “Moroccans Converse with the King” which later developed into “Freedom and Democracy Now” (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:12). Young people diversify their modes of participation, and many who were affiliated to other organizations joined forces with the February 20 Movement in 2011 (M20). This movement bridges a cross-ideological divide, with Islamist youth joining liberals and leftists in a common cause. Many of these members continue to be active in the M20 movement, even though it has been weakened by various authoritarian upgrading measures by the regime. Young people take part in cultural activities, to influence and mobilize others into the political stream.

At the current juncture, we are taking initiatives such as “*falsafa fi zanka*” (philosophy in the street), “*café citoyen*” (citizen coffee shop); we are in the process of creating a cultural and intellectual association because we are more and more aware that the main problem in Morocco is that of awareness [...] there is a problem when it comes to awareness, culture and thought; we want to create this association to make our voice heard and to influence mentalities and the youth (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:24).

The majority of organized young people in the OPT are part of NGOs, where they receive funding from international donors, and are hence part of a movement for “evolutionary change.” Nevertheless, spontaneous movements against Israel erupt, in reaction to specific events. For instance in Hebron, resident young Palestinians developed a neighbourhood movement entitled Youth against Settlements, an initiative seeking to stop the Israeli settlement expansion policies (Birzeit University 2016:16). October 2015 saw a new surge of “revolutionary” zeal among young people who are still in school, and were born after the 1993 Oslo Accords. These youth are starting to call for the end of the occupation. Young people in this wave are independent; they have some tendencies to support one or the other political factions, however they are generally against political parties and are afraid that political

parties would “ride the[ir] wave” (Birzeit University 2016:16). However, an obstacle to young people’s activism and influence on the public sphere in the OPT is the authoritarian structure of the Palestinian Authority itself. One young activist argues that the previous prime minister Salam Fayyad worried that the Arab Spring would travel to the OPT. This fear led to increased suppression of youth belonging to the political opposition, even more so than during the 1990s (Birzeit University 2016:21).

In Turkey young activists who are members of LGBT movements, or involved in Kurdish protest movements, confront repressive measures on the part of the authorities. However, to confront coercion and repression, young activists believe that there is a need to sustain a culture of activism and street demonstrations, to keep their rights of political participation alive. The main problem young people perceive is that they have less space and opportunities for political participation, compared to social and cultural participation (Akyüz et al. 2016:15).

In Egypt, young activists from various political backgrounds argue that the January 25 uprising was a turning point for civic and political participation. Nevertheless, today they are constrained by increased regime crackdown. By 2012 young people had developed various initiatives like “No to Military Trials,” or Baheya for instance. These young activists mobilized others to their causes, through their presence on the street. For these young people “street work” or “street demonstration” was the only free space they were interested to work in. Four of our 33 interviewees who lived abroad returned to the country during the events of 2011 to build initiatives, to help other young people achieve their potential and empowerment. Nevertheless, with the increased constraints on young people’s civic and political participation, many initiatives are dying out, and many young people are abstaining from civic and political engagement (Sika 2016:19-20).

These unconventional means of participation, and persistence of young people to be present in the public sphere, to hold on to their right to retain public space, show their awareness of the shortcomings of the traditional civil society and political actors. Young people who participate through unconventional means are most critical of the same age cohort who participate in pro-regime organizations. For instance, they argue that many young people want to advance their own political and economic interests, irrespective of the political consequences. For instance, they were very critical about the behaviour of young parliamentarians elected on the pro-government list, which was preserved in a quota; for them these are young people who only participate to retain the authoritarian status quo (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:22). Even more clearly, young people who are members of the ruling political parties - like AKP youth in Turkey, for instance, or the Mustaqbal Watan youth close to the political establishment in Egypt - are not critical of the regimes, on the contrary they support the existing status quo. For instance, in Egypt, during a focus group with various young members of political parties, youth criticized themselves for being apathetic in relation to human rights activists. Although recognizing that political parties should have played a bigger role in supporting civil society during the most recent crackdowns and restrictions, members were concerned with their political presence in the scene, more than with protecting civil society and freedoms.⁸ In Turkey, young members of the AKP refer to excluded young people like the Kurds and young women as beneficiaries of AKP policies, rather than equal political agents for change. Young

⁸ Focus Group 1, 19 April 2015 cited in Sika (2016).

