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# Middle East – Topics & Arguments

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#09 – 2017

# Youth

## **Is There A Youth Politics?**

Asef Bayat

## **Arab Youth: A Contained Youth?**

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## **It's Time to Talk about Youth in the Middle East as The Precariat**

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## **Analyzing Moroccan 'Youth' in Historical Context**

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## **The Rise of the Arab Youth Paradigm and the AHDR 2016**

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## **Frantic Waiting: Young Syrian Refugees in Jordan**

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# EDITORIAL

## Political Temporalities of Youth

Christoph H. Schwarz, Anika Oettler

Four stereotypes dominate perceptions of youth around the world. First, youth are feared as dangerous, violent, fanatic, and hostile. Second, youth are seen as helpless, vulnerable, disoriented, paralyzed, and in need of protection or help from outside. Third, youth are appreciated as an innovative human resource, as talented,

dynamic, inspired, and productive. Fourth, youth are admired as heroic, altruistic, idealistic, courageous, lionhearted, and visionary.

**Keywords:** Youth; Precarity; Arab Spring; Political Activism; Intergenerational Relations

The uprisings of 2011 challenged many hegemonic assumptions about 'youth' in North Africa and West Asia. In the years before, Western publics and international policy makers discussed young people mainly as a 'youth bulge' – a demographic, quantitative problem, even a potential terrorist threat, particularly after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the first Arab Human Development Report (UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report*) marks an important intervention, since it shifted the focus on young people's social situation, particularly on youth unemployment and the concomitant psycho-social suffering. However, in problematizing social exclusion this way, the report also catered to stereotypical representations of its own. Youth and young adults were hardly described as political subjects, but rather as objects of policies that had to change. They were portrayed as passive victims of an eroding social pact between former generations and authoritarian regimes. At the same time, international organizations and think tanks in the region promoted an ideal of the 'young, innovative entrepreneur'. This ideal on the one hand apparently aimed to 'empower' youth and end their suffering, while on the other hand it individualized and depoliticized their risks of failure in pursuing their life projects.

Then, in the course of the 2011 events in the MENA region, a new idol emerged, which might be best described by a quote from the Financial Times:

He is the young Egyptian who occupied Tahrir Square, and awakened a sleepy population. She is the young Libyan defying the madness and brutality of Muammer Gaddafi. He is the empowered Bahraini and Yemeni youth raising his voice in a resolute call on governments to listen to their people instead of oppressing them. Each revolt has drawn in swaths of its own society, but it is the young Arab who is the driving force; the unassuming leader. (Khalaf)

In Western publics, the 'young Arab protester' was largely perceived as a heroic vanguard against fossilized autocratic regimes ruled by old men. For many, this figure seemed to embody certain democratic ideals and practices that apparently had lost impetus in the established democracies of the West, especially in the wake of the global economic crisis, and the Euro crisis in particular. Here, new social movements like the Spanish *indignados* were highly inspired by the events on the southern coast of the Mediterranean. The fact that authoritarian regimes that had appeared stable for decades were

suddenly shaken to the ground seemed to prove the hidden potential of an awakening citizenry – and who could better embody this general trope of the 'Arab Spring' than youth?

The term 'Arab Spring' was coined in the West and surely reveals more about the expectations of those who employed it than about the events on the ground. Such a seasonal analogy obviously matches generational semantics and the widespread hopes that are often associated with 'youth', hopes that seem to be the flipside of a common fearful rhetoric of youth as a violent menace to society. In contrast to terms like 'Days of Rage', as many protestors in the MENA titled their rallies, a 'spring' analogy implies that something will come to fruition, that heretofore hidden potentials will be realized. At the same time, it implies the idea of a natural course of the development. And to be successful against the forces of cold and darkness, this development might need helping hands, guidance and care from experienced experts.

As a consequence of the 2011 protests and uprisings, young people in the MENA region were also increasingly given credit as protagonists in the cultural field, which was often directly related to their political

mobilizations. Western media started to show interest in their creative productivity, be it in literature, music, their use of new media and ICTS, or everyday practices like football and its respective fan cultures. Those young people who before were mainly represented by statistics and demographic numbers suddenly were given credit as individuals. Their faces had made it onto journal covers and TV documentaries, often in a posture of defiance and optimism. Journalists aimed to 'zoom in' and get closer to these young people in order to capture personal stories and portraits. Most prominently, Time magazine declared 'the protester' the person of the year 2011, showing on its cover the face of an apparently young, determined-looking person wearing a knit cap and a cloth over mouth and nose. In this case, hiding the subject's face obviously was used to neither hint to a specific gender or ethnic identity, nor to possible identifiers of a local context. Instead, the aim of this graphic was to highlight the commonalities of the pictures that photographers delivered from scenes of protests in very different contexts, in the sense of a global 'protest generation' – "From the Arab Spring to Athens, from Occupy Wall Street to Moscow" as the subtitle went. And many activists made strategic use of this generational narrative. In Madrid, an

*indignados* activist explained to one of the editors that his political group – Juventud sin Futuro ('Youth without a Future') – had deliberately chosen a 'youth frame' as a mobilization strategy precisely because of the 'Arab Spring', which in Spain was perceived mainly as a legitimate youth revolt. As such, even conservative media had made positive reference to it. For this key group within the *indignados* movement, framing their demands as 'youth issues' was a strategy to avoid the typical political divisions in the post-Franquist context.

Again, we are confronted with a flipside dynamic. While in public discourses young people and children are often not taken seriously as political subjects, since they are thought to lack the experience necessary to be responsible political actors, it is precisely the naivety and innocence ascribed to them that makes them particularly powerful witnesses of injustice. The first Palestinian Intifada and its spectacular images of Palestinian children and youth confronting Israeli tanks with stones and slingshots is a telling example (Collins). For a long time, these were almost the only young people from North Africa and West Asia who were taken into account as political subjects in international media and academia on a regular basis. On an iconographic level (Lachenal and Leube),

the violence and injustice suffered by young people delivers particularly outrageous images and narratives that are likely to become key elements in political protests. The case of the 26-year-old Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who is said to have sparked the Tunisian uprising when he immolated himself after his goods were confiscated in a humiliating act by the police, is a prime example. But also at the Eastern side of the Mediterranean, in Syria, the 'Days of Rage' protests began after teenagers had been arrested and tortured by Assad's secret police because they had written anti-regime graffiti on the walls of their school. Later, 13-year-old Hamza al-Khatib was tortured to death by the secret service, who then returned his body to his family, an act that many interpreted as the regime's annulment of "the unwritten pact that at least those who do not pose an essential threat to its power would be spared" (Scheller).

One reason for Bashar al-Assad's persistence was that he managed to convince many decision makers and Western publics that he was the 'lesser evil' and represented 'stability' in the face of an archaic threat, namely Daesh (ISIS). Daesh's propaganda, on the other hand, made heavy use of certain images of 'youth as a men-

ace'. The images and videos of bearded young men in turbans and their acts of extreme violence wielding a gun or sometimes a sabre appear like the worst Western Orientalist projections of Muslim masculinity come true. Daesh triggered such projections, and for many Western recruits they apparently were attractive since they promised direct access to patriarchal power.<sup>2</sup> The young Jihadist's closest iconographic counterpart appears in the heroic Kurdish female fighter as an idealistic, committed, and highly trained warrior beating back the terrorists. It was this icon that managed for the first time to mobilize certain European publics to show solidarity while heretofore they had preferred not to take a stance in the Syrian conflict.

However, the term 'Arab Winter' had appeared in journalism and academia long before Daesh took center stage, not even a year into the uprisings of 2011. Whereas analogies of 'spring' seemed to emphasize common ground with the West, and, as already mentioned, indicated a certain benevolent identification, the use of the 'winter' analogy indicates the 'cooling off' and increasing distance on behalf of Western publics. In consequence, the image of the people in the MENA region again is one of either

stagnation, acquiescence, or sectarian violence, so often associated with a forlorn, anachronistic culture. Such seasonal analogies indicate a particular form of 'temporal othering' - much in parallel to 'spatial othering' (Fischer-Tahir and Soudias) - and youth as a trope seems to be at its center. Political mobilization and security discourses, as well as Jihadist recruitment, each make ample use of these stereotypes, each according to their own logic.

To critically examine such youth discourses and generational semantics, their flipside-dynamics of 'peril or promise' (El Shakry), does not intend to relativize youth's preeminent role in the uprisings of 2011 and in the production of new forms of speaking about their societies' future, nor young people's destructive potential. Instead, it is precisely the crypto-normative aspects of hegemonic assumptions about youth that prove the need for a thorough conceptual discussion, across national and regional borders. In academia, the sudden public attention given to young people in the MENA was echoed by a boom in 'youth research' on the region. Here, like in the media, studies now aimed to find more personal stories and intended to 'give a face and a voice' to young people by including more qualitative methods such as ethnographies

and open interviews that aimed to portray them as individual cases illustrating a more general positionality. But many of the studies and policy papers hardly involved critical theoretical approaches to 'youth'. Again, young people were represented mainly as members of an age cohort, defined in quantitative terms, although now with different expectations. And on the other hand, critical discussions regarding the empirical significance of youth in reproducing social inequality and catalyzing processes of social exclusion continue to revolve around the situation of young people in 'the West', i.e. in sociology, youth studies, etc.

The four stereotypes mentioned in the beginning are not reserved to youth in the MENA region, though they are surely exacerbated by Orientalist projections. But in youth discourses in most contexts, there is a tendency to regard male youth as deviant and dangerous menaces to society, irrespective of whether they constitute real threats (Oettler). Likewise, youth's 'political apathy' as well as their 'radicalization' have been an issue of concern in 'Western' societies for a long time. On behalf of critical youth studies there has been a constant argument to reflect upon the more open notions of politics regarding young people's participation,

and to understand their relations to politics and their understanding of 'participation' (Vromen; Farthing).

For the MENA region, it seems fair to say that those expressions of political agency that did not fit in any of the four stereotypes mentioned above hardly received any attention in Western or international media or academia. Take the case of the Moroccan or Tunisian unemployed graduates, who had been protesting 'apolitically', negotiating their employment with authoritarian regimes since the early 1990s (Emperador Badimón; Schwarz, "'Generation in Waiting' or 'Precarious Generation?'"; Hamdi and Weipert-Fenner). In addition to these organized and visible street protests, there were 'youth non-movements', as Bayat (Bayat, "From 'Dangerous Classes' to 'Quiet Rebels'") had termed some of the everyday activities of young people who were 'reclaiming youthfulness' as a certain form of generational self-positioning and a particular representation of political discord. Based on passive networks, these proto-movements were less visible to the public, but, in many places, turned out to be crucial for the uprisings of 2011 (Bayat, *Revolution without revolutionaries*). And finally, instead of imagining agency exclusively from a perspective of



romanticized 'resistance' or, on the other hand, threatening 'terrorism', research should also take into account that in every context there were and are many young people who exercise political agency in adapting to the current state of affairs or even in actively supporting authoritarian rule as long as it benefits them and as long as the respective regime abides by a certain social contract (Rodgers and Young; Schielke).

In discussing such conceptual research gaps and regional asymmetries, we – both sociologists, one with a regional focus on MENA and Southern Europe, one with a regional focus on Latin America – decided to further engage with these debates. As a first step, in December 2016, we invited scholars from different disciplines to an international workshop in order to foster a conceptual debate between area studies (of the MENA and other regions), sociology of youth, education, critical youth studies, and social movement theory. On this occasion, we want to thank all participants for sharing their insights and thoughts: Yakein Abdelmagid, Abdulsalam AlRubeidi, Eyob Balcha Gebremariam, Asef Bayat, Myriam Catusse, Blandine Destremeau, Jörg Gertel, Linda Herrera, Vera King, Mayada Madbouly, Emma C. Murphy, Rachid Ouassa, José Luís Rocha

Gómez, Dennis Rodgers, Jonas Röllin, Magdalena Suerbaum and Ann-Christin Wagner.<sup>3</sup> As this list of participants already indicates, there is a vibrant academic community working on 'youth' in the MENA region and beyond. Currently, there are several ambitious comparative research projects underway or that have recently concluded, and to which some of the workshop participants and authors of this issue have been contributing, namely the upcoming study funded by the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (Gertel and Hexel), the EU-funded projects Power2Youth ([power2youth.eu](http://power2youth.eu)), and SAHWA ([sahwa.eu](http://sahwa.eu)).

All of these studies contribute to deeper theoretical and empirical understanding. How do the concepts of 'youth' and 'generation' help to understand the larger social and political developments in North Africa and West Asia in recent years? To what extent does social age, a habitus of 'youthfulness', or generationality matter when we discuss power relations, social inequality, and actors' agency in the region? Does it suggest different policy interventions when we frame a certain phenomenon, such as political violence, class or gender relations, unemployment, social exclusion, or inequality, as a 'youth' issue? How do actors position themselves in intergenerational relations and refer to

generational narratives, on which grounds, and to what purpose?

In this issue, we propose a relational and regionally contextualized understanding of youth. By 'relational' we dismiss notions of youth that are based on a de-contextualized and previously defined age-range; instead, we suggest looking at interpersonal intergenerational relationships, societal intergenerational relations, as well as class or gender relations, understood as structural, interdependent power relations. In addition to the local contextualization of these relations, research should embed their findings on youth in the macro-economic structures and the global relations that shape the existence of youth in a transforming social world.

How can we position ourselves as researchers in this wider agenda? What do we lose and what do we gain if we apply one notion of youth or the other? Our ANTI/THESIS section opens the debate and presents two complementary arguments in this regard. In turning to the specificities of youth claims, Asef Bayat discusses if there is a particular 'youth politics'. He revisits his earlier conceptualizations of youth against the background of the uprisings of 2011, highlighting the complexities of young people's lives and

their positionality in the social structure. Cultural, class, and gender divides determine if young people can act as 'youths'. Bayat thus follows an understanding of youth as the experience of 'youthfulness' that is related to 'behaving young' as a "a sort of Bourdieuan habitus—a series of mental and cognitive dispositions, ways of being, feeling, and carrying oneself that are associated with the sociological position of structural irresponsibility". Whereas Bayat focuses on youth's political agency, Jörg Gertel highlights the prolonged socio-economic dependency of young people on parents, kin, and social network – a dependency that is exacerbated by economic ruptures, political instability, and insecurity. His contribution presents a challenging argument. As a break with the rules and moralities of their parents becomes increasingly difficult, a "contained youth" emerges. Therefore, according to Gertel, "the renewal and regeneration of society is endangered; out-dated value-sets are artificially prolonged".

The contributions in our META section take two terms, the precariat and social entrepreneurship, as points of departure to rethink conceptual approaches to youth. Linda Herrera argues that "any meaningful conceptualization of, and engagement with, youth and generations

in North Africa and West Asia should incorporate the notion of precariat and the condition of precariousness." Drawing on the work of Guy Standing and others, she describes precarity as a condition of alienation, anxiety, and insecurity connected to economic structures, policies, and norms, and confronts these with hegemonic discourses on youth participation, agency, peacemaking, education, and 'empowerment' in the region. From this perspective, the recent Arab Human Development Report (UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report*) is a case in point and obscures actual power relations and a neoliberal agenda (see also Sukarieh in this volume). In a globalized economy, the image of young people as consumers, workers, and entrepreneurs supports the normalization of market-oriented neoliberal subjectivities. In a nutshell, Herrera concludes that "entrepreneurship is not the solution". Shana Cohen, in turn, engages with a particular type of entrepreneurship – social entrepreneurship – as a specific form of agency that connects individual activism under the conditions of global capitalism with maneuvering for local political influence. Referring to the Moroccan case, Cohen proposes a novel approach to youth and demonstrates how social and economic agency reconnect to new forms of citizenship beyond the

nation-state. In doing so, Cohen goes beyond a narrow conceptualization of youth as either a passive or protesting age cohort. She conceptualizes youth as a socio-historically specific category at the crossroads between economic opportunity, political expression, and social status.

In the CLOSE-UP section, Helena Nassif draws a portrait of Ahmed Abdalla, the former leader of the Egyptian student movement, later community worker and founder of the Markaz al-Geel ('Generation center'). This youth center was one of the first to do social work with young people in a disenfranchised neighborhood in Cairo, and to campaign against child labor. The turning points of Abdalla's biography and of his thinking on the one hand represent the trajectory of an entire generation of intellectuals, while on the other hand they call attention to youth issues and generational dynamics back then, as well as in the events of 2011 and in the current political situation of authoritarian rule in Egypt.

The FOCUS section represents a collection of articles that explore different analytical options of dealing with youth in the MENA region. While some articles shed light on the power of prominent youth paradigms in international organizations and NGOs, others focus on both the

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constraints in realizing youthfulness and the possibilities of agency in difficult times. Maysoun Sukarieh presents a critical analysis of the 2016 Arab Human Development Report to demonstrate that the youth paradigm is currently mobilized in a way that is connected to a “whole set of problematic analyses and responses that are prejudiced against and harmful” to youth. Youth became the kernel of a “new historical revisionism”, obscuring the role of other social groups in the “Arab Spring” and its bloody aftermath. In a similar vein, Ann-Kristin Wagner picks up the issue of youth as a key security and development concern in analyzing NGO youth politics in the Jordanian town of Mafraq. These politics tend to turn “disenfranchised non-youthful youngsters into model refugees of a certain kind, i.e. a neoliberal refugee youth”. Importantly, Wagner points to neoliberal refugee subjectivities, constantly keeping themselves busy in a condition of insecurity. Refugees are also the subject of Magdalena Suerbaum’s article on Syrian young men in Cairo. From a largely socio-psychological perspective, Suerbaum portrays forced migrants as on a difficult path into masculine adulthood in a “situation of utter despair, instability and liminality”. Bruno Lefort turns once again to stories of agency and describes how students of the

American University of Beirut, as members of a postwar generation – and in their relationships with the war generation – manage space and social relationships, taking a distance from sectarianisms, corruption, and gender inequality, often ascribing a new subjective meaning to these spaces. Jakob Kraiss then takes us back to colonial Algeria, and describes generational conflict and the importance of play communities and sports clubs in creating and fostering anti-colonial nationalism in French Algeria from the 1930s until independence in 1962.

Finally, the REVIEW section discusses two recently published works that do not directly engage with youth questions, but are surely enriching for anyone engaging in the questions raised above. Igor Johannsen introduces Armando Salvatore’s book “The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power and Civility”, the first volume of a forthcoming trilogy that critically discusses the paradigmatic limitations of Western sociology in its view of MENA societies, and proposes alternative concepts in order to self-reflexively enrich the discipline as a whole. Sultan al-Maani reviews “Knowledge Production in the Arab World: The impossible promise”, by Sari Hanafi and Rigas Arvanitis, who shed light on the institutional and structural

conditions of academic research in North Africa and West Asia.

The multifaceted picture of youth presented by the authors of this issue thus denotes a historically grounded and contextualized approach to youth. In our view, there are three main aspects related to the political temporalities of youth.

Firstly, the dimension of space deserves further attention. Youth in one place might ‘mean’ something very different from youth in another, particularly if we deal with center-periphery relations, where very different regimes of time and lifetime might reign. In consequence, some youth in the MENA might in fact act as members of a transnational ‘wired generation’ (Herrera), while other data indicates that, subjectively, they hardly identify with ‘the youth in other countries’ (Schwarz, “Family and the Future”). If we understand ‘youth’ as a socially constructed and historically embedded category, it is obvious that diverse cultural, social, political, and economic contexts on local, national, regional, and transnational levels shape the position of youth. In this regard, the main challenge for future research is to build theory without surrendering the adequate representation of a myriad of contexts, subjects, and practices along this spatial dimension of the political temporality of youth.