AKP members who are also members of the National Youth Council promote the status quo, contributing to the hegemony of AKP members in the Council and promoting their own agenda over that of the rest of the young people in the Council who belong to other political parties (Akyüz et al. 2016).

2.2 Main Interests of Organized Youth

Analysis of the various country reports reveals certain commonalities and differences between young organized and activist people across the region. There are some country-specific problems and initiatives, yet we can find many commonalities in young people's aspirations. For instance, young people are interested in reducing the unemployment problem sweeping through the region. Nevertheless, the majority of young people in our sample do not believe that they can influence government policies in this regard. Accordingly a plethora of business start-ups and youth initiatives have developed, especially in Egypt and Lebanon. These start-ups and business initiatives also reach out to other young people through providing training sessions to young people with no access to good education or business opportunities.

Although socio-economic problems are a critical factor for young people, fieldwork in the six SEM countries shows that they are also interested in political participation and in opening up the public sphere. There is a large tendency in the whole sample to criticize their regimes for the absence of political freedoms. Young people who belong to political parties, mainly in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey, tend to be very critical of their respective regimes' policies concerning opposition parties and opposition activists. These young people believe in evolutionary change through the political system, however they argue that the current regimes are not receptive to their inclusion. At an organizational level, young people in political parties, and mainly those who are in favour of the authoritarian regimes, criticize the fact that they are marginalized from the decision-making process in their own parties. Some have argued that the regimes use them to show their intent to include young people in their political process. However, young people belonging to these parties tend to believe that they can reform the political system from within.

Another main subject of interest for young organized people is social development and equity. There is a large tendency to try to help out other young people in marginalized and rural areas through various means. Here, young people tend to criticize their governments for their ineffective development policies, and for their corrupt systems, which prefer and actualize development projects in urban areas and in large cities while neglecting rural areas and peripheral cities.⁹

It is obvious that young people in the OPT are more concerned with ending the Israeli occupation and with pulling down the Wall. They are critical of the Palestinian authority and of Hamas, due to their inability to unite against Israel, and they are against the Oslo peace accords, which took place before many of them were born. Accordingly their struggle is more of a national struggle against occupation, compared to other young people whose struggle is against their own rulers. In the same vein, Lebanon is different than the rest of the region, in the fact that its young opposition are mainly against the embedded sectarian system, which

⁹ Focus Group 3, 2 May 2015 cited in Sika (2016).

helps support the current political regime. Young activists do not complain about repression by the state, as much as about the lack of funds available to any independent initiative, which makes it hard for these initiatives to flourish and gain more public support.

While Turkey is the least authoritarian regime in the region, young activists there seem to be most concerned with the closure of the public sphere and with the growing use of force against opposition activists. In Morocco and Egypt, young activists are mostly concerned with political freedoms; even young activists who are members of development NGOs are concerned with the lack of political and social freedom. All countries except Egypt have a growing LGBT movement, which is a move beyond the conservative taboo in the region. By contrast, in Egypt none of the interviewees mentioned this issue.

2.3 Unemployment, Education and Migration

The six SEM countries have tackled youth unemployment problems in a similar manner from the 1990s to the mid-2000s. According to Catusse and Destremau (2016), SEM employment policies toward youth are mainly aimed at educated young people and are instrumental for pacifying young people who might otherwise express political opposition and dissent. Nevertheless, unemployment rates among educated youth in all six countries are very high, which reflects a mismatch between the labour market and the education system (Musleh 2016, Paciello et al. 2016a and 2016b, Sika 2016, Harb 2016c). In Morocco and Tunisia, the regimes provided young people with training and internship programmes in private companies. They also gave young people incentives to develop private enterprises through methods such as micro credit schemes. These incentives, “however, failed to provide youth with long-term and good quality jobs, as they were instrumental in promoting the neo-liberal model of reform” (Paciello et al. 2016a:10). A young participant in Morocco’s focus group reported that he did an internship in a private company, however his “working conditions did not correspond to what the law stipulates. The labour code speaks about a provisional contract for a maximum of two years but companies do not respect it” (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:19). In similar vein, young people in Egypt argued that the private sector does not help alleviate employment problems, since it employs highly educated young people but provides them with low salaries, with no other options or rights (Sika 2016:22). In addition, Moroccan participants argued that there is an unequal access to state services and employment opportunities. Clientalism infests the political system, and does not encourage upward social mobility (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016:20). Young people in Egypt have also tackled the issue of clientalism or “wasta.” One young woman argued that she was unable to find a decent job, because she was not connected to powerful people. She sees herself as underemployed. Other Egyptian focus group participants argued that the main reason for the unemployment problem is “wasta”: “If you are not connected then the job market is closed to you. Even in the public sector, the state only allows certain people who are connected to access their jobs” (Sika 2016:22).

Youth unemployment was seen as a major hurdle to development and youth inclusion in all six countries. In the OPT for instance, young people in a local youth NGO argue that “our projects aim at youth participation, but the market wants something else” (Birzeit University 2016:21). Young people in Egypt, Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia extensively discussed the problem of unemployment, linking it to the ailing education system in their respective countries. Young people in Tunisia and Turkey, for instance, argued that youth in peripheral rural and

coastal areas are at a disadvantage in the employment fields, primarily because they do not receive proper education and training. In Turkey, although youth unemployment is a major public policy concern as well as a youth concern, there are rarely any youth initiatives or organizations that conduct activities to tackle these problems (Akyüz et al. 2016).

Young people do not feel that they influence public policies concerning employment and education. Nevertheless, they have developed start-up businesses and NGOs, especially in Egypt, which are concerned with training young people for the employment market, to assist their respective regimes in the creation of employment opportunities for youth. Education and unemployment problems were directly linked to migration, with a large number of participants in the fieldwork believing that migration is an option to find good employment opportunities. Migration was perceived to be a viable option by the majority of young people in the fieldwork, especially in Egypt, Palestine, Morocco and Lebanon. Migration policies of these regimes are mainly economic, to eliminate youth unemployment problems in these countries, and to also receive sufficient remittances from the migrants (Catusse and Destremau 2016). One young Palestinian argues that "one third of young people are thinking of emigration as an alternative to living in a society where they cannot participate." Another adds, "if we could we would all move!" (Birzeit University 2016:21). Similarly in Egypt, a young man argued that "I want to migrate like all other young men in Egypt." According to young Egyptians, however, migration to the North is sought not only for employment reasons but also for equality of opportunity, the rule of law and dignity, which they lack in their country (Sika 2016:21).

3. YOUTH AND SOCIAL CHANGE¹⁰

This section is concerned with understanding "the nature of youth as both an ideological symbol and political actor" (Sukarieh and Tannock 2014:81). Beyond the enthusiasm raised by the recent wave of protest, largely perceived to be youth-led, Sukarieh and Tannock (2014) contend that the idea of youth being a subject for change is not new. This age cohort has been the subject of analysis in the West for centuries. However, in-depth analyses on the role of youth and student movements in perpetuating social, economic and political change has only gained ground since the mid-twentieth century, especially with the rising tide of youth activism in the US during the mid-1960s. The role of youth organizations, especially youth movements, in altering state-society relations has been the core of much research in the past decade. Not only have researchers been interested in the role of youth as agents for social change, but policy makers have also been highly concerned with the role of youth as both a "problem" and as "positive agents" for change. However, to understand the importance of youth in their respective polities, and their influence on global society in general, it is important to analyse the context in which these youth live.

This is not just because of the wide range of social and political actors involved in shaping the meaning and salience of youth, but also because of the extended scope of referents the concept of youth implicates. Youth functions invariably as a relational concept, one that is defined and given meaning, through its contrastive relationships with the concepts of both childhood and adulthood (Sukarieh and Tannock 2014:4).