### Christoph H. Schwarz

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Secondly, youth is at the center of the political and moral economy regarding the temporalization of a society's present. This concerns how societies structure the biographical temporality and life courses of their subjects, how subjects negotiate these questions, and how subjectivities in different positionalities make different sense of time and lifetime. Institutional and socio-economic regimes of structuring subjects' lifetimes are key to understanding the reproduction of social inequality, social exclusion, and discrimination. For the MENA region, Diane Singerman's concept of waithood is a case in point, since it was the first to systematically call attention on the temporal dimension of the social exclusion of the young, problematizing a 'stalled transition to adulthood'. Its intent was to point to the social suffering provoked by this and to the underlying political problematic (i.e. the 'political economy of marriage'). However, in tendency the concept was appropriated by a de-politicizing and individualizing neoliberal discourse that catered to the stereotype of youth as passive victims who should be 'empowered' by becoming young entrepreneurs, when in fact much their struggles might be better described by precarity and the concomitant social accelerated, hectic temporalities (Schwarz, "'Generation in Waiting'

or 'Precarious Generation'?"). Some contributions in this issue point to negotiations in this regard and highlight less visible forms of agency and collective strategies.

Thirdly, in order to understand young people as subjects of history, we argue for a notion of youth that takes intergenerational relations and processes of intergenerational transmission as a point of departure in order to understand how individuals and collectives make sense of the past and attribute meaning to the future. In this sense, concepts such as generation as actuality (*Generationszusammenhang* in Mannheim's sense) or generational consciousness appear highly relevant when it comes to social and political change. As some of the contributions to this issue demonstrate, the intergenerational transmission of narratives and historical memories, their appropriation, actualization, or rejection by the younger generations, are key to processes of reinterpreting a collective past as well as to the projection of collective future projects. Likewise, the intergenerational transmission of material and symbolic resources is key to the reproduction of social inequalities and social exclusion, as well as to strategies of social mobility. To conclude, we argue that 'youth' tends to be used in public discourse to de-politicize social rela-

tions and transpose them to other discursive domains. But youth is an essentially political category, tied to questions of change and persistence of power structures in dynamic societies, and it should be discussed as such.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Most prominently Huntington: "Finally, and most important, the demographic explosion in Muslim societies and the availability of large numbers of often unemployed males between the ages of fifteen and thirty is a natural source of instability and violence both within Islam and against non-Muslims. Whatever other causes may be at work, this factor alone would go a long way to explaining Muslim violence in the 1980s and 1990s. The aging of this pig-in-the-python generation by the third decade of the twenty-first century and economic development in Muslim societies, if and as that occurs, could consequently lead to a significant reduction in Muslim violence propensities and hence to a general decline in the frequency and intensity of fault line wars." (Huntington 265)

<sup>2</sup> Such pictures prove even more irritating when the perpetrators address the audience in some local Belgian, English or German accent. For the first time a terrorist organization had managed to actually recruit thousands of combatants from Western countries, most of them young men. As Benslama highlights for the French recruits, there are hardly any other commonalities between these persons, Muslims and converts alike, than their young age. Another unique feature of Daesh that is important when it comes to intergenerational relationships was the display of male child soldiers in propaganda, i.e. as executioners. The military deployment of underage combatants is widespread among other factions in the war in Syria, but usually it is a practice that the factions deny or aim to conceal. Daesh, in contrast, exploits it as a mediatized rite of passage; the fact that recruits are able to impose a masculinity project on children acts as proof of the patriarchal power they have attained (Schwarz ("Die Macht aus Jungen Männer zu machen"))

<sup>3</sup> We also want to thank the BMBF-funded research network Re-Configurations for financial and logistic support, as well as the co-organizers of our workshop, Amira Augustin, Perrine Lachenal, and Helena Nassif, our student assistants Suhayla Awad, Tim Rottleb, and, in particular, Mohammed Al Hayek, as well as our chairs Hanna Al Taher, Ines Braune, Jamie Furniss, Sihem Hamlaoui, Friederike Pannewick, and Karolin Sengebusch. We would also like to thank Andrea Fischer-Tahir for helpful comments on an earlier version of this text.

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# ANTI/THESIS

## ANTI-THESIS

### Is There A Youth Politics?

Asef Bayat

What is the nature of 'youth politics', if any? This article proposes an analytical lens which may help us consider 'youth' as a useful category, and 'youth politics' in terms of the conflicts and negotiations over claiming or defending youthfulness. Understood in this fashion, youth politics is mediated by the position of the young in class, gender, racial, sexual and other involved social structures. It concludes

that the political outlook of a young person may be shaped not just by the exclusive preoccupation with 'youthfulness', but also by his/her position in society as citizen, poor, female, or a member of a sexual minority.

**Keywords:** Youth, Arab Spring, politics, Middle East, youthfulness, youth activism

#### Introduction

Is there such a thing as 'youth politics' in the way we have gender politics, working class politics, or poor people's politics; and if there is, what are its attributes and modes of expression? After all, what is the significance of youth politics, if any? Even though some have expressed doubts about 'youth' as a meaningful category or considered it as a mere construct, here I would like to propose an analytical lens which may help understanding youth as a useful category with distinct politics. In this sense 'youth politics' will be viewed in terms of the conflicts and negotiations over claiming or defending youthfulness; but this is a politics that is mediated by the position of the young in class, gender, racial, sexual and other involved social structures. In brief, the political outlook of a young person may be shaped not just by the exclusive preoccupation with 'youthfulness', but also by his/her positionality as citizen, poor, female, or a member of a sexual minority. The propositions advanced here are informed by my observations on young people's lives in the contemporary Middle East, where the spectacular Arab uprisings brought youth to the forefront of politics.

A review of popular discourse as well as scholarly works on the Arab revolutions leaves little doubt about the leading pres-



ence of the young people in these momentous political episodes. Perhaps no other social group has gained as much credence in these transformative events as youth, and in no other times in its history has Middle East politics witnessed so much attention to youth—whether as victims of economic marginalization or agents of transformation. A range of writings narrates the prominent role of the young and students in the region's national movements and revolutions. They discuss how, for instance, the indignant youth suffered from the highest rate of unemployment in the world, how they moved from being passive subjects into active agents, in what way the rising 'youth movements' initiated the revolutions, or how the Coptic youth turned into a political player in post-revolution Egypt (Erlich; Sayer and Yousef; Desai et al; Abdalla; Shehata; Delgado). Indeed, the notion of 'youth revolutions' referring to the Arab Spring readily pointed to an assumed propensity of youth for radical politics.

While we have certainly learnt more about the involvement of young people in politics, much of the literature displays the perennial problem of treating youth simply as *incidental* or at best tangential to the core stories and analyses. As such, this genre of writing discusses not the youth per se, but rather such subjects of conten-

tious politics, the uprising, or activism in certain times or places in which youth happen to play a key role, such that if we were to substitute youth with a different group, it would have no significant bearings on the analyses and narratives. At the same time, in the studies where 'youth' do take a more prominent place, there are little or no discussions about the specificities of youth claims and presence in such events; youth often appears as a term to designate an age cohort rather than a conceptual category with particular analytical meanings. In fact, many of the writings on 'youth movements' are of this nature; they are not about 'youth movements' per se, but about certain political organizations, parties, or networks—such as the Kefaya, the Egyptian democracy movement of the mid-2000s—in which young people happen to be active. This kind of treatment is not limited to the Middle East, but seems to inform much of the literature on youth and politics in general. This strand of scholarship on youth then tends to examine not *youth politics* per se, but *youth in politics*. The discussions of 'youth in politics' do certainly teach us a great deal about the extent to which young people care about or get engaged in public life. But they say little about the particularities—concerns, forms, direction, pitfalls or promises—of such political engagement.

For these, we need to delve into 'youth politics'.

### In Historical Movements

There is globally a sizeable scholarship that takes 'youth politics' as its central focus. Here youth politics is construed from the sociological reality of the young in terms of their transitional position from childhood and dependence to adulthood and responsibility. While some in this genre tend to view the young as emotional, inexperienced, and potential instigators of 'youth war', most see them as creative producers of subcultures and new lifestyles, as well as carriers of revolutionary posture and politics.<sup>1</sup> In fact, here youth appear as key players in the major political movements in history all the way from Ancient Greece to the English Revolution, Protestant Reformation, the early 19th Century, and down to the momentous episode of the 1960s. In the inter-war period, youth as a distinct social group assumed such an import as to make both the right and leftist political blocks invest heavily in the transformative potential of the youth. This gave rise to myriad 'youth movements' with intimate links to communist or fascist ideologies and personas, including Mussolini, who considered youth as the "avant-garde of the fascist revolution" (Kalman 343-366;

Passerini). Indeed, the old idea of associating youth with nature, body building, and soul searching was reincarnated after the Second World War in the ministries of Youth and Sports in most postcolonial nations, where a variety of 'young movements' such as the Young Officers in Egypt or Young Turks in the Turkish Republic ascended to the political stage (Sukarieh and Tannock 81-82).

The historic events of the 1960s brought youth more than ever onto the forefront of revolutionary politics. The student revolts in Berkeley and its Free Speech Movement spreading through the US campuses, together with youth and student rebellions in Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia, and especially the May 1968 general strike in factories and colleges presented the youth as if they possessed an inherent radical habitus. Such notions as 'youthful rebelliousness' and 'youth war' virtually linked those revolutionary moments to a youthful disposition, assumed to be shaped by a specific 'stage of life', a mix of alienation and presence, or the generation war (Matza 110; Keniston 7). While some argued that age conflict had taken the place of class conflict, others took the young as the new revolutionary class that had replaced the proletariat as the agent of political transformation (Turner 398; Rowntree and Rowntree). The idea of

'youth as class' and university as a new bastion of revolutionary politics resonated strongly with some major social theorists ranging from Jerome Ferrand, Fred Halliday, C. Wright Mills, and Herbert Marcuse. For the sociologist Alain Touraine, the university came to occupy the same position as the great capitalist enterprise (Touraine). The idea of 'revolutionary youth' also permeated into the discourse of the Arab uprisings, which young people had initiated. Some observers went so far as to describe key historical moments in the Middle East far prior to the Arab uprisings in terms of the revolutionary role of youth. As "an age group and as an educated public", youth and students are suggested to have burst into the political scene to shape nationalist movements, liberation struggles, and revolutions, as well as Islamism and liberalism (Erllich x).

A longitudinal look at the young people's behavior, however, would make the claims of 'radical youth' untenable. Young people, whether in the West or in the Middle East, have also exhibited both passive and conservative orientations. It is well known that the political youth of the 1960s and 1970s in the US and Britain turned by the 1980s into Yuppies or the self-absorbed and conservative young professionals—orientations very different

from the working class punk subculture. For their part, Arab youth went through a process of hibernation for decades before joining the 2011 uprisings; young people in Tunisia were constricted by the police state under the Ben Ali, and those in Egypt showed little interest during the 1990s in any sort of civic activism let alone revolutionary politics, if they had not joined the Islamist Jihadi fringes. Large-scale surveys of Arab youth conducted after the 2011 revolutions point to an escalating apathy and aversion to politics following an earlier political fervor that marked the uprisings. In fact, some observers have concluded that Arab youth usually display apathy when it comes to the conventional politics, political parties, or elections, simply because of their deep disenchantment with formal intuitions. Yet the very same passive youth may turn political in particular political circumstances, such as during the Arab uprisings (Desai et al 165).

### **From Passive to Active**

Why and how do the young turn from passive individuals into active and even revolutionary agents? More specifically, how do we explain the widespread political turn among the Arab youth in the 2011 events? One suggestion is that youth apathy changes when their discontent rises so

high that they resort to radical and dramatic action with perceived impact on government and cost to themselves (Desai et al 165). Here the sources of discontent are invariably attributed to a series of misfortunes, chiefly exclusion and unemployment. Thus, in the common narrative, the Arab world's highest youth unemployment—25% compared to world average 14.4% in pre-revolution—meant late marriage (until 30s) and 'waithood', leading to frustration and ultimately revolt.<sup>2</sup>

There is certainly a great plausibility in these narratives, in particular when it comes to uncertainty and 'waithood', which indeed appear to be mostly youth problems. But broadly speaking, unemployment and economic and social exclusion are hardly the exclusive predicament of the young; adults have also suffered from these misfortunes. But if the focus is on youth, what type of youth we are speaking about—college students, graduates, rich, poor, those living with parents, or married young couples who must rely on themselves? The youth of the rich and privileged families are not supposed to feel social and economic exclusion, and should not, by definition, be outraged and rebellious. Studies on the economics of Middle Eastern youth show that family income has the greatest bearing on young people's educational opportuni-

ties, achievements, and eventually income; the more well-off the family is, the better chance for better degrees and opportunities.<sup>3</sup> Even those non-privileged high school or college students (in a 2016 MENA youth survey by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 37% of youth between 16-30 years of age were students) who do live with and depend on parents may not experience the hardship of unemployment or economic exclusion as long as they remain outside of job market; it is their parents who in their role as providers for these youngsters should feel the crunch of socio-economic exclusion. Unlike in, say, the US or Britain, where the autonomous youth depend mostly on themselves to subsist, in Arab societies it is the families that usually bear the burden of youths, sometimes even after their children get married.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the economic pressure falls more on parents than on their children, and thus it is these parents who should be rebelling. This might explain why a large number of the young respondents (71%) in the MENA youth survey described their economic situation as "very good" despite the relative economic downturn, because these young people were living on their parents' income. However, married couples who were responsible for

their own household did complain about the pressure of bad economic conditions. A year before the Egyptian Revolution, the veteran columnist Hasan Nafaa published a piece in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* where he suggested that new social actors were emerging onto Egypt's political scene (Nafaa). He described three occasions where young people (with work and families) approached him to start a campaign to change the political status quo in Egypt—to support the opposition leader Mohamed Baradei, endorse groups demanding to amend the constitution, and help them push the parliament to reform things. Nafaa then suggested that we are facing a new category of youth in their 30s and 40s who hold responsibilities for their nuclear families as parents and for their jobs in public and private sectors; these youth are inclined not for revolution to alter everything, but towards cooperation and peaceful, managed change. These young activists, he argued, were different from the radical students of the 1970s or those in the April 6th Youth Movement in Egypt. These youth were not simply interested in their own individual or family matters, but were also concerned about the public good. Deeply worried about the failure of the state, they wanted to do something about it; they sensed that the alarming situation could lead to an

explosion, especially when neither the regime nor the traditional opposition were able to bring about reforms. "I do not think I exaggerate in stating", Nafaa concluded, "that the advent of this new age cohort (generation) in the political stage constitutes a turning point in mobilization for change."

### Who are Youth?

This interesting observation raises serious conceptual questions about and complicates the meaning of youth and youth political agency. Can one consider this 30-40 year-old age cohort with marriage, work and responsibility 'youth'? Is 'youth' simply an age-category? Is it simply a construction imagined and presented by others? Or is there no such thing as 'youth' at all? The policy circles such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) usually define youth in terms of certain age groups—some take it as those 15-25 year of age, others 15-30, while others up to 40 (UNDP 22). Even though operationalization is necessary for policy purposes, such designations with varied ranges remain inevitably arbitrary. It is therefore not a surprise that some scholars reject the category of 'youth' in terms of 'life stage' or in terms of generation altogether, considering it instead as a 'construction'—a social identity that is imagined by others

about the young (Sukarieh and Tannock). But this is no less problematic. It is true that elders, the state, or moral authorities do intervene to construct different images of youth as, for instance, 'rebellious', 'brave', the 'future', or 'dangerous'. This however does not mean that youth lack any reality of their own. Perhaps we should be asking how the young define themselves; for this can help us to identify those particular traits that, beyond external attributions, shape young people's image of themselves and their behavior. Denying the young the ability to define their own reality, or overlooking their paradoxical positionality in the social structure, can lead to such inaccurate conclusions that, as Bourdieu put it, youth is "nothing but a word".

I have suggested that "youth" in the sense of young persons is in part related to a particular life stage and thus a particular location in the social structure, where the individuals navigate between the world of childhood (as the time of vulnerability, innocence and need of protection) and adulthood, the world of work and responsibility. Theoretically, a young person experiences a life of relative autonomy, a kind of 'structural irresponsibility', where the individual neither substantially depends on other people such as parents, nor is responsible for others, such as his/

her own family or children. This seems to be in line with the perceptions of young Egyptians who, in my interviews with them, broadly described themselves as being less experienced and less responsible.<sup>5</sup> In modern times, mass schooling has played a crucial role in the production of youth and prolongation of the time in which the individual lives and operates as young. 'Youth' in the sense of 'behaving young' represents a sort of Bourdieuan habitus—a series of mental and cognitive dispositions, ways of being, feeling, and carrying oneself that are associated with the sociological position of structural irresponsibility. This is how young people experience 'youthfulness'.

Of course the reality of young people's lives is more complex and may vary across cultural, class, and gender divides. For instance, many adolescents in poor families may have to seek work to earn a living instead of attending school; girls may get married early thus assuming the responsibility of being a parent and spouse before experiencing youthfulness; unmarried girls, even in the middle class families, often take some responsibilities to help their mothers in cooking, cleaning, or caring for the children. There is also the possibility of the young couples who, once married, may appear as if they have moved out of the youth world into adult-

hood (in 2016, 29% of youth were interviewed for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's MENA youth survey either married or divorced, and 15% of 'youth' in Egypt described themselves as 'adults'). Interestingly, anecdotal evidence suggests that the youngsters who did not experience youthfulness in their young age may tend to 'experience' it years after they move to adult life. A 40-year-old woman from Lebanon stated recently that she did not want to get married and be responsible at this age, because she "had lost her youthfulness during the civil war", and "now want[ed] to experience it". In fact, there seems to be a trend of 30+ working or non-working women who do not wish to get married but desire to live independently, while we also may encounter young males who hold jobs and earn a living but remain unmarried and live with parents.

How can we account for these sub-groups of the young? Are they not youth? If they are, what make them so? Simply age? If so, what then accounts for their positionality in the social structure? The relevance of these questions boils down to the reason we strive to conceptualize 'youth' in the first place. If the purpose is to identify youth groups with particular needs and abilities in order to devise policies to address them, then the particularities of

such subgroups should be acknowledged and highlighted. However, if the purpose is, as in this essay, to understand what kind of politics youth espouse, then we should focus on their positionality in the social structure to determine if the individuals assume some sort of youth habitus or live and behave like adults even in their young age.

### Youth Politics

If we conceive of 'youth' in this fashion, youth politics then takes a different form from what is commonly perceived and presented. In this sense, youth politics is not the same as 'student politics', which is concerned with student rights, tuition cost, and educational policies, as well as contentions that are shaped by the school environment. Curricula can potentially cultivate critical awareness about, say, racism or colonialism, or a university's objectionable investments in certain countries can potentially cause campaigns of divestment, all of which are facilitated by the fact that college campuses brings students together helping collective action. The protests in Spain's universities in 2010 or those led by Camila Vallejo in Chile in 2011, concerning public spending on education and an end to the commercialization of schooling, exemplify what I mean by a 'student movement'. On the other

hand, youth politics is also distinct from such things as the 'youth chapters' of different political movements or organizations, be they Fascist, Ba'athist, or leftist. Rather, youth politics, strictly speaking, is essentially about claiming or reclaiming youthfulness; it expresses the collective challenge whose central goal consists of defending and extending the youth habitus—a set of dispositions, ways of being, feeling, and carrying oneself (e.g., a greater demand for autonomy, individuality, mobility, and security of transition to the adult world) that are shaped by the sociological fact of being young. Countering or curtailing this habitus is likely to generate youth dissent.<sup>6</sup>

Conceptual precision notwithstanding, real life is of course more complex. The fact is that most youth are students, most students are young, and almost all are at the same time citizens carrying broader concerns. In other words, young people's politics encapsulate contentions that derive from their multiple positionalities as youth, students, and citizens, filtering through class, gender, racial, and other identities. So even though young people often pursue their exclusively youthful claims through cultural politics (e.g. in the way that the Iranian youth followed particular a lifestyle in the 1990s), they may blend their youthful claims with other con-

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cerns in their positions as students and citizens to mobilize against corruption, political repression, or urban exclusion, as we saw during the Arab uprisings and after. Yet in their involvement in the broader political campaigns, the young often bring to them a good degree of youthful tastes and sensibilities often displayed in political graffiti, sociality, fun, and youthful energy.