¹⁰ The first paragraph in this section is adopted from Sika and Albrecht (2015:8).

As argued earlier, organized young people in the SEM mobilize and participate under authoritarian structures, nevertheless they do see themselves as forces for social, economic and political change in their respective countries, even if on a small scale. For instance, young people in Turkey argue that they are mostly unable to change the political discourse and public policies of the ruling AKP. Nevertheless, some have developed their own initiatives, like We Will Stop Femicide, whose work was essential in bringing the issue of female murders to the forefront of political debates in Turkey. According to one young woman member of this initiative:

When we started our [advocacy] work, even most of the women's associations were saying "Is there femicide? Only a few." Whereas, at this moment we can say there is femicide and there should be a law against it. The most basic right of women is the right to live, so when we focus on one issue, like sharpening the tip of an arrow, then it becomes more central and result-oriented (Akyüz et al. 2016:20).

This initiative changed the public discourse on the issue of female killings. In the past, female murders were discussed as a social problem, whereas since the campaign this issue has been framed as a "systemic murder of women by men." It has also been framed in relation to the authoritarian patriarchal social structure in Turkey (Akyüz et al. 2016:20).

In the OPT, young people are essential in their activism against the Israeli occupation. Their political influence is not large, and is mainly symbolic, nevertheless, movements like Youth Against Settlements, Love in the Time of Apartheid, and the Stop the Wall campaign are able to bring international recognition and support to their cause. Although these movements are able to develop, they are not able to bypass the main authoritarian structure of the Palestinian Authority. Independent activists belonging to new political parties, like the Birzeit Students Alliance party for instance, are not able to mobilize for participation and for votes in their favour; in university elections they only received one seat in the student council. The greatest change they were able to effect in the West Bank was to elect a student council in Birzeit University consisting of Hamas adherents rather than Fatah (Birzeit University 2016:17, 20).

Fieldwork in Tunisia and Egypt shows that young people believe that their agency for change stems from their ability to mobilize for demonstrations. They believe that their voices are mainly heard when they demonstrate for a certain cause. Otherwise, they are unable to change their polities. For instance, in Tunisia, young people in the focus groups stated that engineering students were only able to change university admissions' policy after they demonstrated and had a sit-in on campus (Boubakri and Bouzidi 2017).¹¹ In Egypt, young people argued that changing the public discourse is possible, even when there are a lot of constraints by the state against them. According to one young activist in a human rights organization,

The regime hates us, but at the same time it needs us for its external legitimacy. Can we change policies? Yes and no, as it is very hard for activists today to be present in the public sphere; however, we can still make some small changes. We were able

¹¹ See for instance, "Engineering Students Strike in Spite of Negotiations", in University World News Africa Edition, No. 146 (20 February 2015), <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150219095815688>.

to get the regime to take out one hundred imprisoned activists, because we had a successful international campaign (Sika 2016:12).

The field research in the six SEM countries points out that the majority of organized young people are more in favour of evolutionary change than revolutionary change. They prefer and accept working within the current political systems for their aspirations of social, economic and political inclusion. They accept the general laws, traditions and cultures of their respective polities, however they want to reform these, without a complete overhaul. The most “revolutionary” demands are made by young Lebanese activists who want to abolish the well-established political sectarian system (Harb 2016b and 2016c).

In Egypt, for instance, young people’s perception of change varies dependent on their social background, gender and on their type of participation. The majority of the civically engaged young people in the sample believe that change should occur from the state, and their perception of change is dependent on structural aspects such as legislation, education and health care. They argue that they as part of non-governmental organizations help in the process of change and development, however, this is not sufficient, and the state needs to do much more to enhance change. Changing the education system and applying the due process of law are essential for the development of Egypt according to the sampled group within this category. However, they believe that the state is not willing to change, and therefore they take the initiatives themselves to make small-scale changes. Young political activists, on the other hand, were mainly interested in political change, basically through being included in the governance process, and through changing legislation concerning political participation. This change however is not only desired on the state level, as they also want to be included in the governing process of political parties themselves, even opposition political parties (Sika 2016).

In Morocco, young people who belong to human rights organizations and to political opposition groups like the February 20 movement are constrained through the regime’s use of force against them. These young people believe that change can be gradual and that young actors have the main responsibility for whether change will occur or not. They are not interested in mere participation and therefore they boycott the formal institutional framework. For them, corruption and despotism are the major problems. The only way for them to advance change is through demonstrations and joining protest movements. In Egypt and Turkey young people are more concerned with opening up the public sphere for political opposition. Young activists, especially those in protest movements like April 6 in Egypt and Gezi protestors in Turkey, are concerned that the regime perceives them to be a threat, while they themselves believe that they have legitimate socio-political and economic demands (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016, Sika 2016, Akyüz et al. 2016).

“In Turkey it is almost impossible to change the mainstream politics.” In a state of hegemony, even the political parties, if they are not part of the government, cannot influence [the] polic[ies]. Civil society has only a little influence on the oppositional parties, but these [parties] are impotent and inefficient. The interviewee from Eğitim-Sen (a trade union of school and university teachers) said that the government “is not receptive to any feedback, not from the youth, not from anyone. Those who want to raise their voices and raise awareness find themselves face-to-face with the police.”

These young people do not feel safe within their polities (Akyüz et al. 2016:21-22).

In Lebanon, activism revolves around issue specific areas such as environmentalism, or rights to the city and to public space. However, as argued earlier there is also a trend of activism against the sectarian status quo. Activists were able to challenge the sectarian system through their development of a municipal campaign entitled Beirut Madinati, which received one third of votes during the 2016 municipal elections (Harb 2016b:8).

CONCLUSION

Structural factors impeding youth participation in the social, economic and political realms are very similar in all six SEM countries. Even though the regimes in Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Turkey, Tunisia and Palestine face different economic and political problems, the ways in which they exclude young people from their respective polities and the ways in which they handle youth activism and participation are rather similar. They all rely heavily on cronyism in the social and economic realms, while employing authoritarian measures like co-optation and coercion against young independent and opposition activists. Gender discrimination is also abundant in these regimes, where the laws heavily discriminate against women, with the exception of Tunisia. However, all regimes including Tunisia support social and cultural customs that exclude young women from various forms of civic and political participation. Nevertheless, young organized people in these regimes are not apathetic observers to the structural impediments to their inclusion. On the contrary, young people themselves in these six regimes have shown similar patterns of civic and political participation. When faced with formalization and an “NGOization” of the public sphere over the past two decades, young people were not slow to develop their own youth-led organizations or to develop informal youth initiatives and protest movements. These contested the legitimacy and the power of their respective regimes through unconventional means. Contestation and demonstrations are important means of youth participation in these regimes, especially in Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia. Political coercion, especially in Turkey and Egypt, has been increasing against young activists, constraining their “street” activities. However, organized young people continue to work through unconventional means such as developing issue-specific campaigns. Civic and political participation of young people in these regimes seems to be in support of the status quo and in support of evolutionary change, rather than revolutionary change. The majority of young participants prefer to work within the existing authoritarian and traditional systems in their polities with an aim to reform these systems, rather than enforcing revolutionary changes like ousting the ruling incumbents or changing the social structures in their respective polities. Organized young people belonging to the main or ruling parties are obviously the most supportive of the current status quo, and the least critical of the ruling regimes. These young people are mostly concerned with organizational factors of inclusion, and complain about their exclusion within their own political parties (except AKP youth).

Organized young people in the six countries voiced concerns around education, employment and migration. They believe that these three issues are interrelated: poor education standards have led to a mismatch between the supply of educated young people and market demand within their polities, resulting in either unemployment or underemployment. Faced with this prospect, it is the preference of young people to migrate to the North. Some young

participants have voiced their interest in migration not only based on employment problems, but also due to the lack of dignity, rule of law and political freedom in their regime.