The mere presence of young people subject to moral and political discipline does not necessarily render them carriers of a youth movement, because young persons (as age category) are unable to forge a collective challenge to the moral and political authority without first turning into youth as a social category, that is, turning into social actors. Youth as a social category, as collective agents, are an essentially modern, mostly urban, phenomenon. It is in modern cities that “young persons” turn into “youth,” by experiencing and developing a particular consciousness about themselves as being young. Schooling, prevalent in urban areas, serves as a key factor in producing and prolonging the period of youth, while it cultivates status, expectations, and, possibly, critical awareness. Cities, as loci of diversity, creativity, and anonymity, present opportunities for young people to explore alternative role models and

choices, and they offer venues to express individuality as well as collective identity. Mass media, urban spaces, public parks, shopping malls, cultural complexes, and local street corners provide arenas for the formation and expression of collective identities. Individuals may bond and construct identities through such deliberate associations and networks as schools, street corners circles, peer groups, and youth magazines. However, identities are formed mostly through ‘passive networks’—that is, instantaneous communications among atomized individuals that are established by the tacit recognition of their commonalities and that are mediated directly through the gaze in public space, or indirectly through mass media.<sup>7</sup> As present agents in the public space, the young recognize common traits by noticing (seeing) shared symbols, for instance, inscribed in styles (T-shirts, blue jeans, hairstyle), types of activities (attending particular sports, music stores, and strolling in streets), and places (stadiums, hiking trails, street corners). Whether the young behave in their sheer youthful impulses or respond to the broader and shifting power structures—of class, gender, race, or age—has been widely debated, but youth political behavior cannot conceivably be understood without considering the interplay of youth-

ful agency and societal structures, mediated by political culture and political opportunity. Youthful claims are articulated mostly at the cultural level and in the form of claims over lifestyle. But youth often get involved in both cultural politics as well as wider political contentions. Thus, to serve as transformative agents, the young would often have to go beyond their exclusive youthful claims to draw on the broader concerns of citizenry. Such was the conduct of the Arab youth who played the leading role in the 2011 uprisings, opening a new chapter in the history of the Middle East.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Like the US Institute of Peace, "Youth Revolt" (Amara)

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Shahata Dina. "Youth Movements and the 25th Jan Revolution", *Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond*, edited by Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi, American University of Cairo Press, 2014; similarly Edward Sayer and Tarik Yousef ascribe the emergence of the uprisings generally to 'youth exclusion', see Sayer, Edward and Tarik Yousef, eds., *Young Generation Awakening: Economics, Society, and Policy on the Eve of the Arab Spring*, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> See Salehi-Esfahani, Djavad, "Schooling and Learning in the MENA: The Roles of the Family and the State", *Young Generation Awakening: Economics, Society, and Policy on the Eve of the Arab Spring*, edited by Edward Sayer and Tarek Yousef, pp. 44-45.

<sup>4</sup> In 2016, 69% of youth, 16-30 year old, in the Arab world (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Yemen, including the Syrian refugees) were living with their parents in one household; see Arab Youth Survey 2016 conducted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin. Aspects of this pattern have emerged recently in the countries hit by financial crisis such as Spain and Greece, where youth unemployment has resulted in diminishing parents' pension funds.

<sup>5</sup> Bayat, Asef, Interviews I, Cairo, July 2003.

<sup>6</sup> More details may found in Bayat, Asef. "Muslim Youth and the Claims of Youthfulness", *Being Young and Muslim: Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, edited by Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat, Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> For an elaborate exposition of "passive networks," see Bayat Asef. *Street Politics: Poor Peoples Movements in Iran*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, chapter 1.

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## ANTI-THESIS

### Arab Youth: A Contained Youth?

Jörg Gertel

Young people in the Arab world increasingly have to struggle with economic hardship and difficulties to start their own lives, although the majority is better educated than ever before. The problematic labor market situation combined with weak public schemes to support young careers force large sections of young people to postpone their ambitions to marry. This period of delayed marriage is captured as 'waithood'. I will argue that this term is misleading. Two points of critique apply: The social dimension of waiting exceeds the status of remaining inactive until something expected happens; the ever-changing present continuously generates new realities. Simultaneously uncertainties and insecurities have dra-

matically expanded since 2011 and further limit livelihood opportunities and future perspectives, particularly of the youth. Young people are hence becoming both, increasingly frustrated and disadvantaged the longer they "wait", and even more dependent on parents and kin networks. This hinders them to develop their personality - they rather have to accommodate with values that are not always suitable to master the present requirements of a globalizing world. In this paper I will inquire, in how far young people of the Arab world have thus to be considered as a "contained youth".

**Keywords:** youth, waithood, contained youth

#### Introduction

Alongside progressing industrialization and modernization, youth has emerged as a social group. Originally being a mere *rite de passage* between childhood and adulthood, adolescence has become a more or less fixed period, both delineated and fragmented by various transitions, such as from completing education to starting work, from living together with parents to moving into independent housing, and from being single to finding a partner to marry and take over responsibility for others. More recently, the time of adolescence has been further extended in Arab countries (but not only there), as marriage increasingly is postponed. Diane Singerman (7) captures this phenomenon as 'waithood', emphasising that delayed marriage has become the norm, mainly for economic reasons. I will argue that the term 'waithood' is no longer able to capture the deep social transformations the current generation of Arab youth are experiencing. 'Waiting' more generally suggests that after a period of delay things will go on; it connotes a status of remaining inactive or of being in a state of repose until something expected happens. This is misleading, as the ever-changing present continuously generates new realities. Moreover, the current situation is particularly dynamic and problematic Three

points are crucial: (1) After decades of neo-liberal restructuring, including the world financial crisis (2007/8), and after the so-called Arab Spring (2010/11), widespread insecurity and uncertainty prevail in most Arab countries. Severe economic problems, political instability, war, and complex emergencies have dramatically reduced public transfers, while voluntary institutions offering social support have also been weakened, with severe repercussions. (2) Dependency on parents, kin and social networks are ever more increasing. Insecurities and status transitions of young people have almost entirely been buffered by family help and solidarity. (3) Liberation from family bonds thus becomes almost impossible, a break with parents often unthinkable. Young people have to accommodate themselves with the rules and moralities of their parents; a large section has hence to be considered a 'contained youth' - one that is enclosed and embedded in family configurations. The consequences are far-reaching: frustration about problematic economic prospects, sublimation of sexual desires, and half-hearted alignments with adult values all constrain juvenile identity formation. If the questioning of social norms and of established thinking is not disentangled and somehow released from kinship ties and innovation are not empowered dur-

ing adolescence, the renewal and regeneration of society is endangered; outdated value-sets are artificially prolonged. Under the global condition—where no one is any longer outside of far-stretching articulations and rather part of global competition—this does not qualify as a solid position from which to master the future. My argument in this essay unfolds in three steps: I inquire about the relations between youth and society, revisit the properties of waithood, and discuss the characteristics of a contained youth.

### Youth and Society

Youth, of course, is just a word (Bourdieu). But what does it represent? A short rite of passage, a period between childhood and adulthood, a status of not yet being married, or rather a still uncompleted achievement of not being a father or mother? With on-going processes of globalization and financialization, the notion of youth has changed during the last decades within and between societies. Three rather rhetorical questions open up the context: How did Arab society change more recently, how is the concept of family related to these transformations, and how did youth emerge as a social category representing specific segments of recent Arab societies? To address these questions I will juxtapose some key criteria

from the Arab world with some insights from German youth studies and inquire about the (changing) properties of youth within different societies. This is not to say that Arab or European societies, such as the 'German,' contain only one type of youth, one type of family or one coherent society. Obviously, the following statements will entail great generalizations. It is thus neither a search for singularity nor for uniformity, but rather an attempt to create abstract positions that open up a spectrum of possibilities to capture different notions of youth.

Elizabeth Warnock Fernea reflects on the shifting notions of childhood in the Middle East. She explains:

In the predominately agrarian societies in the past, the primary social unit in the Middle East was the extended family, which might range in size from 20 to 200 persons, related on both sides of the marital connection. Within this kin group, each child received identity, affection, discipline, role models, and economic and social support, ideally from birth to death; in exchange the family required conformity and loyalty from all members, beginning in early childhood. The crucial test of allegiance came with the time of marriage,

when the man or woman either acceded to or rebelled against the wishes of the family in preparing to extend the family unit into another generation, for marriage in the system was not officially perceived as an emotional attachment between individuals [but] as an economic and social contract between two family groups, a contract that was to benefit both. Although marriage was a crucial step in tying individual members to the group, it was the birth of children that conferred full adult status on both the man and the woman. Only after the birth of children were the newly married man and women considered full members of their particular family unit and adult members of the wider society (Warnock Fernea 5).

In agrarian societies, youth as period thus hardly existed.<sup>1</sup> Children were incorporated into the labour regime of extended families and local communities and only after marriage achieved the status of being adult, though they only became a full member of society after children were born. This requirement can be comprehended as a necessity of social reproduction, but also as a condition to achieve social security: Children were expected to assist parents throughout their lives, as no other institutions or systems of welfare

offered an alternative source of security. Indeed, even today the disposable male labour reservoir largely determines the livelihood security of nomadic families (Gertel and Breuer). With the ongoing transformation of agrarian societies, profound changes through the monetarization of labour relations, rapid urbanization, public education and lately driven by the expansion of wireless communication opened up spaces for the formation of youth as a social group. Warnock Fernea continues her argument and further quotes Mohammed Soufani from the Ministry of Education in Morocco, who emphasises still in 1988 that children are situated between two worlds: “that of their illiterate, unambitious, resigned parents and of their ‘modern’ educated, highly aspiring peers.” He continues:

At a time when old absolutes are crumbling and old values are disregarded, what are young people to do? They are endangered because they are, in terms of values at least, at sea (Mohammed Soufani in Warnock Fernea 4).

To comprehend the massive ruptures that are fragmenting Arab societies and contribute to the formation of youth as a social category, a closer look into economic developments is helpful.

The initiative of James Côté (527) for a renewed understanding of youth from a political economy perspective recently opened up a contested debate about the relations between the situation of young people and the dynamics of the wider economy. Based on the observation of a (systematic) ‘proletarianization’ of youth, Côté demands identifying the root causes for this development. He assumes that the deterioration in material conditions is linked to the global economic depression, representing one of the most severe crises of capitalism, expressed, for example, in unemployment, social exclusion and serious wealth inequalities. Subsequently, he asks to further inquire into how far neoliberalism impacts on the prolongation of youth and thus contributes to the diminished economic prospects of young people. Sukarieh and Tannock (1), referring to Côté and his critics (e.g. France and Treadgold 612), argue for realigning youth studies in order to capture a wider social field. This corresponds to the various studies undertaken to comprehend social insecurity in the first place. One strand of research, originating from studying marginalization, poverty, and vulnerability in the global south, is largely linked and connected to development discourse. Another, second strand, addressing the impact of neoliberalism in dismantling

welfare states in Europe and elsewhere, is connected to the inquiry into changing conditions of labour and increasing precarisation. In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007/08, the two fields experienced a conversion and also a joint interest in studying and comprehending the role of young people (Gertel "Ungewissheit" 39).

### Global South: Expanding

Although the development discourse was able to highlight historical causes of inequality, scrutinize the impact of the new international division of labour in the 1970s, analyse the consequences of the debt crisis for Arab economies in the 1980s, and also tackle the social consequences of structural adjustment measures, youth were almost never identified as a target group. Youth as a social group only appeared on the social surface in struggles for political independence, as an anticolonial revolutionary generation. But increasing poverty, combined with severe cuts in public subsidy systems, caused recurrent IMF or bread riots and widespread insecurity (Walton and Seddon). An increasing 'strata of the insecure' (Elwert et al. 284) emerged, particularly among the growing masses of city dwellers. Semsek offers an implicit positioning of youth when he describes a

potential successful 'modern' agent in urban Cairo:

The individual becomes a free-floating agent, acting daily, in different spheres, with different keys of action. To achieve prosperity people have to be successful on all occasions. [A]n individual who tries to integrate all such different ways of being into one frame of action has not understood that modernity demands a lot, not least a multiplicity of human actions (Semsek 283).

Bennani-Chraïbi captures related identity constructions for Moroccan youth as 'bricolage culturelle' (102). It is from here, from the multiplicity of lifestyles and the contestation of traditional role models, that student protests in Arab countries and youth subcultures developed, rendering youth newly visible in society. Bayat (115) comprehends this as the 'claim of youthfulness', cumulating in the so-called Arab Spring when young people initiated mass protests (Gertel and Ouassa).

Two trajectories are crucial: On the one hand, 'youth' emerged as a social category in the Arab world only recently. From the very beginning, though, different groups and various subcultures developed, structured by gender, age and confessional

lines, but also subdivided by interests in music, sport and clothing styles, consumption patterns and political provenience (Herrera and Bayat). This development has been compounded by rapidly spreading communication technologies starting in the 1990s, such as the introduction of SAT-TV, mobile phones, Internet infrastructure and smart phones. Alternative lifestyles became visible and lived distinctions between Arab youth, as a social category beyond the family, and local communities became possible. On the other hand insecurities – economic, political and cultural – expanded, while coping strategies to buffer transformations and insecurities were not able to follow the pace and depth of changes. Whereas their parents, particularly men, had been able to enter into secure labour conditions in still-existing Arab welfare states until the mid 1980s, young people – the newly forming youth – grew up in neoliberal times, experiencing both insecurity for their own life trajectories and dependency on their families.

It is from this disjuncture where the argument of 'waithood' unfolds. Marriage has become increasingly costly, not only for young people and their families; its economic scope has stretched beyond kin networks and impacted on national economies. In Egypt, for example, its total eco-

economic significance exceeds the amount of economic aid, of all foreign remittances, and almost equalled total tourist revenues in 1999 (Singerman 11). Practices of marriage are thus thoroughly embedded in society and not easy to change. Young people and their families have to save money for years in order to be able to accumulate the capital needed to marry and start a family. Ten years ago Singerman emphasized the consequences:

Throughout the Middle East, the family not only financially supports the children until they marry, but it also supervises community norms and morality. Families are intimately and extensively involved in nearly all realms of social, political, moral, and economic life such as educating children, childrearing, securing employment, negotiating the bureaucracy and engaging with the political elite, establishing and maintaining businesses, saving money, promoting morality and status, distributing resources and information, securing credit, organizing migration, and policing sexuality (Singerman 36).

This all comes together as a “family ethos” that while creating security for young people in the midst of expanding uncertainty is “supporting the status quo” (Singerman,

37). From here my critique starts, challenging this notion of a fixed reality of a conserving status quo.

Over the last decade insecurity has largely expanded in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly after the Arab Spring. Not only do armed conflicts dominate everyday life in Libya, Yemen, and Syria today, but for many other countries the situation is also extremely problematic. Millions of refugees live in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey; revenues from tourism, an important pillar of national economies, have collapsed in Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan, while at the same time investments are declining, with few exceptions, due to political instability. Accordingly, the latest Arab Human Development Report states that the Human Development Index—a measure of a country’s level of development—has fallen substantially since 2010, and inequality in Arab countries has increased (AHDR, 1.2). This is not to say that these problems are generated exclusively internally. Given the colonial past, asymmetric exchange systems, and extensive deregulation and privatization, together with the expanding impact of the international financial system, external and internal causes of inequality are highly articulated on a global scale. Young peo-

ple live in the midst of the turmoil of a further polarizing world.

### Global North: Shrinking

Changes are also occurring north of the Mediterranean. Based on Robert Castel’s observation of expanding social insecurity in Europe and on Klaus Dörres’ insights on the working society, the debate on precarity and a renewed social question took off, particularly after the financial crisis. As a consequence of neoliberal restructuring, dissolving welfare states, flexibilization of labour regulations, and increasing insecurities, disparities have expanded. According to Castel & Dörre, precarity shows four features: (a) In cases when employees or workers fall below a (local) common standard of income, of protection or of social integration, they are considered to live in precarity. (b) The subjective dimension of precarious labour entails the loss of making sense, deficits in appreciation, and uncertainties in planning ahead. (c) Precarity is thus comprehended as a relational category, depending on the social delineation for common standards. (d) Subsequently, the precariat is not a homogeneous class. Resulting from the erosion of common standards, different societal zones of integration, precarity and decoupling emerge. Marchart extends the argument and stresses that precarity—in all

its different forms—has already expanded into general society, transgressing the field of labour relations, shaping as well the spheres of reproduction, generating fear, and constituting a society of precarity. North-South differences, as a consequence, have further been blurred.

Particularly young people in Mediterranean countries, such as Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal, have more recently been hit by expanding insecurities such as youth unemployment (Bush et al.). Transitions from school into higher education and vocational training, and also from higher education into the labour market, became increasingly problematic; even for young people with university degrees easy transitions are no longer a given. Limited labour contracts, part-time employment, contracted and temporary work, and precarious self-employment contribute to a prolongation of adolescence far into adulthood. While European youth do comply with the requirements for social upward mobility (education, flexibility, work experience), the official promises of accessing formal, stable and well-paid jobs and being integrated into society are no longer fulfilled everywhere (e.g. for Greece, see Grekopoulou; and for Portugal, see the protest song of Deolinda). These uncertainties in an increasingly frag-

mented world have to be navigated by young people, but what about their internal insecurities?

Youth, including German youth, live in a liminal world, as the huge corpus of literature reveals (cf. Mansel and Brinkhoff; Flammer and Alsaker; Albert et al.). Physical and psychical processes of restructuring urge young people to disentangle the bonds of family dependencies and to detach and free themselves from the 'embodied parents' (Schröder & Leonhardt). Becoming a member of the world of adults and thus of society requires an adolescent to re-evaluate emotional and social ties, to break with unwelcome parental determination, and to appropriate self-experienced and adjusted sets of values. The simultaneous desires for recognition and appreciation on the one hand and for autonomy and individuation on the other conjoin in the longing to be accepted as a responsible person that, however, still needs space to develop. Adolescence is thus marked by the concurrence of different aspirations: biological, cultural and occupational identity fragments develop and mutually constitute the subject. This is not a linear process; progressive ambitions are rather often accompanied by regressive tendencies.

To sum up: Uncertainties and insecurities of young people conjoin and interfere with each other, both in the Arab world as well as in Europe (cf. Albert and Gertel, 357). What does this encounter entail for the respective societies and different groups of young people? Every society with an interest in renewal and regeneration should create conditions to allow the questioning of its norms and of established thinking and should develop the capacity to empower the creativity and innovation that is released during adolescence. This idea comes, of course, not uncontested, as it threatens authorities, and it is realized only to certain degrees and in specific times. The European youth of the 1920s and 1960s are, for example, valued as a development model that has to be protected by society (Schröder & Leonhardt). In these periods, youth have been recognized as strategic social groups oriented towards education and experimenting with new lifestyles and new ways of thinking.