Young people largely perceive themselves as having minimal impact on transformative change within their polities. They believe that political, cultural and social norms impede their influence for change. They are unable to influence their regimes' economic and political strategies. However, a closer look at this report shows that young people were able to alter the public sphere, through their mere presence and operation in society. Instead of waiting for NGOs to support their rights and their concerns, they developed their own initiatives and movements. Instead of waiting on the regimes to generate employment, they developed their own youth-led employment initiatives and small business start-ups. When the public sphere was closed for demonstrations and street activism, they resorted to online activism and crowd-funding. Even though these young people might not be engaged for the promotion of democracy, they are indeed pushing the limits for more change, inclusion and political participation. These participatory measures "hel[p] us to recognize, indeed giv[e] us hope, that despite authoritarian rule, there are always ways in which people resist, express agency, and instigate change, rather than waiting for a savio[u]r or resorting to violence" (Bayat 2013:29).

REFERENCES

- Abdel Rahman, Maha (2002), "The Politics of 'Uncivil' Society in Egypt", in *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 29, No. 91 (March), p. 21-35
- Akyol, Mustafa (2015), "Turkey's Authoritarian Drift", in *The New York Times*, 10 November, <https://nyti.ms/2k5loCq>
- Akyüz, Ali Alper et al. (2016), "Youth Exclusion and the Transformative Impact of Organized Youth in Turkey", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 21 (October), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6913>
- Albrecht, Holger (2008), "The Nature of Political Participation", in Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, eds., *Political Participation in the Middle East*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, p. 15-32
- Albrecht, Holger and Oliver Schlumberger (2004), "'Waiting for Godot': Regime Change without Democratization in the Middle East", in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (October), p. 371-392, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512104045085>
- Bayat, Asef (2013), *Life as Politics. How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 2nd ed., Stanford, Stanford University Press
- Beinin, Joel and Frédéric Vairel (2013), *Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2nd ed., Stanford, Stanford University Press
- Bellin, Eva (2004), "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East. Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective", in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (January), p. 139-157
- Bilgi University (2015), *Mapping Youth Organizations in Turkey*, Narrative Report, Power2Youth Project, unpublished
- Birzeit University (2016), "Organizational Factors of Youth Exclusion and Inclusion in the Occupied Palestinian Territories", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 22 (December), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/7136>
- Boubakri, Hassan and Asma Bouzidi (2017), "Tunisian Youth, from Obedience to Protest", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, forthcoming
- Brown, Nathan and Katie Bentivoglio (2014), "Egypt's Resurgent Authoritarianism: It's a Way of Life", in *Carnegie Articles*, 9 October, <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/?fa=56877>
- Catusse Myriam and Blandine Destremau (2016), "Governing Youth, Managing Society: A Comparative Overview of Six Country Case Studies (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tunisia and Turkey)", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 14 (June), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6488>

Clark, Janine A. and Marie-Joëlle Zahar (2015), "Critical Junctures and Missed Opportunities: The Case of Lebanon's Cedar Revolution", in *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 1-18

Dunne, Michelle and Katie Bentivoglio (2014), "Egypt's Student Protests: The Beginning or the End of Youth Dissent?", in *Diwan blog*, 22 October, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/?fa=56984>

El-Mahdi, Rabab (2010), "'Um al-Mahalla: Intilak harakat 'umaliyya jadida" [The Workers of Mahala: The Emergence of a New Labor Movement], in Dina Shehata, ed., *'Awdat al-Siyasa. Al-Harakat al-Ihtijajyya fi Misr* [The Return of Politics. New Protest Movements in Egypt], Cairo, Al Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, <http://dar.bibalex.org/webpages/mainpage.jsf?PID=DAF-Job:224689>

Freedom House (2016), "Egypt", in *Freedom in the World 2016*, January 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/egypt>

Gençoğlu Onbaşı, Funda (2016), "Gezi Park Protests in Turkey: From 'Enough Is Enough' to Counter-hegemony?", in *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 272-294

Gengler, Justin et al. (2013), "Civic Life and Democratic Citizenship in Qatar: Findings from the First Qatar World Values Survey", in *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 258-279

Guazzone Laura and Daniela Pioppi, eds. (2009), *The Arab State and Neo-liberal Globalization. The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East*, Reading, Ithaca Press

Gümüş, Pinar and Volkan Yılmaz (2015), "Where Did Gezi Come From?", in Isabel David and Kumru F. Toktamış, eds., *Everywhere Taksim. Sowing the Seeds for a New Turkey at Gezi*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, p.185-197, <http://open.org/search?identifier=611222>

Harb, Mona (2015), *Database on Youth-Relevant NGOs in Lebanon*, Narrative Report, Power2Youth Project, unpublished

Harb, Mona (2016a), "Assessing Youth Exclusion through Discourse and Policy Analysis: The Case of Lebanon", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 8 (February), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6039>

Harb, Mona (2016b), "Cities and Political Change: How Young Activists in Beirut Bred an Urban Social Movement", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 20 (September), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6837>

Harb, Mona (2016c), "Youth Mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 16 (September), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6816>

Hawthorne, Amy (2004), "Middle Eastern Democracy: Is Civil Society the Answer?", in *Carnegie Papers*, No. 44 (March), <http://ceip.org/1FgAkGQ>

Hibou, Béatrice (2006), "Domination & Control in Tunisia: Economic Levers for the Exercise of Authoritarian Power", in *Review of Africa Political Economy*, Vol. 33, No. 108 (June), p. 185-206

Jamal, Amaney A. (2007), *Barriers to Democracy. The Other Side of Social Capital in Palestine and the Arab World*, Princeton, Princeton University Press

Kandil, Amany (2008), "A Mapping of Civil Society in Egypt", in UNDP, *Egypt Human Development Report 2008*, Cairo, UNDP, p. 61-85, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/reports/nationalarab.aspx?cid=5>

Karam, Karam (2006), *Le mouvement civil au Liban. Revendications, protestations et mobilisations associatives dans l'après-guerre*, Paris, Karthala-IREMAM

Konda (2014), *Türkiye'de Gençlerin Katılımı* [Youth Participation in Turkey], Istanbul, Istanbul Bilgi University Press, <http://www.sebeke.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/turkiyedegenclerinkatilimi.pdf>

Luciani, Giacomo (2007), "Linking Economic and Political Reform in the Middle East: The Role of the Bourgeoisie", in Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism. Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, p. 161-176

Lust-Okar, Ellen (2004), "Divided they Rule. The Management and Manipulation of Political Opposition", in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No 2 (January), p. 159-179

Maghraoui, Driss (2008), "The Dynamics of Civil Society in Morocco", in Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, eds., *Political Participation in the Middle East*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, p. 193-215

Masbah, Mohammed (2013), "Moving towards Political Participation", in *SWP Comments*, No. 1 (January), http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2013C01_msb.pdf

McBride, Kelly A. and Lindsey N. Kingston (2014), "Legal Invisibility and the Revolution: Statelessness in Egypt", in *Human Rights Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (June), p. 159-175

Meknassi, Zine El Abidine (2015), "Morocco's 'Soft' Repression of Human Rights Activists", in *OpenDemocracy*, 29 September, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/node/96368>

Mikdashy, Maya (2013), "Queering Citizenship, Queering Middle East Studies", in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (May), p. 350-352

Musleh, Abeer (2016), "The Shortfall of Development Policies to Address Youth Issues in Palestine", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 11 (May), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6384>

Nazra for Feminist Studies (2014), "*Qanun Nashaz*" - A Campaign on the Legal Issues Associated with Violence against Women in both Public and Private Spheres, 9 December, <http://nazra.org/en/node/388>

Nemutlu, Gülesin and Yörük Kurtaran (2008) "Youth Work-Based Policy Proposals", in Nurhan Yentürk, Yörük Kurtaran and Gülesin Nemutlu, "Youth Work and Policy in Turkey", in *Youth Studies Unit Research Papers*, No. 3 (November), p. 22-41, <http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/?p=8398>

Omar, Menna (2014), "Women's Gains in the Egyptian Constitution of 2014", in *The Legal Agenda*, 3 February, <http://legal-agenda.com/en/article.php?id=583&lang=en>