### **Contained Youth**

The majority of Arab countries are recently shaped by a loss of employment security, expanding precarity and a failed promise of education enabling social mobility. With few suitable jobs for qualified young people and limited mobility opportunities,

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the juvenile phase is, as a consequence, extended for many as they lack the necessary resources to start a family. Young adults can hardly liberate themselves from the bonds of their families to become emotionally and financially independent, which increases the potential for individual frustration and forms new collective moralities. A longitudinal study in Rabat (Gertel, "Jugend(t)räume und Alltag", 26) juxtaposes the situation of about 400 young people in 2002 and in 2012; it compares the importance of family support and current anxieties among young unmarried people (aged 15-34 years) one year after 9/11 and one year after the events of 2011 (Arab Spring). Two findings are crucial: Firstly, although the general self-assessment of the economic situation increased considerably during these ten years, the most frequent fear of young people, namely that of "being not as successful as one wish" also increased. The pressure of being successful under any circumstances is deeply felt. Secondly, the largest increase of fears was "to break with the parents". Hence, parents and kin relations offer support to an extent that the role of the family can hardly be called into question. A more recent study from 2016/17 of 9,000 young people (aged 16-30 years) capturing nine Arab countries reveals that the majority, more than two-

thirds, would indeed raise their children 'about the same' or even 'in exactly the same way' as their parents raised them (Gertel and Kreuer, 80). Young people in the Global South are increasingly becoming a contained youth, a group that has to cope with the bifurcation of increasing economic and political insecurities preventing long-term life plans on the one hand, and of growing dependencies that are entangled with moral standards of former generations. These have often been not developed to handle the demands and norms of modernity. They rather continue to unfold as a series of almost uninterrupted valued interventions into the everyday lives of young people who are simultaneously exposed to accelerating exchange relations, expanding consumerism, and omnipresent visual images of alleged needs. Both are shaping personal imaginations, aspirations, expectations and encounters – entailing, at times, dramatic potentials of severe collisions.

### What follows

One of the foundational questions in youth studies still remains whether the category of 'youth' represents a group by itself, with shared or unifying properties, or rather in how far it constitutes a catch-all category, containing different and varying subgroups, depending, for example, on

age, marital status, income and peer group. For the group of contained youth this question has to be extended: A contained youth does not exist by itself. It is best comprehended in relation to parents, as they mutually depend on each other. The family constitutes the unit of reproduction that decides about female and male obligations, options, careers, and perspectives. This holds true for identity formation, educational careers, the entry into labour markets and marriage options. As a consequence, adolescents should be addressed together with their family as a unit of analysis in post-Arab-Spring youth studies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This is not to say that we should assume a stable secure past of youth in the Arab world, living in homogeneous agrarian societies with functioning and uncontested social structures. Rather, socio-economic differences, including a variety of political conflicts, also prevailed in Arab countries throughout the last century.

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# META

## It's Time to Talk about Youth in the Middle East as *The Precariat*<sup>1</sup>

Linda Herrera

In 2011, the year of the Arab uprisings, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* by Guy Standing hit the bookstands. The concept *precariat* describes the condition of life and labour among educated urbanized youth in the twenty-first century more lucidly and persuasively than the key policy literature on the region, as exemplified in *The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2016:*

*Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality.* This paper argues that any meaningful conceptualization of youth in North Africa and West Asia going forward should incorporate the notion of *precariat* and the condition of precariousness.

**Keywords:** Youth; Precarity; Arab Uprisings; Policy; Dignity

Today's youth have been cast in a condition of liminal drift, with no way of knowing whether it is transitory or permanent. (Bauman 76).

In 2011, the year of the Arab uprisings, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* by Guy Standing hit the bookstands. Standing, a labour economist and Professorial Research Associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), gives a name and policy context to a new global class of people who labor in circumstances of extreme structural insecurity, whose lives are "fleeting and flexible, opportunistic rather than progressively constructed" (Standing, *The Precariat* 223). Like Standing, the late sociologist Zygmunt Bauman was weary of the destructive effects of globalized modernity on the world's youth. He wrote about youth as being cast into an ocean of "liminal drift" (Bauman 76), a metaphor which unfortunately has taken on a literal meaning as growing numbers of young people risk perilous journeys across seas and land in search of a tenable and dignified life.

Drawing on decades of work at the International Labour Organization (ILO), Standing identifies the precariat as a growing global class who suffer from "the

4 A's—anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation" (*The Precariat* 33). He recognizes that precarity is a condition that afflicts women and men across generations, but emphasizes its particular toll on youth ("Why the precariat"; *The Corruption*). We should stress that Standing's ideas particularly pertain to *educated, credentialed* and to some degree, *urbanized* youth. This demographic cohort often gets subsumed under the title of millennials, born roughly between 1982 to 2002. We might very well call emerging generations, *the precariats* or *the precarious generation*. A large swath of these under-35s have played by the rules of supposed meritocratic systems of education, often at great cost and sacrifice to themselves and their families. Yet at the end of long, expensive and laborious educational journeys, they "are not offered a reasonable bargain" (Standing, *The Precariat* 112).

Standing, while by no means a specialist on the Middle East region, what I prefer to designate as North Africa and West Asia (NAWA), describes the condition of life and labor among educated urbanized youth in the twenty-first century more lucidly and persuasively than the key policy experts on the region. The main argument here is that any meaningful conceptualization of, and engagement with, youth

and generations in NAWA going forward should incorporate the notion of *precariat* and the condition of precariousness.

### Precarious—an Evolution

The word precarious has undergone a significant shift in meaning and usage since it first entered the English lexicon in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Gilliver). Precarious derives from the Latin word *prex* or *prec* (prayer). In its early usage in the 1640s, *precarious* [sic] referred to something "obtained through prayer or supplication," such as the right to occupy land or hold a position. These favors were "given 'at the pleasure of' another person, who might simply choose to take it back at any time" (Gilliver). In this sense, people who were neither protected by laws, nor afforded rights of citizenship and due process, had to turn to God and the propertied and positioned class to secure some degree of security. By 1680 the word evolved to mean "dependent on the will of another." This element of dependency carried an inherent association with a "risky, dangerous, uncertain" situation (Online Etymology Dictionary). From the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning of precarious shifted away from human relations of dependency and whim, to refer to insecurity resulting from physical danger. For instance, precarity would result from an "unsound, unsafe, rickety" structure

(Oxford English Dictionary). In the post-9/11 period in the United States, the term entered critical social theory, most notably with Judith Butler's work, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Butler looks at how the 9/11 terrorist event unleashed a transnational chain of precarity for victims and perpetrators of violence. In 2011, Guy Standing brought the term into the realms of social policy, political economy, sociology and labor economics. Over the course of three decades, Standing has observed the gradual closing of the commons, the disenfranchisement of workers and demise of citizen rights and due process. These changes have occurred in a global context in which unions and other forms of organizing have faced growing assaults. He has watched the nature of work fundamentally change with the spectacular spread of digital technologies and automation. Taking all these transformations into consideration, Standing merged the words *precarious*, the overwhelming feature of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with *proletariat*, a class designation, into *the precariat*. That term was evidently coined a decade earlier in Italian as *il precariato* following the 2001 anti-G8 protests in Genoa (Bremen), but Standing substantiated it with reams of economic data and political and historical context.

Standing's critics have taken issue with his notion that the precariat might constitute an emerging global class. They argue that he misunderstands the nature of *class* and that he is too Eurocentric since he draws considerably—though not exclusively—on data from the *Global North* (Bremans; Munck). These critiques have some validity, but they tend to miss the point. Standing is not talking about class in a traditional Marxian sense. Rather, he provides a language to make visible a widespread pattern of insecurity and anxiety connected to changing structures of work and rights. As more people recognize precarity as a common condition, as they understand the structures, policies and norms that perpetuate it, they can potentially build movements and tools to collectively confront and change it. Standing insists that the precariat “is a class in the making, is the first mass class in history that has systematically been losing rights built up for citizens” (Standing, “Why the precariat”). His observations and arguments are especially germane to the study of youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Youth and Precarity

The first reason for the need for a reconceptualization of youth to *include the precariat* has to do with ideology and the ubiquity of the idea that “there is no alter-

native” (TINA) to the market. In the past three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the language and logic of markets has seeped into all forms of social and economic policy, crowding out other ways of imagining and organizing the world. States, civil society, Islamist movements, non-governmental organizations, global finance organizations, United Nations bodies and even youth activists, have all more or less reinforced policies that steer children and youth into a neoliberal global order. They support policies of consumerism, marketing, and economic growth over more sustainable and fairer alternatives. In areas of citizenship and democracy, they advocate the individual’s right to express herself and to self-identify with discreet gender and ethnic categories as a sort of substitute to building public culture, deliberating across lines of difference and organizing for political and social change. In other words, a range of actors support the fragmentation of the polity into micro sub-groups and the normalization of market-oriented neoliberal subjectivities.

In the MENA region, two major events have generated tensions within a market and individualized discourse and policy on youth. First, the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, ushered

in a more explicit security orientation towards Muslim youth, particularly in the Muslim majority countries of the Middle East and West Asia. Young people became matters of containment and security, in addition to retaining their positions as consumers, individuals and workers in a globalized economy (Bayat and Herrera; Sukarieh and Tannock). In the ensuing years, it was common to read about young people as the *Generation in Waiting* (Dhillon and Yousef).<sup>2</sup> The logic was that while young people were waiting for jobs and opportunities, they were in need of interventions to offset the potential lure of extremism and radicalization. Ironically, there was little acknowledgement of the effects of western-led wars, arms sales, and foreign occupations on the lives, emotional development, political orientation and opportunities for young people. Instead, a spate of policies from the international community and NGO sectors insisted on programs for democracy promotion, volunteerism and entrepreneurship, which were connected in various ways to youth lifestyles and consumerism.<sup>3</sup>

Second, and apparently without warning, in 2011, millions of people poured into streets across the Arab states demanding “bread, freedom and social justice.” Young people led the calls against their auto-

cratic rulers. Together with other segments of the population—factory workers, members of professional associations, women, the elderly, children, the retired—they demanded justice, the rule of law, the right to live with dignity and to secure livelihoods. The western media and scholarly community initially celebrated the *Arab Spring* and rebranded young people in the region as “non-violent champions of democracy” and the tech savvy and liberal “Facebook youth.”<sup>4</sup> However, as counter-revolution set in in Egypt and several states spiraled into war, with Syria, Yemen, and Libya becoming sites of proxy wars, unbridled violence and failed states, the initial enthusiasm for the uprisings abated. The old paradigms for youth containment and development quickly made a comeback.

#### **Business as Usual: The 2016 Arab Human Development Report on Youth**

The international community continued its development agenda as if the uprisings, the most momentous grassroots political event in the region in over a half century, had not even occurred. *The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*, stands as a case in point. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has produced The

Arab Human Development Reports every five years since 2002. These reports, authored by groups of experts from and on the region, are designed to build partnerships with local stakeholders and to serve as the “instruments for measuring human progress and triggering action for change.” They specifically provide guidelines for “region-specific approaches to human rights, poverty, education, economic reform, HIV/AIDS, and globalization” (UNDP).

The 2016 AHDR report on youth, released roughly six years after the start of the Arab uprisings, was an opportune moment for development scholars and policy experts to reflect on the seismic shifts occurring in societies across the region. The uprisings were a clarion call from millions of people, and especially young people, that *business as usual* can no longer be an option. Unfortunately, the opportunity was missed, and the AHDR 2016 instead put forward the old prescriptive model of development, amidst overwhelming evidence of its decay and failure.

The concepts, *participation*, *empowerment* and *youth agency*, frame the policy conversation on youth. These concepts derive from a human development and human capabilities approach which dates

to the 1990s. A passage from the introductory chapter reads:

Like its predecessors, this sixth AHDR is grounded in a concept of human development that embraces human freedom as a core value. [...] A central cross-cutting concept in the AHDR 2016 is youth empowerment [...] Key to this concept is a sense of agency, whereby Youth themselves become resolute actors in the process of change. The concept is embedded in self-reliance and based on the realization that young people can take charge of their own lives and become effective agents of change. (25).

By borrowing the market language of choice and individual agency, this definition obscures the notion of *power*, the very core of the word *empowerment*. In fact, it excises politics and *power relations* from the act of empowerment. Instead, the report places the *individual* at front and center, relegating the *collective*, *the social*, *the community*, to the shadows. The authors further obfuscate the potentials of youth collective struggle by using the terms *youth* and *young people* interchangeably. The term *young people* denotes human beings of a particular age with no especial relation to history. *Youth*,

on the other hand, signifies a social collectivity similar to a social class or an ethnic group. A group by definition harbors a consciousness of itself as sharing certain features and interests, and thereby occupies a distinct place in the power structure and the historical process.

The message to young people is that they should pull themselves together, become more self-reliant and take charge of their individual lives. In other words, they should become effective agents of change irrespective of structural impediments, lack of support by governments or other institutions, and without turning to politics and organizing. This skewed framing of empowerment advances a model of development in which young people are nudged to break their collective bonds with each other in exchange for facing the future as competing individuals.

Who, we might ask, are the experts who are perpetuating and reproducing these ideas? The production and editorial processes of these reports are murky at best. After the 2016 youth report was released, three of the authors of Chapter 4, "The new dynamics in the inclusion and empowerment of young women," wrote an essay expressing their misgivings about the editorial process. They were

concerned after long passages of their chapter on young women were removed from the report without explanation, thereby altering the meaning and spirit of the chapter. They explain:

Large sections of our text had been excised, including one in which we gave examples of ways in which young women transgress norms surrounding marriage and heteronormativity; another dedicated to young women as producers of culture; and a further section about online activism. ...[O]ur chapter ended up in an obscure editorial process that lacked any proper consultation or transparency. ...It is our understanding that several Arab ambassadors were involved in the process of reviewing the report. (Al-Ali, Ali and Marler).

These authors draw attention to the politics and hierarchies of knowledge production in a multilateral institution. They also help to clarify why a reader of the report encounters contradictory positions and perspectives. In total, 74 people are listed as contributing or advising on the report in some capacity, broken down as follows: 14 members of the core team, 18 background paper authors, 8 members of a readers group, 13 UNDP regional bureau

representatives, and 21 members of a youth consultative group. This collection of people reflects a diversity of opinions, ideological positions and disciplinary differences and priorities.

Despite the din of so many voices, one can distill the big ideas that underpin the major policy priorities around youth. The first pertains to the persistent security concerns, translated to the idea that youth should be the peacebuilders and peacemakers. The second big idea relates to education and its connection to markets and economic growth. The third big idea pertains to youth entrepreneurship, the seeming panacea for all forms of economic, social and political reform.

### **Wars and Repression are not Compatible with Youth Peacemaking**

The 2016 youth report grew out of the August 2015 UN Global Forum on Youth Peace and Security in Amman, Jordan. Following this event the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2250 of 9 December 2015, which urges "Member States to consider ways to give youth a greater voice in decision-making at the local, national, regional and international levels." The resolution highlights, "the threat to stability and development posed by the rise of radical-

ization among young people," and calls for more youth representation as *peace builders* (UN Resolution 2250).

Policies that position youth as so called "empowered peace makers" without addressing massive arms sales, the proliferation of militias and weaponry across the region, contexts of extreme insecurity, the repressive policies of government and occupying regimes, disregard reality in favor of decontextualized ideology. The section of the Security Council Resolution 2250 that deals with prevention of youth violence is a case in point. The resolution stresses:

the importance of creating policies for youth that would positively contribute to peacebuilding efforts, including social and economic development, supporting projects designed to grow local economies, and provide youth employment opportunities and vocational training, fostering their education, and promoting youth entrepreneurship and constructive political engagement (Article 11).

What, for instance, does "constructive political engagement" mean in states where young citizens lead exceedingly politically precarious lives; where they get

arrested, disappeared and tortured for as little as retweeting a comment, standing in a public space to protest an injustice, posting a political joke on Facebook, or dancing in public?<sup>5</sup> On a different but related note, how can young people find a real place at the table of peace negotiations and peace-building during times of extreme destabilization and militarism, as in Syria, Palestine, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan, to name just some of the countries being decimated by warfare, conflict and extreme forms of surveillance and repression? In the absence of any real recognition of geopolitics and pressure on the actors who are creating the situation of violence and repression, the idea of youth empowerment and youth peace-making rings hollow.

#### **Education is Not About Markets**

For decades, the mainstream international policy community has been relegating education and formalized learning to a domain of the market. It has focused obsessively on educational outputs, testing, privatization and related goals such as youth entrepreneurship. In this conceptualization, young lives become themselves market commodities and a survival-of-the-fittest mentality reigns (Giroux). For critical and engaged educators, it has been a matter of great dismay to witness

the ways in which research and policy have narrowly reduced educational institutions to supposed sites of job preparation and markets. The AHDR 2016 follows a pattern of un-problematically correlating education with jobs and the demands of the labor market. The authors of the report reveal ways in which they are driven by an ideology of markets and accountability principles of inputs and outputs, rather than respect for the dignity of children, youth and concern for the well-being of their communities and societies. They write:

Overcoming education system failure must be a priority for policymakers and educators, who should strive to achieve a good fit between the output of educational institutions and the demands of the labor market. This would involve a survey of the distribution of enrolments across subjects, skills and disciplines, upgrades in technical education and a review of curricula to promote problem-solving skills, entrepreneurial and management capacity and the value of self-employment (UNDP 184).

Putting aside the reductive understanding of education illustrated in this passage, we must begin by asking, "What are the



demands of the labor market to which schools and universities must answer?" Currently, the market favors flexible, short-term, disposable and cheap labor. In other words, corporations and global capital needs an unlimited supply of young energetic people who are willing to intern, volunteer, work long hours, work remotely, work with weak or no contracts, continuously retrain, and not make demands for unions, benefits or job security. This growing class, *the precariat*, are people who are

living through unstable and insecure labor, in and out of jobs, without an occupational identity, financially on the edge and losing rights. (Standing, *The Corruption* xiii).

Regrettably, the authors of the AHDR seem to have no problem advocating even more than before on outputs, testing and market style approaches to education. They disregard, indeed implicitly support exploitative and unstable work conditions for young people that ultimately contribute to personal insecurity and politically and socially destabilizing societies.

Schools and universities should decidedly not be institutions that normalize

and reinforce precarity. Educational institutions should certainly play roles in preparing young people for adult roles in work and society. However, the proponents of market-oriented education policies display a callous disregard for the ways in which schools and universities can strengthen social solidarity and nurture a diverse array of human talents and abilities. They do not regard educational institutions as places for young people to develop bonds and understanding across lines of difference, where they can think and work together to find creative solutions to the enormous challenges of contemporary life. Instead, as the mainstream policy community focuses obsessively on outputs, testing and short-term rewards, it proselytizes its big idea, youth entrepreneurship.

### **Entrepreneurship is Not the Solution**

North Africa and West Asia is a region with a disproportionately high percentage of young people, a situation known as a *youth bulge*. It is not clear what percentage of the one hundred million 15-29-year-olds in the predominantly Arab countries, a third of the population, are supposed to become self-employed entrepreneurs. Such a push is reminiscent of the late 1980s and 1990s, when UN agencies, global finance institutions, and non-gov-

ernmental organizations joined forces on a massive scale to promote microfinance to alleviate poverty. After more than three decades of experimentation and data collection, the evidence overwhelmingly points to that fact that microfinance does not cure poverty, and indeed has been a *debt trap* and a *disaster* for many. Economists who have traced the adverse effects of microfinance have argued that in actuality, according to the evidence, microfinance

constitutes a powerful institutional and political barrier to sustainable economic and social development, and so also to poverty reduction. [...] [C]ontinued support for microfinance in international development policy circles cannot be divorced from its supreme serviceability to the neoliberal/globalisation agenda (Bateman and Chang 13).

Small-scale, temporary-income-generating activities should not be conceived as a substitute for stable work, social protections and due process of the law. Likewise, evidence is mounting that youth entrepreneurship, while it can certainly benefit some people in the short term, is more likely to lead the young to a debt trap, precarity, and/or a cycle of failures. The debt trap is already in clear evidence with the

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student loan epidemic in which growing numbers of students carry debilitating debt (Kamenetz).

While youthful drive and ambition are positive qualities to be nurtured and encouraged, it is unfair and disingenuous to propagate the myth that anyone with an idea, grit and determination can be a successful entrepreneur. Economist Mariana Mazzucato has written extensively on how companies in the *new economy*, such as Apple and Google

that like to portray themselves as the heart of US 'entrepreneurship', have very successfully surfed the wave of US government-funded investments.

The Internet, GPS, touchscreen displays and Siri are among the startups that benefitted from steep US government funding. If Arab governments and businesses in the NAWA region are serious about youth entrepreneurship, they should provide resources and support organizations to guide and support young talent, not lead them down a road of borrowing and debilitating debt.

### Conclusion: Youth Studies and Precarity

Change is happening faster than ideas and policies to deal with it. As students

and scholars, as members of international development and policy communities who want to sincerely advance security, dignity, livelihoods and democracy, we must acknowledge those misguided policies that have contributed to the current detrimental state of affairs. We collectively face the daunting task of forging an alternative future.

If we listen to, respect and take seriously the voices of youth that rang out during the 2011 uprisings, we will hear that these old ideas that have informed education, employment and youth policies are not working. Those of us working in the NAWA region, in youth studies, and education and social policy need more than the tools of critique to move forward. We need to reclaim research and scholarship as a collective means to better understand the current realities and challenges. Our work should aid in understanding the structures of precarity and the responses to them. Standing posits that since youth "make up the core of the Precariat" they are the ones that "will have to take the lead in forging a viable future for it" (*The Precariat* 113). A more rigorous and engaged scholarship can guide the young towards a road of opportunity, security and dignity, rather than push them further along a perilous path of precarity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were published in *MadaMasr* (Herrera, "Precarity of Youth") and in *The Middle East in London Magazine* (Herrera, "Middle East Youth").

<sup>2</sup> The concept "generation in waiting" shares features with an older concept in youth studies, "generation on hold" (Cote).

<sup>3</sup> For an example of democracy promotion programs that combined youth lifestyles and consumerism with forms of youth political engagement "Cyberdissident Diplomacy," chapter 2 in Herrera's *Revolution in the Age of Social Media*.

<sup>4</sup> For examples, see the cover story of *Time Magazine*, "The Generation Changing the World" and Wael Ghonim's *Revolution 2.0*.

<sup>5</sup> See the Middle East and North Africa section of the online platform, *Global Voices*, for reporting on a wide range of issues pertaining to censorship, arrests and intimidation of youth activists and social media users.

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## Analyzing Moroccan ‘Youth’ in Historical Context: Rethinking the significance of social entrepreneurship

Shana Cohen

Popular analyses of political discontent among young people converged on a global level after the advent of the economic crisis in 2007-08. They have referred to pervasive alienation, frustration, disappointment, and fear, depicting a generation exploited by ruthless business owners, neglected by policy elites, and abandoned by older generations. The analyses likewise share an understanding of the meaning of ‘youth’, namely a population defined by narrow-

ing economic opportunities under global market capitalism and subsequent protest. This paper attempts to go beyond this conception to explore the emergence of a new framework for agency. More specifically, the paper aims to go beyond interpreting the behavior of ‘youth’ in the Arab World, especially among educated young men and women, as simply about protest. Instead, the paper posits that concurrent trends in privatization of public services, increasing individual and

local responsibility for social problems and job creation, job insecurity, and greater exposure to rights and government accountability are influencing capacity to influence local change and likewise, challenging boundaries between social, political, and economic agency. Drawing on longstanding research on social activism in Morocco, the paper adapts the language of theorists of generational formation and consciousness (see Edmunds and Turner 2002, 2005) to argue that the initial consequence of market reform in the eighties and nineties was the formation of an ‘interval generation’, disenfranchised economically and unrepresented politically. Over the past 5-10 years, though, the entrenchment of globalization and neoliberal ideology have led to the emergence of an ‘active generation’ maneuvering to influence policy and liberal market capitalism through altering local economic and social opportunities. This maneuvering is particularly apparent in the rise of social entrepreneurship, not just as an employment policy, but also as an indicator of how the boundaries between economic, political, and social agency at a local level have blurred.

*Keywords:* youth; North Africa; entrepreneurship; identity

### Introduction

Popular analyses of political discontent among young people converged on a global level after the advent of the economic crisis in 2007-08. They have referred to pervasive alienation, frustration, disappointment, and fear, depicting a generation (see Edmunds and Turner) exploited by ruthless business owners, neglected by policy elites, and abandoned by older generations. Looking for alternative political ideas, they turn to right-wing (Bayer; Mondon and Bowman) or left-wing populism (Mounk), radical religious groups, or just to the streets, to protest. Writing for the *South China Morning Post*, Yonden Lahtoo criticizes property developers

preying on the youth demographic by building shoebox-sized flats and mis-marketing them as 'trendy' homes for the young, upcoming proletariat. Add other unsavory predators to the mix, such as businessmen renting out cubicle sleeping spaces that resemble hyperbaric chambers, and you have a cesspool of greed and desperation that is not just a blight on this city [Hong Kong], but on humanity itself. (November 17, 2016)

Reports on protests in Russia, the United States, Europe, and the Arab World are

strikingly similar, describing a newly mobilized generation desirous of a more stable, promising future. A young man quoted in the *New York Times* commented that the unexpectedly high turnout among young people at the March 2017 anti-corruption protests in Russia was because young people "just want to live like normal, modern people in the rest of Europe" (Higgins and Kramer A1). An article on the left-leaning American news site *Salon* challenged the criticism of the 'millennials' as lazy and over-protected and pointed out that,

In 2015, millennials became the largest voting bloc in the nation, overtaking baby boomers. And, despite the hype, millennials are voting. Even more, they are protesting and organizing and making their voices heard" (McClennen).<sup>1</sup>

The same references to suffering from decision-making or negligence amongst political elites and the grim future young people may face characterize analyses of protest and alienation in the Arab World. The *20 Fevrier* movement in Morocco during 2011-2012 was supposed to, as in Russia in 2017 or Hong Kong in 2016, fight corruption and make the government more accountable, particularly for their future. As one journalist said of the de-

monstrations several years afterwards,

During this period, most political parties were terrified of the youth's rebellion, disobedience, and their strong insistence to speak out against inequality and injustice by manifesting their claims and demands in the streets instead of with ink and paper (Igroupane).

In response, the Moroccan government did amend the constitution to protect the right of assembly and peaceful demonstration and the right to join trade unions and parties, but the practical exercise of these rights has remained legally ambiguous (Madani et al 21). Thus, though more stable politically than other countries in the region, with its high unemployment (and most likely underemployment) rates among young people, declining public health and education services, and persistent concentration of power in political elites, Morocco possesses a similar context for disenfranchisement to other countries in the Arab World and elsewhere.

Beyond the common characterization of this disenfranchisement, the analyses share a conceptual understanding of what 'youth' is, namely a population defined by narrowing economic opportunities under

global market capitalism and subsequent protest. This paper attempts to go beyond a conception of youth as a passive construct of international and national policies and economic ideology and trends (Sukarieh and Tannock; France and Threadgold) to explore the emergence of a new framework for agency. Though I am not an expert in youth studies, the paper develops upon a debate in the field concerning the political economy of youth, namely on the relative importance of economic (neoliberal) ideology and inequality to the identity and behavior of young people. Sukarieh and Tannock describe this approach to the study of youth as concerning “how (and whether) individuals and groups come to be constituted as ‘youth’ in the first instance.” The analysis itself is of “the continuously changing nature and significance of youth as an identity, social category and ideology, in relation to the broader contexts of local, national and global culture, society, politics and economy” (1283). More specifically, the paper aims to go beyond interpreting the behavior of ‘youth’ in the Arab World, especially among educated young men and women, as simply about protest. Instead, the paper posits that concurrent trends in the privatization of public services, increasing individual and local responsibility for social problems and job

creation, job insecurity, and greater exposure to rights and government accountability are influencing capacity to influence local change and, likewise, challenging boundaries between social, political, and economic agency. I suggest that the consequence has been to alter perceptions among young people as to how they can demonstrate their own power and achieve recognition.

Drawing on longstanding research on social activism in Morocco, the paper adapts the language of theorists of generational formation and consciousness (see Edmunds and Turner) to argue that the initial consequence of market reform in the eighties and nineties was the formation of an ‘interval generation’, disenfranchised economically and unrepresented politically. Over the past 5-10 years, though, the entrenchment of globalization and neoliberal ideology has led to the emergence of an ‘active generation’ maneuvering to influence policy and liberal market capitalism through altering local economic and social opportunities. This maneuvering is particularly apparent in the rise of social entrepreneurship, not just as an employment policy, but also as an indicator of how the boundaries between economic, political, and social agency at a local level have blurred. In

Morocco - with its longstanding embrace of entrepreneurship to counter unemployment, political support for civil society, and a policy of decentralization, accelerated since the constitutional reforms of 2011 - the ambition to instigate change at a local level and the blurring of boundaries between sectors may be more pronounced than in countries such as Jordan, where the public sector is more predominant.

The paper first discusses how theorists have situated ‘youth’ within historical context, and then explores how analysis of generational change can reveal transformation in the meaning and practice of citizenship and suggest long-term economic and political implications.

### **Conceptualizing Moroccan ‘Youth’ in Historical Context**

#### **Distinguishing Generations Over Time**

Conceptualizing the agency of youth in relation to a particular political economic context differs from theories of generations, namely those originally developed by Karl Mannheim. The latter are rooted in demographics and the viability of a coherent, cohesive perception of commonality and purpose shared across individuals

and groups of similar ages. Mannheim explains that

Fundamental integrative attitudes and formative principles are all-important . . . in the handing down of every tradition, firstly because they alone can bind groups together, secondly, and, what is perhaps even more important, they alone are really capable of becoming the basis of continuing practice" (305).

Building upon Mannheim's work, Eyerman and Turner define 'generation' as a

cohort of persons passing through time who come to share a common habitus, hexis, and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time" (93).

Drawing particularly from the experience of the Sixties, they add that generations are constituted by traumatic events, protest against dominant cultures, competition for resources, collective memory enhanced by the valorization of particular physical spaces (i.e. Woodstock in the Sixties), and passage through specific economic periods, such as the Great Depression or the more current Great Recession (96).

This passage through specific economic periods resonates with the explanations cited above of youth protest and anger. Edmunds and Turner ("Global generations: social change in the twentieth century"), in a later theorization of generations, propose considering generations in Marxist terms of 'in itself' and 'for itself'. They argue that generations make the transition from being a 'passive cohort' to a 'self-conscious cohort' when they "are able to exploit resources (political/educational/economic) to innovate in cultural, intellectual or political spheres" (561). They write:

In our theory, resources, opportunity and strategic leadership combine to constitute active generations. Thus, intergenerational change could be conceptualized in principle as alternating between active and passive generations. An active generation that transforms social and cultural life tends to be followed by a passive one that simply inherits the changes produced by its more successful predecessor (561). Following Mannheim as well as Bourdieu, they portray generations in conflict over resources, as "an active generation closes off potential advantages to successive generations."

Active generations can also "act strategically within a field to influence significantly the opportunities for collective action of future cohorts" (561).

I suggest that social entrepreneurship in Morocco, though still highly limited, indicates the shift from 'passive' to 'active' and with the latter motivation, or to alter, rather than close off, opportunities for future generations.

### **Market Reform in Morocco and the Context for Generational Change**

Situating analysis of generational change within a political economic context, young men and women in postcolonial Morocco arguably identified citizenship with social mobility within the nation-state. Job opportunities and the possibility of economic security (owning a house and consumer goods, the possibility of savings and/or a pension) were linked to public investment in a national society. Political participation focused on, whether in opposition to or in support of the government and the monarchy, political ideology and party agendas. In the market reform period, 'youth' became associated with marginalization within economic globalization and the decline of the nation-state, and likewise pervasive political alienation and disaffection, as citizenship ceased to



have the economic implications of the postcolonial era. (Cohen "Alienation and Globalization in Morocco," *Searching for a Different Future*).

However, market reform policies generated diverse forms of change, not just economic but also in the public sphere and political and social activism. With market liberalization and, notably, more complex and wider relations with international funding bodies such as the World Bank, government became more decentralized, social development more associated with local initiative, and public administration more responsive to local input and feedback. The 2011 Constitution reinforced these trends, stating in the First Article,

The territorial organization of the Kingdom is decentralized, founded on an advanced system of regionalization

and recognizing that

The citizens [feminine] and citizens [masculine] have [disposit] the right to present petitions to the public powers (Constitute Project).

Article 27 reinforces this point, stating,

The citizens [feminine] and citizens

[masculine] have the right of access to information held by the public administration, the elected institutions and the organs [organismes] invested with missions of public service.

The Constitution also provides in Article 31 for

The State, the public establishments and the territorial collectivities to provide equal access to, among other services, healthcare, education 'of quality', 'water and to a healthy environment', and 'lasting [durable] development'.

On a practical level, despite criticism for a lack of vision of social justice and, likewise, instrumentalization of anti-poverty programs to maintain political and economic power<sup>2</sup>, social development policies initiated under King Mohammed VI such as the Initiative Nationale de Developpement Humain<sup>3</sup> have provided employment in social action<sup>4</sup> and, importantly, normalized local activism, especially among young people, as an expression of citizenship (Cohen). The official description of INDH states that,

This community project is a major advance in accordance with the participatory and partnership approach

to development. Proactive and multi-dimensional, the INDH is based on a decentralized approach that promotes access to decision-making; illustrating a targeted policy and strongly rooted at local level.

It then describes one of the program's benefits as

Talking about the civil society evokes the Highest Royal Will to allow all Moroccans (women and men) to participate individually and collectively in the development challenges (INDH).

The effect of greater political and policy attention to governance, government accountability, and civic activism, alongside persistent unemployment rates, has been to broaden public debate concerning political reform and on an individual level, integrate practical action into the meaning of citizenship, or beyond access to public services for individual gain. Indeed, King Hassan II introduced these new dimensions to the public sphere and citizenship when he spoke publically about the World Bank's assessment of Morocco's economic future in the early Nineties (Catusse; Lamli; World Bank). In doing so, he instigated a break with Morocco's economic model of endoge-

nous growth and the severity of government control over public information. The result was to associate external pressure for economic liberalization with political reform. Seemingly contradictory in his politics, a young journalist and prominent critic of the regime in the mid-Nineties told me once, "The World Bank is enforcing accountability." His hope was that the Bank's interventions would increase transparency in economic activity, especially among political and business elites. Discussing the availability of information in Morocco, the director of an international NGO called Hassan II's recognition of World Bank economic concerns in 1993 a 'watershed' moment, when dissemination of information about policymaking and public institutions began to evolve into a public right.

As public institutions have come under pressure in subsequent decades to become more responsive to citizens, the promotion of local civic activism and push toward private sector employment have integrated social change with participation in the global market economy. Rather than join political parties or movements, as in the post-colonial period, political expression among young people who have grown up under market reform is now interrelated with challenging the

organizational forms and values that sustain market capitalism. Though arguably young people have retreated from directly challenging the regime (Engelcke, Desrues), this does not preclude other forms of political activism aimed at transforming social and economic structures.

### Investigating a Generational Shift

#### The Formation of an Interval Generation

From the eighties onwards, young people leaving lycée, university, or vocational school encountered the effects of structural adjustment and market reform measures, which sharply decreased their employment, and life, opportunities. They became an 'interval generation', caught between the decline of an identification of life chances with the nation-state, the ambiguity and insecurity of globalization, the inaccessibility of political power, and limitations on freedom of expression. Analyses of the Arab Spring in particular have highlighted the loss of social belonging engendered by unemployment and lack of capacity to alter the future. A chapter in a 2014 World Bank report on youth unemployment in Tunisia leads with a quote on the existential meaning of a job from an unemployed young man from Sidi Bouzid, where the Arab Spring began:

For us, unemployment is a kind of blasphemy; an unemployed is not a person, society itself does not accept him, he is not part of the circle of society. That is the true meaning of "unemployed": a person who is not active in the heart of the society. Tell me, what use is that person? (24)

Speaking at a special session of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) governing body in 2011, Dorothea Schmidt, a senior specialist in unemployment at the ILO, explained that low wages, lack of social protection and contractual security, and subsequent distrust in the possibility of social mobility have had a predictable effect on confidence in political institutions and politicians. In a press release for the meeting, she is quoted as saying, "it is no wonder that many young people are angry" (ILO).

Despite the recognition of political consequences of unemployment and economic insecurity, policy responses have focused largely on strengthening the connection between skill development, particularly at the level of post-baccalaureate education and vocational training, and job market supply. A few policy recommendations have pushed for minor changes, such as making information about openings more

accessible and the introduction of unemployment insurance, which Morocco implemented in 2014, though targeted at those with employment experience rather than new jobseekers.<sup>5</sup> The dominant narrative of job creation, however, is reflected in King Mohammed VI's *Discours Royal* in August 2014:

To develop qualified human resources is a major priority for enhancing competition and responding as well to the requirements of development and the job market and should complement the advancement and diversification of the national economy.

The reduction of job creation to cultivating human resources neglects both the existential importance of a job conveyed explicitly in the World Bank Report and how particular jobs become important existentially. More importantly, it misses the emergence of alternative forms of political expression facilitated by other policy strategies and programs, as well as the globalization of the economy. These trends have potentially led to the formation of a new, in Edmunds and Turner's perspective, 'active' generation that blurs the boundaries between citizenship and economic opportunity. This shift ironically echoes the substance of post-national

social contracts, where social mobility and citizenship intersected, but the underlying rationale for this relation is not to stabilize and legitimize the nation-state. Rather, the blurred boundaries reflect the nation-state's decline and both the general void left for developing new frameworks of political activism and the specific consequences of devolution policies and the normalization of civic engagement for at least perceived capacity to instigate change at a local level.

### **The Symbolic Importance of Social Entrepreneurship**

To investigate generational change today, I suggest looking at social entrepreneurship, not as a policy strategy to create jobs or address poverty, but rather as an indication of how the individual would-be entrepreneurs at a local level distinguish possibilities for individual agency. The term 'social enterprise' itself is ambiguous and atemporal, perhaps enhancing its value in development policy. Dacin and Tracey distinguish social entrepreneurship by its mission: "creating social value by providing solutions to social problems" (Dacin and Tracey 1204). Martin and Osberg adopt their definition from Schumpeter, substituting social aims for profitmaking while engaging in the same entrepreneur-

ial pursuit of new ideas that renders obsolete other methods.

In Morocco, King Hassan II's statement in 1988 during the opening session of Parliament reinforced the importance of entrepreneurship as a political economic strategy:

Moroccans are entrepreneurial and very often aspire to become, at their own scale, entrepreneurs. We now have to encourage such aspirations, it should not be that potential entrepreneurs feel confined within an economy where they are barred access due either to the concentration of private capital or public enterprises.

The late King added that the goal was to create the conditions for new entrepreneurs to take risks and assume responsibility so that they could become agents in economic development (Catusse 52). Political support for entrepreneurship led to the creation of the oft-criticized (La Vie Eco "Crédit Jeunes Promoteurs") program of *Jeunes Promoteurs* (L'Economiste) and other, more recent efforts. For instance, the World Bank has recently invested \$50 million in support for start-ups,<sup>6</sup> with the aim, as stated by the Maghreb Director Marie Françoise Marie-Nelly, to ease

“access to opportunities for entrepreneurs” because entrepreneurship “is the path to an inclusive growth that is beneficial to all Moroccans” (World Bank “Small enterprises”).

Undoubtedly, entrepreneurship has come to function as a policy alternative for public sector job creation. A baseline report on youth unemployment produced by the organization S4YE (Solutions for Youth Employment) and funded by the World Bank highlights the expectation that entrepreneurship can decrease unemployment rates, especially among young, educated Moroccans. In the press release announcing the report, the S4YE Coalition Manager, Matt Hobson, remarks,

The report shows that young people are by inclination more entrepreneurial than adults - and we now know that of all the interventions governments, private sector and civil society implement to address youth employment, providing support to early entrepreneurs is the most effective (World Bank “Youth unemployment”).

The report itself concludes that entrepreneurship reflects initiative, ambition, and desire for independence from economic forces: (S4YE 2015, 58). Analyses of social

entrepreneurship (Martin and Osberg; Dacin and Tracey; Eppler, Kerlin) also associate entrepreneurial initiative with youth and the desire to help ‘their communities’.