Ottaway, Marina and Amr Hamzawy, eds. (2009), *Getting to Pluralism. Political Actors in the Arab World*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Paciello, Maria Cristina, Renata Pepicelli and Daniela Pioppi (2016a), "Public Action Towards Youth in Neo-Liberal Morocco: Fostering and Controlling the Unequal Inclusion of the New Generation", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 5 (February), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/5961>

Paciello, Maria Cristina, Renata Pepicelli and Daniela Pioppi (2016b), "Youth in Tunisia: Trapped Between Public Control and the Neo-liberal Economy", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 6 (February), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/5962>

Posusney, Marsha Pripstein (2004), "Enduring Authoritarianism: Middle East Lessons for Comparative Theory", in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No 2, p. 127-138

Roniger, Luis (2004), "Political Clientelism, Democracy and Market Economy", review article in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (April), p. 353-375

Salloukh, Bassel F. et al. (2015), *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, London, Pluto Press

Schlumberger, Oliver (2008), "Structural Reform, Economic Order and Development: Patrimonial Capitalism", in *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol 15, No. 4 (October), p. 622-649

Schmitter, Philippe C. and Nadine Sika (2016), "Democratization in the Middle East and North Africa: A More Ambidextrous Process?", in *Mediterranean Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2016.1220109

Shehata, Dina (2012), "Youth Movements and the 25 January Revolution", in Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi, eds., *Arab Spring in Egypt. Revolution and Beyond*, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, p. 105-124

Sika, Nadine (2012), "Dynamics of a Stagnant Religious Discourse and the Rise of New Secular Movements in Egypt", in Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi, eds., *Arab Spring in Egypt. Revolution and Beyond*, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, p. 63-82

Sika, Nadine (2013), "Dynamics of Development and Uprisings in the Arab World", in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Fall), p. 43-67

Sika, Nadine (2016), "Youth Civic and Political Engagement in Egypt", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 18 (September), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6819>

Sika, Nadine and Holger Albrecht (2015), "Organizational Factors of Youth Exclusion/Inclusion and Youth Collective Agency in the South East Mediterranean", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 3 (May), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/4174>

Somi, Omar (2016), "Youth Policies in Tunisia: The Internationalization of Youth as a Public Policy Issue", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 9 (May), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6307>

Sowers, Jeannie and Chris Toensing, eds. (2012), *The Journey to Tahrir. Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt*, London/New York, Verso

Springborg, Robert (2011), "The Precarious Economics of Arab Springs", in *Survival*, Vol 53, No. 6 (December-January), p. 85-104

Sukarieh, Maysoun and Stuart Tannock (2014), *Youth Rising? The Politics of Youth in the Global Economy*, London/New York, Routledge

Tuğal, Cihan (2013), "Resistance Everywhere: The Gezi Revolt in Global Perspective", in *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 49, p. 147-162, <http://sociology.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/faculty/tugal/Cihan%20Tugal,%20NPT-Gezi%20Revolt.pdf>

Uysal, Ayşen and Oğuz Topak (2010), *Particiler. Türkiye'de Partiler ve Sosyal Ağların İnşası* [Political Party. Political Parties in Turkey and Construction of Social Networks], Istanbul, İletişim

Vairel, Frédéric (2013), "Protesting in Authoritarian Situations. Egypt and Morocco in Comparative Perspective", in Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel, eds., *Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2nd ed., Stanford, Stanford University Press, p. 33-48

World Bank (2010), *Young People in Arab Countries: Promoting Opportunities and Participation*, Background Paper to the World Bank Marseille Conference, 28-30 April, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/finalbackgroundpaper.pdf>

Zerhouni, Saloua and Azeddine Akesbi (2016), "Youth Activism in Morocco: Exclusion, Agency and the Search for Inclusion", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 15 (September), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6815>



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.

POWER2YOUTH

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Via Angelo Brunetti 9 - I-00186 Roma

Tel. +39-063224360 | Fax +39-063224363

www.power2youth.eu



Istituto Affari Internazionali