Dart writes that,

As business becomes a more preeminent organizational model and as increasingly wide swaths of human society become conceptualized as markets, then the businesslike hybrid face of social enterprise is legitimate and in fact responsive to the times (421).

In Morocco, The World Bank, in partnership with the British Council, has supported social entrepreneurship to generate economic opportunity and to foster responses to local problems. Their program, launched in 2015, consisted of a boot camp entitled ‘Provision of Employment and Inclusion Services for Youth in Morocco’ for social entrepreneurs that included training for 30 social entrepreneurs and \$10,000 in financing for 10 social enterprises selected through competition. The British Council launched a second program in 2016, Social EntrepreNorth, which is directed at supporting social enterprise in Northern Morocco. Like its predecessor, this pro-

gram is intended to “develop locally-owned, innovative solutions to social and economic challenges,” and specifically, “to train a team of social enterprise trainers and help students gain the skills to secure employment or start their own social enterprises.” Another aim is to develop better relations with local government so that they become “more responsive to youth needs, improve service delivery, and support social enterprise (British Council).”

Examples of social enterprises<sup>7</sup> include Sanady,<sup>8</sup> founded in 2006, which provides educational support through teacher training, after-hours classes, and school refurbishment to children in multiple cities in Morocco. Other, newer social enterprises like Tamkeen<sup>9</sup> in Tangiers run educational workshops to encourage creativity. Looly’s and Al-Ikram (Media24 “La première entreprise sociale”) provide employment to low-income groups through the manufacture of food products or crafts or facilitate market access for small local businesses through online platforms (e.g. Anarouz).

The growing prominence of social entrepreneurship (The Guardian), as perhaps youth entrepreneurship in general, does not preclude its high failure rate. Adhane

Addioui, the director of MCISE, an organization that supports the incubation of social enterprises, told me that of approximately 2000 expressions of interest over the past several years, only 78 were established and only 20 of these have survived (Doane; Cohen *Personal Conversation*). Of the 30 participants in the British Council-World Bank project, and the 10 that received financial support, allegedly only two are still functioning. In his analysis of social entrepreneurship in Morocco, Faouzi notes that the impact of social enterprise remains minimal, referring in particular to the inefficiency of cooperatives (there are approximately 12,000 in Morocco, according to him, with about 450,000 members). Angel-Urdinola concurs in his own analysis, stating that businesses that serve marginalized populations are 'rare' in Morocco (World Bank Blogs), while a British Council report states that in Morocco, "Awareness of social enterprise is considered to be extremely low" (Angel-Urdinola 6, World Bank). The same British Council report on social enterprise in Morocco remarks:

It is clear that the social enterprise movement is being driven by a relatively small circle of people; this circle of people share common characteristics - notably, graduates of higher education

and exposure to international ideas and experiences on social enterprise - which have clearly influenced their thinking on social enterprise development in Morocco.

In other words, only those able to connect to international organizations and sources of capital can lead national efforts to promote social entrepreneurship.

At the same time, though the impact of social enterprises is still essentially unknown, as the majority are relatively new. The evaluations of older initiatives indicate steady growth in networks, projects, and funding sources, as well as effective use of services. Sanady's 2014-15 report (*Sanady Rapport 2015*) states that in a national survey of more than 1700 pupils, 980 parents, and 141 teachers, 97% of the pupils claimed their academic results had improved, whereas 95% of the teachers stated that they were very satisfied with their working conditions and 99% felt that their efforts were valued. A somewhat lower percentage, 73%, of the parents expressed satisfaction with their children's education. Overall, in 2015, the foundation provided educational programs to 4100 pupils and partnered with 38 companies. The number of pupils was more than double the figure cited in the

2011-2012 report, or 1905 pupils, while the number of partner companies was 25 (*Sanady Rapport 2011-2012*).

Local social enterprise has greater implications, though, than employment or even the delivery of a service. It indicates a desire for autonomy and freedom, realized through constructing community, or building social solidarity across different socio-economic groups. The S4YE report generalizes the behavior and attitudes of young people to undergird policy objectives, but the rhetoric also notes the wish for 'control'. This control is identified with initiative and engagement across social and sometimes ethnic and religious diversity (Murphy and Coombes). Addioui remarked that very few of the young entrepreneurs that contacted him were from Rabat or Casablanca and were not necessarily Francophone. They were also often not from families with means, and despite the anxiety and fear of their parents, who needed reliable income, assumed the risk of launching an enterprise.

Social enterprise requires linking global movement of capital, goods, and ideas, social media, and local social change. Without financial support in Morocco, social entrepreneurs have to turn to international foundations like Drosos and national or international competitions

launched by agencies like the World Bank and the British Council, organizations like Seedstars,<sup>10</sup> and companies like Orange.<sup>11</sup> They can also access crowdfunding through online platforms like Kickstarter.

Beyond the practical implications of setting up an enterprise, I suggest that the interrelation between economic opportunity, political expression, and social status indicates the possible formation of a different generation than the one marginalized by the decline of the public sector and political disinterest. In interviews, experienced social activists in Morocco consistently noted the shift in interest among young people, regardless of location, in connecting economic opportunity to local social change and, implicitly or explicitly, political engagement. They remarked frequently in recent conversations (Summer 2017) that younger activists have different expectations than their older counterparts. For instance, the program director of a well-established Moroccan organization noted in an interview that young people view leaders in the sector as 'opportunistic' and 'corrupt', seeking to reinforce personal status and networks through social action. These leaders have also possessed the independent resources to engage in social activism as a vocation, whereas younger activ-

ists have required employment. Unlike their older colleagues as well, they concentrate on immediate local issues, or at commune or even neighborhood level, rejecting the national scope of older organizations. They are engaged in local politics, the program director commented, even if they feel distant from national affairs.

A much younger social activist, who had worked with a number of social enterprises in Rabat and Casablanca, reiterated the distance and suspicion her generation felt toward leaders in social action and civil society in Morocco. "The older generation thinks in terms of charity," she said. She also criticized how the 'older generation' based in the 'North' (Casablanca and Rabat) lack contact with local residents, who were suspicious of externally driven projects. She preferred a "more straightforward method, or talking directly through roundtables" to generate "trust with people on the ground."

#### **Conclusion: The Implications for the Youth of the Future**

The preeminence of local social action in the description and practice of social enterprise upends Zygmunt Bauman's fears that "being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and

degradation" and that "[L]ocalities are losing their meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating capacity and are increasingly dependent on sense-giving and interpreting actions which they do not control" (Bauman 12). Instead, social enterprise makes transforming the local context an avenue for accessing and even influencing globalization.

This paper suggests that social enterprise reflects a generational shift, where, echoing the postcolonial social contract, economic security has become reconnected to citizenship. Today, however, citizenship is constituted differently from belonging to the nation-state and the expectation that the opportunity for social mobility will legitimize political authority. Instead, citizenship among young people in particular often bypasses the national government as an object of reform, allegiance, or contestation, targeting instead the more immediate transformation of local conditions through the utilization and alteration of market mechanisms and pressure on local government. National programs like INDH or the limited resources for social entrepreneurship provide an opportunity for individual activism and maneuvering for local political influence, where citizenship becomes associated with social intervention. Though still emerging as a social

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process, the effect may be to force the question of if and how this new generation's efforts will be recognized and whether or not the blurred boundaries between economic, political, and social agency will, in turn, challenge the divisions between public and private sector and charity and collective benefit.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Brexit vote in the UK highlighted intergenerational tensions and anxiety about the future among young people. Letters to the newspaper *The Guardian* (June 24, 2016) from teenagers spoke of outrage, disgust, exclusion, and a dimming future. One writer stated, "Mostly I am outraged that this decision, which reflects on the British people, has been made without my consent. The future already looks less bright for us and it is a future I did not have a say in shaping." Another blamed older people who voted for a political and policy rupture that would most likely never affect them and called the vote a betrayal of her future: "One thing that upsets me most is that this decision has been made by people who will not have to live with the consequences for as long as us. Young people voted to remain and older people voted to leave. I feel that I have been let down by an older generation who won't be affected by the volatility of this decisions." Those who would remain largely unaffected or benefit financially from leaving the European Union had thought

only of themselves, and not other citizens or even their heirs.

<sup>2</sup> Zemni and Bogaert argue that with INDH, "The logic of participation has become a matter of linking state institutions with 'non-state' experts, NGOs and other social and economic partners. This technocratic approach to development evacuates to a large extent the possibility of politics as conflict is translated into a development target that has a solution based on certain kinds of expertise and knowledge." (412).

<sup>3</sup> INDH. Presentation. <http://www.indh.ma/index.php/en/presentation>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://fr.cctv.com/2016/05/19/ARTI9wytaWf5GvLIWStiCIMk160519.shtml> for a few figures.

<sup>5</sup> La loi no 03-14 complétant et modifiant le dahir no 1-72-184

<sup>6</sup> The webpage describes the project as having "three components. 1) The first component, Financing Program, will target the following funding categories: angel/seed, early-stage, and VC stage. It has the following subcomponents: (i) Angel/Seed financing(s); and (ii) Early stage/VC fund(s). 2) The second component, Ecosystem Support, will support organizations within the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the project area to stimulate new innovative enterprises. It has the following subcomponents: (i) Pre-seed Grants; (ii) Soft Loans; and (iii) Entrepreneurship Support. 3) The third component, Project Management, Coordination, and Monitoring and Evaluation, will fund the Project Management Unit (PMU) and all of its incremental eligible operational and administrative costs for the management and supervision of the project over the project life (six years)." <http://projects.worldbank.org/P150928?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> See <http://dareinc.mcise.org/nos-startups/> for a list supported by MCISE.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.sanady.org/home/>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.tamkeencommunity.org>

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.seedstars.com>

<sup>11</sup> See <http://entrepreneurclub.orange.com/fr/>

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# CLOSE UP

## Ahmed Abdalla: Youth Leader, Intellectual, and Community Worker

Helena Nassif

**Keywords:** Egypt; legacy of Ahmed Abdalla; political struggle; generational problematic

### The Youth Leader

In Spring 2003 after the US-led invasion of Iraq, I met Ahmed Abdalla (1950-2006) with friends at a small restaurant near the American University of Beirut. They introduced him to me as one of the leaders of the Egyptian student movement in the 1970s. That evening, we engaged in long political conversations on the dark future of the Arab region and listened to Sheikh Imam songs. Sheikh Imam and poet Ahmed Fouad Nigm were major cultural symbols of left-wing politics and popular mobilization in Egypt in the 1970s. Even today, I can recall the imprint of Abdalla's charming presence, conviviality, wit, and charisma. I met him for few times after that encounter but it was the 2011 Egyptian revolution that reintroduced contentious politics to Egyptian and Arab political life and that led me to rediscover Ahmed Abdalla, not only as the leader of the student movement in its 1971-1973 moments, but as an intellectual and a community worker who spent his life struggling for Egypt's national cause, its youth, and underprivileged classes. Abdalla's relevance to Egyptian politics today is observed at two junctures: when the political sphere in Egypt opened post-2011 and he became a symbol of continuity with a past of social mobilization and political struggle; and as the political sphere is

closing again, his life as well as his writings proved to contain valuable insight into understanding the disquiet Egypt is living in today. A student political leader, an academic graduate of Cambridge, and an Old Cairo grassroots development actor, studying the history of Abdalla's marginalisation by the Egyptian regime helps us to understand the relationship between challenging power at the levels of youth activism, intellectual pursuit, and grassroots social work, and the challenges an intellectual has to endure to remain honest to his ideals and to his independent search for knowledge.

A social liberal and an economic socialist, Abdalla belonged to the generation whose questions, struggles, and motives linked the personal to the national and the global. To write about Ahmed Abdalla, one cannot help but start from the major formative life-marker on Abdalla and his generation, the June 1967 Egyptian military defeat and subsequent occupation of Sinai by Israel, known as Naksa. Abdalla described the defeat he experienced as a seventeen-year-old as a "great psychological shock" which shattered the worldview, ideas, and concepts of his generation (Abdalla, "Egyptian Generation" 71). It also destabilised the Nasser regime and as a result allowed "a rebellious minority"

of young people to gain a "new courage" to self-organise and engage in politics ("Egyptian Generation" 74). The "most vocal expression of public unrest following the defeat of 1967" was the student uprising of February 1968, where students across ideological divides confronted Nasser's regime (Abdalla, "Student Movement" 149). Abdalla's role grew from participating in what he described as "a reaction to the 1967 defeat" ("Egyptian Generation" 77) to leading a "rebellion" against the Sadat regime's control over youth and their organisations ("Student Movement" 176). At the age of twenty-two, Abdalla was named a leader of the student movement, where he played a major role in the January 1972 student uprising and the mobilisations of the subsequent academic year 1972/1973, leading to his detention in December of that year.<sup>1</sup>

Abdalla's 1970s generation challenged Nasser's legacy, even while they continued to be inspired by the Third World National Liberation Movements he was part of. Their rebellion against the regime questioned its ways but not its goals. They requested democracy as a means to hold accountable those responsible for the military defeat, to allow freedom of thought and political organisation, and to mobilise against the defeat becoming a

total national surrender (Hisham). In the late 1960s early 1970s, large numbers of politicised students became attracted to Marxist literature and revolutionary theory as part of a global movement inspired by the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnam resistance against the US, and other self-determination and national independence movements. Majority-youth Marxist organisations of all sizes were established. Abdalla did not belong to any organised political group, for he was known to prefer his intellectual and political independence but associated himself with the left-wing socialist student movement (*Al-Talaba* 16). Countering this movement stood students with a different ideology, establishing *al-Jamā'at al-Islāmiyyat* (the Islamic Groups), a new political Islamic hybrid trend influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafism, or what they considered to be an alternative to a "failed Nasserist dream" (Tamam 8). Abdalla identified the "radical left" and the "Islamic fundamentalists" as the major "polar opposites" organising, recruiting, and mobilising students (Abdalla, *Al-Talaba* 413). This polarization within the student body was encouraged by Sadat's governmental policies. For while Islamist students participated in the student uprising of 1968 as part of a general student mobilisation bringing together different ideolo-

gies, Islamists in 1972 marched against the student occupation of the University Hall and chanted against communism. What came to be called the 1970s' student movement, which Abdalla led in its 1972 moment, is thus a congregation of a generally left-leaning block bringing together the radical left and the Arab nationalists who took the name of Nasserists. This movement excludes the Islamic students who were growing in power and who slowly succeeded in exerting their control over the Egyptian University, winning the seat of president of the Cairo student union in 1975 (Taman). Abdalla was not in Egypt then to witness this shift. In 1974, he moved to the United Kingdom, after he had spent nine months in prison (December 1972 - September 1973). He was number one on a list of 56 students accused of

“publishing false news and rumours”, “inciting the students”, and “collaborating” amongst each other in order to “disturb the public order, harm the public interest, and attack the existing regime” (Amin 624-6).

One of the confiscated documents the judges used to interrogate Abdalla in 1973 was a handwritten article titled “What is the Student Movement?” (republished in

Amin). Abdalla hung this article as a wall magazine on 28 October 1972 at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University, where he was studying. In the article he asserted that

“the student movement was not a person or another who could be watched or monitored, but the cause of liberating a country, and as long as liberation is postponed, the situation keeps risking to escalate” (Amin 101).

He added that

“the intellectual differences among students are all fused in the crucible of national views”, and that “the central security might succeed in liquidating protests and sit-ins, but it cannot succeed in liquidating conscious minds” (Amin 102).

Consciousness in this context is a shared generational preoccupation with questions regarding Egypt's liberation, freedom, and progress. The slow liquidation of the movement, however, happened as a result of Sadat gaining legitimacy after fighting the 1973 war with Israel. The student movement lost fighting the war as its main organising impetus. The Islamic groups grew in power benefiting from the Sadat regime's *laissez-aller* attitude

towards their political mobilisation among students, and its clampdown on the student movement and the Marxist organisations as part of a pro-US Cold War alignment. It was the liquidation of that generation's consciousness that was more difficult. They remained active in resisting the implications of the Camp David Accords to build relationships between Israel and Egypt by initiating anti-normalisation campaigns. Abdalla left Egypt for the UK following his long 1973 detention; however, he did not give up and sought a deeper understanding of the history of the student movement and its role in Egyptian national politics. His research culminated in a Ph.D. thesis later published in both English (1985) and Arabic (2007).

### The Intellectual

Abdalla's intellectual project was indistinguishable from his political project of social liberalism and economic socialism. He started a self-funded Ph.D. at King's College Cambridge during his second year in the UK. He worked in different kinds of occupations, ranging from menial restaurant jobs to research work at the Arab Planning Institute in Kuwait. He chose his dissertation topic, “The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt”, based on a clear historic and generational

positionality, an awareness he said he shared with the 1970s generation of active students, who in seeking historical knowledge of Egypt's student movement since independence, sought inspiration for their own political movement (Abdalla, *Al-Talaba* 15). Abdalla neither approached the generational issue from a perspective of bias towards his generation nor eulogised younger generations. He identified, however, a *generational problematic* and proposed ways to deal with it (Abdalla, *Humūm Miṣr*). The problematic was that there were *generations* closer to the position of *monopoly* and generations closer to the position of *exclusion*, causing a social polarization as severe as class and political divisions in Egypt in the 1990s (Abdalla, *Humūm Miṣr* 618). This problematic also helps to explain the different generational polarizations visible since the 2011 revolution across and within the political divides. Abdalla in the 1980s and 1990s tried practical efforts towards closing the rift between different generations. He established scientific platforms for young researchers in Cairo to express their ambitions and concerns and organised workshops and seminars as pressure groups that led to different interaction and cooperation across the divide (Abdalla 619). These initiatives, however, remained far from constituting a national trend and

impacted only those within the scope of Abdalla's influence in Egypt, an influence excluded to the margins of the Egyptian state's intellectual, media, and political life. In order to understand the type of intellectual Abdalla constituted, it is necessary to build on his differentiation between two trends of intellectuals engaged in social change in Egypt. Firstly, those who depended on state institutions and called for social change through reform; secondly, those who questioned the formation of state institutions and called for democratic struggle to change the state foundations (Abdalla, *Al-Jāmi'* 132). He positioned himself in the second trend, where he refused state legitimacy inherent within state institutional power, called for popular legitimacy which represented the will of the civil society, and advocated for the establishment of non-suppressive state institutions as a means to break away from tyranny (Abdalla, *Al-Jāmi'* 132-3).

The state-dependent approach to social change was not the only shortcoming of Egyptian intellectual elites Abdalla criticised. Intellectuals across the board have also exhibited internal and relational deficiencies. Firstly, intellectual elites both in power and in the opposition have built weak relationships with the populace, who do not constitute sources of political

power (Abdalla, *Al-Jāmi'* 136). Secondly, intellectual elites failed to prove their respect for democratic processes within their parties and organizations (138). This can also be extended to the political struggle in general, where they have expressed weak commitment to the democratic tradition, especially with regards to the representation of Islamists (142). Abdalla believed that democratic principles were the only way for Egypt to move away from torture and rigging elections and towards building a state that gives hope to young people (143). His interest in analysing the necessary conditions for Egypt to become a democratically stable country also led him to look into the factors that might enforce or impede the role of the army in politics. One important factor he highlighted was the direct and indirect role of military men in political life and the attitude of civilian politicians towards them (Abdalla, *Al-Jaysh*). He explained that the legitimacy of the presidency and the ruling party continued to be derived from the military, although the 1967 defeat subdued the logic of the army model and the rhetoric that social development needs to be achieved at the expense of political freedom. He analysed that it is unlikely for the military to take over in Egypt, but argued that certain conditions might also lead to military control over political life,



threatening the nascent democracy, a valuable contribution for anyone studying Egyptian post-revolutionary politics today (Abdalla, *Al-Jaysh*).<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his intellectual journey, Abdalla remained committed to understanding and analysing the socio-political challenges to democratic change. He not only studied nationalism, the army, and the university (intellectuals), but also the mosque, political parties, and workers unions (Abdalla, *Tārīkh Miṣr; Al-Jaysh; Al-Waṭaniyya; 'Ummāl Miṣr; Al-Jāmi'*). His interest in social change is well explained by Mohammad al-Sayyed Said in an article collected in one compendium of 78 lamentations celebrating Abdalla's life and struggle. According to Said, Abdalla regarded politics as a contribution to civilizational renewal, where civilization is the ability to satisfy the material, spiritual, and cultural needs of the most vulnerable, or is the opposite of poverty. It is this vision of a society that guarantees economic efficiency, social justice (distribution of national wealth), and political freedom that led Abdalla to be a proponent of the rights of workers and the inclusion of youth (Abdalla, *'Ummāl Miṣr* 6). Abdalla's intellectual production remained guided by critical questions rooted in his personal

experiences. In describing his generation in 2000, he wrote that

although the bitterness is still overwhelming, words that were branded in the mind through the experience of this generation remain: demonstrations, strikes, 'wall magazines', ... the Students' Charter, the Supporters of the Palestinian Revolution, the Students' National Committee, ..., Nigm and Imam's songs, rallying cries (such as 'Wake Up Egypt'), slogans ('All Democracy for the People, All Devotion to the Homeland'), and so on ("Egyptian Generation" 80).

### The Community Worker

It is Abdalla's dedication to Egypt which brought him back to Cairo from London in the 1980s. Upon his return with a Ph.D. in political science, Abdalla was vetoed out of public university teaching jobs. He tried to apply to various public institutions, but it was clear that he was on a no-hire black list. Mubarak's regime did not provide Abdalla with any chance to achieve academic status or political power outside the margins. His charm, charisma, eloquence, and especially his proven ability to mobilise the masses, including the popular classes, might have been one reason. Other reasons might have been that he

was brutally honest, did not compromise, and confronted authority with a strong intellect and a cynical humour. A friend who knew him while in the UK observed that his short-temperedness grew after he moved back to Egypt. Moving up the class ladder did not rid him of his pride of having a working-class background or prevent him from returning to serve the popular community where he grew up in Old Cairo. One university colleague of his explained that it is his mother who inspired his rootedness in Ayn al-Sira. His mother, a woman with a strong character, raised him and his sister with the fruits of her labour as a seamstress. His estimation for Ayn al-Sira is clear in the dedication of his first book: "To the people of Masr al-Qadeema (Old Cairo), the illiterate who gave me knowledge; the poor who enriched my conscience" (Abdalla, *Student Movement*). This recognition did not dwindle with time, for sixteen years later, he again gave the credit to Egypt's working class whose givings "allowed him to earn his education and to achieve class mobility"; he described the knowledge he was producing as a kind of "paying back" (Abdalla, *'Ummāl Miṣr* 6). It was not knowledge alone which he paid back, for in 1993, he initiated al-Geel Centre, a research and community development centre dedicated to social research, youth

studies, and social services mainly around child labour.

Abdalla built the centre and contributed to its construction on a plot of land belonging to the Community Development Organization headed by al-Sheikh al-Koumy. The funding was mainly comprised of donations by friends from all over the world; individual donations that kept the centre working when Abdalla refused to become dependent on donor organizations. Abdalla, keen to remain independent from donor funding, earned his livelihood by taking visiting professorship appointments in various universities around the world. Al-Geel was the space to continue his engagement in social change and social justice issues at both theoretical and practical levels. It was one of the early civil society initiatives that regarded social science research as a basic component of community development work. An approach that viewed knowledge, politics, human rights, and dignity as intertwined. One of the first events the centre organised was an academic seminar in collaboration with the American University of Cairo, Ain Shams University, and Harvard University, titled *Studying the Egyptian Society: The Concerns of Young Scholars*. In 1994, Abdalla published the conference pro-

ceedings in an edited volume under the title *Humūm Miṣr wa-'Azma al-'Aql al-Shābba* (Egypt's Concerns and the Crisis of Young Minds). Al-Geel Centre also depended on volunteers and succeeded in recruiting university youth to empower the children of Ayn al-Sira. Rida Abdul Hamid, a long-time volunteer at the centre, however, pointed to how academic research and socioeconomic development components remained separate. The academic research component hosted local and international researchers and organised panels that mainly engaged in macro socio-political questions, while the development projects targeted micro social, political, and cultural issues. The centre developed two projects with children: one on child labour with working children (1995-2000) and a children's club (2000-2006). Abdalla's intellectual work and commitment to the underprivileged thus merged in al-Geel Centre, where he built strong relationships with the populace, and he aspired to respect democratic processes in the organization. Abdalla succeeded in empowering the children and the volunteers of the centre to conscientise themselves through education, and through internal democratic governance structures and election practices. However,

he did not use academic research to directly improve the how-to of development projects.

Abdalla's close relationship to children and young people is traced in the video produced by the centre in his memory (Zaky). And it is said that the children of the club contributed to convincing him to run for parliamentary elections in November 2005. In 2005, his friends in Egypt donated to the election campaign, but the funds were not enough to coordinate a campaign that could compete with the establishment candidates. Although Abdalla was aware of the limitations in the electoral process and that elections needed to be viewed as an opportunity for political campaigning, his colleagues at the centre judged his loss to have had a weighing impact, for he felt let down by the community (Zaky). He died months after the elections, in June 2006. His death was a great loss to Egypt's youth, its underprivileged, and its opposition, as well as to engaged academia and free courageous thought. He wrote in his book *Egypt before and after September 11, 2011: Problems of Political Transformation in a Complicated International Setting* that Egypt's only curing doctor "must be the Egyptian people themselves" (40). In January 2011, Abdalla was remembered by his friends belonging to a generation

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of the rebellious left in the 1970s who took to the streets next to a new youth that might have not known anything about their political struggle, or who might have been their children. The 1970s generation who participated in liberating Sinai but were not able to save Egypt from the social and economic costs of the 1967 defeat, who are said to have been defeated politically and morally (Imbabi), were able to hear the same chants of “Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice” on the streets again (Mugheeth). Abdalla thus became a symbol of continuity with a struggle that did not achieve democracy but that did not lose hope in building a more just Egypt. He also remains a reference to analysing Egypt's political system: “It is hereditary in either case” (*Egypt* 39). Whether the “non-incrimination” of Mubarak's reign is served by his son as “heir-President” or “by a military colleague as President” (*Egypt* 39), Abdalla forewarned that the files of commissions, transactions, corruption, torture, and rigging will need to be kept closed.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> On January 24, 1972, the Egyptian central security forces arrested at dawn the hundreds of students occupying the Nasser Hall at Cairo University since January 20. As a reaction, students marched to Tahrir and occupied it for the whole day of January 25 before they were evacuated (Shaaban 70-8).

<sup>2</sup> Abdalla highlighted a number of elements that might lead to the direct takeover by the military: a) for forty years military personnel were only used to working under the political authority of military men like themselves as presidents and were not used to taking commands from civilian men, and this mentality might become that of the whole Egyptians; b) the democratic experience in Egypt does not involve a wide base; c) the alternative mode of change might be implemented by Islamists, who enjoy a wide popular base and economic power; d) anywhere in the world where there is a civil administration incompetently managing an economic and social crisis, the military personnel are sought to take over (Abdalla, Al-Jaysh 25-7).

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ISSN: 2196-629X  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.9.7527>

# FOCUS

## The Rise of the Arab Youth Paradigm: A Critical Analysis of the Arab Human Development Report 2016

Mayssoun Sukarieh

This article offers a critical analysis of the *Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2016*, that was released by the United Nations Development Programme in November 2016. *AHDR 2016* represents the return of the Arab Human Development project that had been interrupted by the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011. It also epitomizes the Arab youth paradigm that has increasingly come to frame development and security discourse in the region. While there is much that is familiar in *AHDR 2016*, there are

also concerning developments: a historical revisionism that holds Arab youth responsible for the Arab Spring and the Arab Spring responsible for the Arab Winter that followed, and a new trend that views not just Arab youth deficits as a dangerous threat to regional and global security, but Arab youth abilities and surfeits as well.

**Keywords:** Arab Human Development Report; Arab Spring; youth; youth bulge; generational conflict; over-education

### Introduction

In November 2016, the long overdue *Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2016* was finally released by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). With the subtitle *Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*, *AHDR 2016* was the first of a total of six Arab Human Development Reports that have been produced since 2002 to focus exclusively on the question of youth in the region, looking at youth in relation to civic participation, education, work, gender, health, war and conflict, mobility and migration. As Sophie de Caen, Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States in UNDP, said at the launch of *AHDR 2016*: “The wave of uprisings that have swept across the Arab region since 2011 has shown us that we can no longer treat young people in the Arab region as passive dependents or a generation in waiting.” Fadlo Khuri, president of the American University of Beirut, who spoke at the launch event of *AHDR 2016*, said that “I look at our youth with optimism because I think there is a sense of resiliency and a sense that this youth is not waiting for the grand intervention of the western states, or even the great universities, or the United Nations, to save them. They want us to help them; that is very evident in this report. But they don’t want

saving. They want support, they want opportunity, they want to save themselves" (quoted in Jafari)

While AHDR 2016, like previous reports in the AHDR series, has received widespread coverage in the media, and attention and support from a range of different development and policy organisations, it demands far more critical attention than it has been given to date. This article thus offers a close, critical reading of AHDR 2016, situating it in the context of the AHDR series as a whole, but also in relation to what we might call the rise of the Arab youth paradigm in development policy and discourse in the Arab region, a paradigm that increasingly shapes development policies and practices across the region, and that impacts the lives not just of Arab youth but people from all generations in the Arab world. AHDR 2016 thus follows in the footsteps of a growing number of parallel reports that have focused on Arab youth as a key development concern over the past decade, including the Brookings Center's *Middle East Youth Bulge: Challenge or Opportunity?*, the RAND Corporation's *Initiative for Middle Eastern Youth* and the United Nations' *The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007: A Youth Lens*. This paper argues that AHDR 2016 epitomizes the

Arab youth and development paradigm. However, while there is much that is familiar in the report, there are also some concerning new developments: a historical revisionism that holds Arab youth responsible for both the Arab Spring and the Arab Winter that followed, and a new trend that views not just Arab youth deficits as a dangerous threat to regional and global security, but Arab youth abilities and surfeits as well.

### **The Arab Human Development Report Regime**

The Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) have been produced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) since 2002, with a total of six reports (*AHDR 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2009; 2016*) appearing over the past fifteen years. Each report focuses on a key topic considered to be central to development concerns in the region - knowledge (*AHDR 2003*), freedom (*AHDR 2004*), gender (*AHDR 2005*), human security (*AHDR 2009*), and most recently, youth (*AHDR 2016*) - and typically proceeds by identifying a series of "challenges," "obstacles" or "problems" that confront the Arab world and proposing a set of recommended "principles" and policy recommendations. While the UN produced several national and subnational development reports on

Arab states prior to 2002, it explained the launch of the regional development reports by arguing that "recent events and tragedies" in the Arab world meant "the time is right for a study that assesses the current state of human development across the region and offers some concrete suggestions on how to accelerate progress in the future." It stated that the goal of the reports was to spur "discussion and debate by policymakers, practitioners and the general public alike" and "help Arab countries to continue to advance the fundamental purpose of development" (Brown, *ADHR 2002* iii-iv). It is notable that the Arab region is the only region in the world for which the UNDP has felt it necessary to produce regionally focused development reports (although the organization has produced global development reports on an annual basis since 1990).

When launching its AHDR series, the UNDP emphasized from the beginning that the reports would not be written by "normal, internal UN authors," but instead would be "authentic" works produced "by Arabs for Arabs," released simultaneously in both Arabic and English (Brown, *ADHR 2003* i). UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown (iv) notes in his foreword to the first AHDR that "it is independent experts from the region rather than the UNDP who have

placed their societies under a sympathetic but critical examination ... in a way that perhaps only Arabs should," and insists the report "is not the grandstanding of outsiders but an honest, if controversial, view through the mirror." The use of Arab researchers based in the Arab world for producing the AHDR series has continued ever since. The release of each AHDR has been accompanied by high profile public launches and large media campaigns - "great fanfare," as Levine puts it. AHDR 2016, for example, was launched at the American University of Beirut in November 2016 in an event that brought together "150 participants including youth; civil society and women's organizations; government representatives; parliamentarians; and the private sector, from across the Arab region" (UNDP, *AHDR 2016*); and then again at follow-up launch events in Stockholm in March 2017 and Brussels in April 2017, in collaboration with the European Commission and the EastWest Institute (UNDP, *AHDR 2016*).

In many ways, the UNDP's Arab Human Development Report series has been an enormously successful enterprise. All of the series reports have been widely used - the UNDP records over a million downloads of each report - and just as importantly, have tended to be primary sources

quoted frequently not just by academics in and of the region, but Arab business and political leaders as well (Amin; Traboulsi; Trebilcock). There are a number of likely reasons for this: the extensive media promotion of the reports by the UNDP and other organizations, the status of legitimacy provided by the combination of UNDP sponsorship and Arab authorship, and the fact that the reports are one of the few sites where large amounts of statistical data on the Arab world have been made freely and easily accessible (Abu Lughod, Amin; Bayat, Trebilcock). The AHDR series, therefore, is particularly important to pay close and critical attention to because it has become so central to the political construction of knowledge in and about the Arab region. Bayat argues that "no comparable Arab document in recent memory has been as much debated, commended and contested as the AHDR;" (1227) while Trebilcock claims that the AHDR has "attracted more attention and controversy than any other official studies of development in recent years." (1)

Despite, or perhaps precisely because of their extended success and influence, the AHDR series has attracted a small but growing number of critics over the fifteen years that it has been in existence.

Criticisms have focused on the way in which the AHDR series has been produced, the uses of the series, particularly by western governments and international organizations, and more substantively, the content and claims of the series, in particular the representations of the Arab world that the series helps to promote. In contradiction to UNDP claims of the independent and indigenous nature of AHDR authorship, Arab authors who have worked on the AHDR series over the past decade and a half have repeatedly complained of censorship, editing and lack of overall control. Islah Jad, who was one of the authors of ADHR 2005, felt compelled to issue a statement that she "is not fully the owner of the report" (Jad); the release of ADHR was actually delayed by the UNDP because some of its claims "were politically controversial and not in line with the organization" (*AHDR 2005* vi). Likewise, with AHDR 2016, the authors of one chapter wrote publicly to say that they were "surprised by the final edits" of their chapters, claiming that "ambassadors of different countries were involved in the editing of the report" (Al-Ali et al.).

The use of the AHDR series by the United States, other western governments and international organisations has also caused considerable criticism and suspi-



cion. The first AHDR was directly commissioned by the United States government in the context of the war on terror (personal interview with Clovis Maksoud, April 2006). The series overall has been used as a platform for international intervention in the region, widely quoted by US and EU leaders and officials to legitimate and support the various programmes and policy reforms they were sponsoring throughout the Arab World (Baroudi; Trebilcock). Bayat argues that policy personnel in the west and notably the US used the AHDR to call “for an urgent change in the region and yet believe that change will not come from within, but from without, and by force.”

Finally, a number of scholars have focused on the problematic representation of the Arab world that is promoted by the AHDR series. The series has tended to embrace a culturalist framework of analysis, in which in which culture is central and constitutive in explaining the demise of human development in the Arab region (Abu-Lughod; Baroudi; Said; Traboulsi). Most of the reports refer to a set of core and unchanging “traditional” values and practices that are said to be at odds with the practices of modernity and pressures and forces of a globalizing world. This ignores the extent to which “traditions”

are themselves constantly reimagined and reinvented as a constitutive part of the modern, globalized world (Lavergne; Traboulsi). Bayat argues that the AHDR series represents the region as “something very different, a unique cultural entity which does not fit into conventional frames of analysis.” Further, the AHDR focuses on institutional and cultural deficits that are said to separate the Arab world from every other global region and claims that these deficits (in knowledge, freedom, democracy, women’s empowerment, etc.) form the center of its social, economic, and political backwardness (Hasso). The sweeping invocation of gaps, lacks, and deficits between the Arab and western worlds perpetuates ungrounded Orientalist stereotypes of the region. Traboulsi claims that the region is presented as a set of “lacks, lags and deficits, to an extent that one does not know what the Arab region has, it is only what it does not have that is presented” (see also Abu-Lughod).

In general, there is an absence of attention to and criticism of external interventions in the ADHR series, either from the US and other powers in the current period, or of colonial powers during the period of European imperialism and colonialism. Amin explains the denunciation of the

report by many Arab intellectuals by its “exclusive emphasis on internal sources of decline as one-sided, totally ignoring the role of colonialism and imperialist intervention causing the developmental malaise of the Arab people” (see also Baroudi). When we turn from the AHDR series’ analysis of problems to its proposed solutions for the Arab region, we find that the reports are broadly linked to an ideological model of neoliberal development. In report after report, the series strongly promotes the (further) liberalization of Arab national economies and societies in order to secure good governance, growth, and consequently, human development. Amin argues that both AHDR 2002 and AHDR 2003 begin with a culturalist analysis of the Arab region and end up with a neoliberal solution. Abu-Lughod and Adely both argue that the AHDR-promoted policies for women’s empowerment are neoliberal in orientation. Traboulsi also talks about the AHDR series as ending with a “neoliberal wishlist” as solutions for development problems in the Arab world.

### **The Rise of the Arab Youth Paradigm**

The *Arab Human Development Report 2016* needs to be situated not just within the context of previous Arab Human Development Reports, but more generally within the context of a broad political and

ideological discourse that has focused on and indeed, helped to construct the idea and central importance of Arab youth in the region's policy and development debates. As youth studies research has noted, the social category and identity of youth is not universal, and has tended to be most relevant in the wealthy countries of the global North (Boyden, et al.; Brown, Larson and Saraswathi; Finn; Griffin; Nsamenang). Up until a few decades ago, the social category of youth was of limited relevance in most of the countries in the Arab region. There were few, if any, NGOs working with youth specifically, and nation state youth policies and ministries were essentially unheard of; academic research rarely considered the issue of Arab youth, as studies of class, family and faith were much more central (Al-Amin).

All of this began to change from the 1990s onwards for two reasons. First, youth has become increasingly central to development discourse, policy and practice, not just in the Arab world but on a worldwide scale. This shift is perhaps best marked by the World Bank's decision to dedicate its 2007 *World Development Report* (subtitled *Development and the Next Generation*) entirely to the question of the place of youth in global development agendas. Second, both youth and devel-

opment together have increasingly come to be seen as central to regional and global security concerns (LaGraffe; Sukarieh and Tannock, "The Global Securitization"). While this has also been a global phenomenon, it has focused in particular on Arab and Muslim youth, spurred on by the participation of young Arabs in the 9/11 attacks in 2001 in the United States and, more recently, in enabling the growth of ISIS in Syria and Iraq (Bzina and Gray). As a result of these shifts, both the Arab region and other parts of the world have seen a phenomenal explosion of state-led youth policy initiatives, youth-focused development projects, youth-oriented NGOs and youth policy documents (African Union; ILO; USAID; World Bank, *Children & Youth*). In Jordan, for example, NGOs tailored to youth grew in number from one in 1990 to 15 in 1998, and to 83 in 2014.

Why has youth become a central development and security concern in the Arab world and beyond? According to AHDR 2016 (and other parallel reports in the youth, security and development discourse), there are two straightforward explanations for this. One factor is the presence of rapid demographic change: the extreme growth in the numbers of youth in Arab societies and emergence of

what is commonly referred to as a "youth bulge." AHDR 2016 thus notes that there has been an "unprecedented" demographic "wave," "mass" and "momentum" in the Arab world caused by the fact that "young people between the ages of fifteen and 29 make up nearly a third of the [Arab] region's population" (22). "Never before has the region had such a large share of youth," the report explains, as "youth of the ages 15-29 make up around 30% of the population, or some 105 million people" (22). The second factor is the widespread marginalization, disempowerment and exclusion of youth in public and private sector decision making throughout the Arab region. As AHDR 2016 claims:

The exclusion of youth is pervasive throughout the Arab region.... The mass disenfranchisement of youth constitutes one of the key stumbling blocks in the development process in Arab countries. Young people have not been recognized as legitimate agents of change, nor have they been empowered to fulfil this responsibility.... [Y]outh are formally excluded politically by middle-aged and elderly men, who dominate society because of traditional norms and deeply entrenched state-sponsored economic practices. Youth also face large entry barriers to jobs, marriage and housing, where older

groups enjoy privileges, largely acquired under public programmes during the oil booms. (32, 170)

However, despite such an appealing narrative of youth empowerment and concern, this positive and positivist account needs to be looked at carefully and critically, as there are a number of problems and concerns with the new youth development and security paradigm. First, as can be seen in the quotation above, the youth paradigm foregrounds claims of generational conflict and inequality as central dimensions of inequality in Arab societies, while backgrounding other issues of social class, race, gender, religion or regional relations of inequality between the global North and South. Attention is focused on the exclusion of youth by “middle-aged and elderly men,” and the inequities of “older groups” enjoying “privileges” that the young do not have access to. Second, the youth paradigm is closely linked with a strong attack on the public sector – “state-sponsored economic practices” and oil-funded “public programme” privileges in the above quotation – and corresponding promotion of the private sector. In fact, the youth paradigm poses an alleged affinity between the core interests of youth (getting a good education to help them get

good jobs) and those of private sector elites (securing a reliable and productive workforce for their enterprises). The attack on the Arab public sector is a constant throughout the document. Since independence, the report claims, most Arab countries have “pursued a model of development that is dominated by the public sector and turns governments into providers of first and last resort” (175). The domination of the public sector is claimed to be the cause of the lack of strong enterprises and culture of entrepreneurship: “for the public sector has either crowded out and manipulated the private sector or forged uncompetitive and monopolistic alliances, while inhibiting the development of viable systems of public finance” (29). The solution proposed by AHDR 2016, in the name of empowering youth, is very much a standard neoliberal wish list, that includes labour market deregulation (73), capital control and trade liberalization (30), and privatization and marketization (29).

Finally, despite the ostensible embrace and celebration of youth, the youth paradigm also promotes negative stereotypes of youth as problems, pathologies and in deficit. One of the core concerns of AHDR 2016 is that the combination of a youth bulge and youth exclusion has led to a prevalence of “frustration, helplessness,

alienation and dependency” among Arab youth, and it is Arab youth discontent with their social and economic position that has become “an explosive and radicalizing mixture” that threatens the entire region (5, 22). More generally, one of the effects of promoting a youth framework of analysis for addressing social, cultural, political and economic problems in Arab societies is that social development is presented as being dependent upon the individual development of young Arabs. Thus, emphasis is placed on extending and reforming formal and informal education systems in order to provide youth with the knowledge and skills (that they are presumably now lacking and that are causing them problems) that will enable them to succeed in civil society, the labor market and the political sphere. According to AHDR 2016, “only a small minority of youth” have “adequate skills to meet the demand of labour markets;” while most Arab youth suffer from “limited skills,” “inadequate skills” and “poor human capital endowments” (24, 31). AHDR 2016 is consequently littered with calls for a wide range of educational reforms that will meet the needs of Arab youth and Arab employers alike, such as “reorganizing university curricula, assuring quality tertiary education and expanding vocational training programs” (76), expanding “career

guidance and matching services,” and “supporting entrepreneurship skills amongst youth” (83). While such kinds of educational interventions may well provide a range of benefits for individual young Arabs across the region, if social, political and economic problems are not primarily caused by educational skills deficits among Arab youth – which, as will be discussed below, is what AHDR 2016 itself often seems to argue – then these problems are not likely to be solved by educational interventions either (see Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising* 55-74).

### **The Arab Spring and the New Historical Revisionism**

AHDR 2016 offers a third account of why youth has become a central development and security concern in the Arab world today. The combination of the youth demographic bulge and youth economic and political marginalization has led to youth (allegedly) playing a growing role in social and political unrest throughout the region. “The events of 2011 in the Arab region have refocused attention on the pivotal role of youth ... in society,” AHDR 2016 states, and “the wave of protests which has swept through a number of Arab countries since 2011 with youth at the forefront” constitutes a “key argument” for why a focus on youth has become such a

social, economic and political imperative (5, 7). Thus, according to AHDR 2016:

While this report represents a natural progression from earlier Arab Human Development Reports, it has been drafted within quite a unique context. Since 2011, several countries in the region witnessed uprisings, and the region has experienced the most rapid expansion in war and violent conflict among all global regions over the past decade. (170)

In this respect, AHDR 2016 is part of a much broader set of reports, books and articles that has focused recently on youth as a threat to social, economic and political stability and security, both in the Arab world and beyond. These include, for example, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security; the Final Report of the Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security (held in Amman, Jordan in August 2015); and the report of the Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism (held in New York City in September 2015) (Sukarieh and Tannock, “The Global Securitization”).

The claim that the combination of the youth bulge and youth marginalisation

and exclusion is responsible for violence, unrest and instability in the Arab region needs to be questioned and critiqued for the negative and inaccurate stereotypes of youth that this claim tends to promote. As Anne Hendrixson notes:

The youth bulge is most often personified as an angry young brown man from Africa, the Middle East or parts of Asia or Latin America. He is often portrayed as Muslim, susceptible to extremism, and sometimes driven by his very biology to unrest. This stereotype is an example of what anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes calls “dangerous discourses” that over-predict individual acts of youth violence, even as they downplay the role of other forms of violence and structural inequalities that contribute to youth poverty and powerlessness. (2)

AHDR 2016 is more moderate in its portrayal of youth as being particularly susceptible to violence and disorder than some other youth bulge texts (for example, Cincotta and Doces, the age Structural Maturity Thesis): while “youth, especially young men ... are often depicted as especially prone to violence,” the report observes, “most young people do not engage in violence” (143). Nonetheless,

we can still find echoes of such negatively stereotyped language in the report. It is a combination of “less control over life, a greater space for self-expression and a lower prevalence of obedience to authority” that led Arab youth to spearhead the recent period of unrest that swept across the region, according to the report (59). These and other such claims of increased youth susceptibility to violence and conflict are widely challenged in the youth studies literature (e.g., Arnett; Offer and Schonert-Reichl).

But more than this, there is also a concerning historical revisionism at play here. First, there is the claim made throughout AHDR 2016 that the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 were youth-led events. This, of course, is how the Arab Spring has widely been portrayed right from the very beginning of the emergence of the first protests, as a “youth revolt,” “youth uprising” or “youth quake” (Al-Momani; Sadiki; Zill). This portrayal, however widespread it may have become, it also highly inaccurate. For while many young Arab men and women were absolutely central participants in the Arab Spring protests, there were multiple other groups and actors from across Arab civil society that were also directly involved with the uprising, including trade unions, peasant movements, poor people’s orga-

nizations, women’s groups, political parties and Islamist and faith-based movements (Dahi; Joya et al.; Korany; Soliman). By framing the Arab Spring as a youth phenomenon, we obscure the presence and leadership of these other groups, erase their concerns and agendas, and misconstrue the broader nature and significance of the uprising for the Arab region as a whole. Such a framing also helps to suggest a much narrower set of responses to the protests (e.g., promoting educational reforms, etc.) than might otherwise be expected.

Second, and even more alarming, is the blurring together in AHDR 2016 of both the Arab Spring uprisings and their often violent aftermath – a blurring together that effectively holds Arab youth responsible not just for the Arab Spring, but also for the counter-revolution and so-called Arab Winter that followed. For example, the opening pages of AHDR 2016 are framed by a direct link between Arab youth and the extensive regional instability and violence of the previous five years:

The report underlines that the wave of protests which has swept through a number of Arab countries with youth at the forefront has led to fundamental transformations across the entire regi-

on.... Systems which had maintained stability came under serious challenge, with protracted conflict ensuing. (5)

Similarly, AHDR 2016 closes with a parallel statement that again ties Arab youth to regional conflict and war:

This Report examines the problems and challenges of youth in light of the recent [Arab Spring] uprisings.... Since 2011, several countries in the region witnessed uprisings, and the region has experienced the most rapid expansion in war and violent conflict among all global regions over the past decade.... The exclusion of youth is pervasive throughout the Arab region ... [and] ignited uprisings across many Arab countries in late 2010 and early 2011, causing some to descend into social and political instability and deep economic uncertainty. (170)

This blaming of Arab youth for the protracted violence and unrest in the Arab region following the 2011 Arab Spring effectively leads to the complete erasure of the responsibility of other actors in Arab society for such violence—in particular, the forces of counter-revolution, includes the old regimes, political and business elites, neighboring and western states, and inter-

national organisations (Al-Rasheed; Kamrava; Nuweihed and Warren). Indeed, far from being key perpetrators of violence and conflict, youth in the Arab world, as elsewhere, are often much more likely to be some of the principal victims of violence being committed against them by ruling elites and their supporters (Sommers). All of this revisionism is an example of what might be called the “youth ruse” (Sukarieh and Tannock, “Youth Ruse”). In the guise of supporting and empowering youth, the embrace of the youth frame in documents such as AHDR 2016 is actually used to import a whole set of problematic analyses and responses that are prejudiced against and harmful to the young men and women that such a framing is ostensibly supposed to protect.

#### **Shifting Concerns Around Arab Youth: From Deficit to Surfeit?**

There is another framing in AHDR 2016 that marks a further shift from the previous series of Arab Human Development Reports. From the beginning of the AHDR series, the prevailing framework for portraying the Arab region, as noted earlier, has been a language of deficit, lack, lag and backwardness. AHDR 2016, as has already been pointed out, likewise promotes a stereotyped discourse of youth

deficits, problems and pathologies as presenting a major challenge for development in Arab countries. However, at the same time, there is also a counter-discourse in AHDR 2016 that argues that problems in the Arab region today are being caused not so much by deficits in Arab youth, but what we might term *surfeits* – an abundance or excess of skills, abilities, knowledge, insight, aspiration and ambition. First, Arab youth are repeatedly referred to in AHDR 2016 as the most highly educated generation in the history of the region. The report begins by stating that “today’s generation of young people [in the Arab world] are more educated, active and connected to the outside world, and hence have a greater awareness of their realities and higher aspirations for a better future” (8). Second, Arab youth are also repeatedly referred to in AHDR 2016 as being highly networked – both within the Arab region and externally with the rest of the world – active on social media and technologically savvy:

Through their access to information and communication technology, youth [in the Arab region] are increasingly connected to the world.... [T]his exposure to information and communication has been a liberating portal and a virtual space to express themselves,

raise objections, voice their opinions and challenge power structures, thus transforming them from passive members of society into active, self-aware and reform-driven individuals. (27)

Third, more generally, Arab youth are referred to as being highly aware and ambitious, as “the progress in some areas of human development over the years has tended to elevate the expectations of people in Arab countries” (24).

All of these shifts might be expected to be cause for celebration – particularly in the context of the long litany of complaints about Arab deficits and deficiencies throughout the rest of the AHDR series. Paradoxically, however, these apparent successes are instead presented in AHDR 2016 as a danger and threat to the Arab region as a whole, and a potential cause of social and political instability and unrest. The rise of the “most well-educated” generation in the Arab region’s history, AHDR 2016 warns, may “constitute a destabilizing force,” “an overwhelming power for destruction,” and a threat that is reshaping “the region’s security landscape” (8, 28, 170). The reason for this, according to AHDR 2016, is the tension and conflict between the high levels of education, knowledge and skill, aspiration and expect-

tation among Arab youth, on the one hand, and the sharply limited social, political and economic opportunities available to the majority of youth in most Arab countries, on the other. Thus, “young people’s awareness [in the Arab region] of their capabilities and rights collides with a reality that marginalizes them and blocks their pathways to express their opinions, actively participate or earn a living” (8). Because Arab youth “enjoy fewer opportunities than their parents to convert their skills into higher living standards,” and as a consequence, “possess so little hope of achieving tangible progress,” their education and ability becomes not a resource or benefit to the Arab world, but a danger and threat that needs to be channelled and contained (170).

What we are seeing here in AHDR 2016 are some of the first signs of cracks in the neo-liberal development model that has consistently promoted more education, information, skills and knowledge as the standard solution for both individual and societal development. In what Brown, Lauder, and Ashton refer to as the “broken promises of education, jobs and incomes,” formal institutions of education have been pressured to deliver universal opportunities for social and economic mobility in an environment where there are simply not

enough high quality, engaging and well remunerated jobs – or jobs of any kind, quite simply – to go around. This is not just happening in the Arab region, but globally, as the spectre of graduate unemployment and underemployment – and the threat of social, economic and political instability that the thwarted expectations and ambitions of highly educated and capable graduates presents – becomes a regular topic of discussion in political, media and public discourse (Guardian; Jeffrey et al.; Mason). Particularly in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, concerns about the problem of over-education and under-employment, previously seen during the early years of the rise of mass higher education in the 1960s, have once again returned (Bills; Green). Business and political leaders now talk not just of needing to raise the aspirations of young people, but of having to tackle the sense of *entitlement* among the young, and of *managing* and even *lowering* their expectations (Sukarieh and Tannock, *Youth Rising* 69-70). As Drine writes of the Arab region, one of the central development problems currently is that there is a “mismatch between what the labour market offers, and what young people expect.” Part of the response to this situation is to argue that even though Arab youth are highly educated and skilled, they have the

wrong kinds of education and skills, and thus education and training needs to be tied more closely to the needs and interests of employers – as discussed above. But the fact that it is now the high levels of education, technological integration and ambition that are being constituting a key youth challenge raises one of the most important questions for the Arab region, and indeed the global South, over the coming decade. How will these be addressed effectively? What lasting significance will this shift from a concern with youth deficits to claims about youth surfeits have for the Arab region and beyond?

### Conclusion

The past decade has seen the rise of different discourses around youth in the Arab world, from the war on terror and discourse of Arab youth as terrorists, to the Arab Spring and construction of Arab youth as freedom fighters and revolutionaries, to the current period, where Arab youth are once again seen as a dangerous threat, liable to plunge countries into extended periods of instability, conflict and crisis. What is constant in all these different constructions of Arab youth over the past decade is the fact that youth has been a trope through which elite agendas, anxieties, concerns and interests are projected. In this sense, AHDR 2016 is part

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of a larger pattern that views youth, whether positively or negatively, both as a threat to the contemporary social and economic order in the region, and also as a useful rhetorical frame to call for reinforcements of this prevailing social and economic order. What this article argues is that, if we are break out of this pattern, we need to develop much greater critical reflection about the particular ways in which the youth frame is mobilized in policy and development discourse in the Arab region, and more generally, across the world. The promise of more critical, political economy based studies of youth is that not only will we be able to develop a better, more grounded understanding of the current situation of youth in the Arab region, but we might also be better able to push for new, creative and alternative development policies and programs that will benefit not just Arab youth, but individuals of all age groups in the Arab world as well.



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## In absence of a Hero Figure and an Ideology: Understanding new political Imaginaries and Practices among revolutionary Youth in Egypt

Dina El-Sharnouby

One of the challenges in analyzing youth who participated in the recent Arab uprisings relates to explaining and understanding their revolutionary practices. Adopting a leaderless and cross-ideological form of mobilization, youth during the eighteen days of the Egyptian uprising managed to practice inclusion by uniting a diverse group of Egyptians. After toppling Mubarak, the revolutionary youth, however, did not present themselves as aiming to seize power, a defining feature of revolutions at least until the 1970s. To understand the meaning of these new cross-ideological and leaderless forms of mobilization, I suggest understanding youth within their time and space. Drawing on Alain Badiou and

his conception of the intervallic period and the rebirth of history through the Arab revolts, this article highlights important differences among this generation in their conception of doing politics. More specifically, this paper focuses on the changed meaning of the hero figure, highlighting the importance of inclusionary politics. It will suggest that since the 2011 revolutionary event, a shift away from traditional politics based on a leader and an ideology is being contested for a more inclusionary politics as desired by the younger generation in Egypt.

*Keywords:* Revolution; Youth; Subjectivity; Alain Badiou; Revolutionary politics; Egypt

Through the 2011 revolutionary event in Egypt, a new political generation of youth surfaced. Over just eighteen days, young men and women, foremost among other participants, took to the streets and toppled Egypt's longtime President Hosni Mubarak, whose regime had been in power for nearly thirty years. Over the course of the uprising, these young Egyptians aired a collective frustration with deteriorating living conditions and advanced a hope for a different type of politics and social order capable of achieving 'Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice'. This generation of young Egyptians - the 1980s generation - was born in a decidedly different historical moment than their parents. Arising in the midst of a neoliberal world order (Bayat) and during a moment marked by an end to classical war situations that depended on the soldier figure to protect the nation in the name of an ideology (Badiou), this generation of Egyptian youth grew up in altered times, affecting both their transition into adulthood and, accordingly, their understanding of what it means to 'do politics'. A number of scholars have highlighted the extraordinary nature of Egyptian youth's new political practices, exemplified by the Tahrir experience and the loose organizational structures adopted at the square, namely its leaderless and cross-

ideological forms of mobilization (Harders, Bamyeh, Hanafi, Herrera et al.). Yet several scholars have also emphasized the inability of revolutionary youth, through these practices, to formulate a new politics capable of contesting the state (Abdelrahman, Rennick). In his analysis, French philosopher Alain Badiou describes the new time in which Egypt's revolutionary youth are operating in as an 'intervallic period', defined by an end to the traditional way of doing politics conditioned on a leader and an ideology. According to Badiou's reading of the Arab uprisings, "we find ourselves in a *time of riots*<sup>1</sup> wherein a rebirth of History, as opposed to the pure and simple repetition of the worst, is signaled and takes shape" (Badiou 5). Following Badiou's understanding of the intervallic period and the rebirth of history through the Arab revolts, this paper aims to highlight some of the nuances in the new political understandings and practices among Egypt's revolutionary youth. Specifically, it aims to show that, since the 2011 revolutionary event, Egyptian youth have been contesting and shifting away from traditional politics based on a leader and ideology, towards a decisively different, more inclusionary imagination of the politics to come. After a review of relevant literature and a discussion of the intervallic period high-

lighting the different lived experiences among youth today, the paper will examine the cases of Mohamed El-Baradei, one of the founders of the Constitution Party, and Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, one of the founders of the Strong Egypt Party, through the perspective of youths, to highlight how the meaning and role of leaders in politics has changed for revolutionary youth. It will highlight the experiences of the 1980s generation by situating them within their historical location (Mannheim), and instead of defining youth by age, it will examine youth as a social process based on a historical location. It will suggest that while older political activists played an important role in mobilizing for the 2011 events and afterwards, their role is now foremost one of symbolic representation, rather than as leaders advancing a particular ideology. Moreover, it will argue that revolutionary youth no longer want or accept leaders and ideologies in their conception of politics, posing both a challenge and an opening for a different, more emancipatory politics to come.

#### **Youth and the 2011 revolutionary Event**

It came as a surprise to many people in Egypt and around the world when young Egyptians took to the streets to topple President Hosni Mubarak. The possibility that this generation, which has been per-

ceived as apathetic and uninterested in politics (El-Sharnouby, Murphey, Herrera et al.), would take to the streets in such great numbers against the thirty-year rule of Mubarak was inconceivable before 2011. Yet, the day after, revolutionary youth in Egypt did not manage to entrench themselves or their social justice ideals in the political system of the state or its formal political institutions. As opposed to previous revolutionary movements, Egyptian revolutionary youth never sought to seize political power to change the system from one form to another (Bayat). Yet, the 2011 revolutionary event did impact youth's political imaginaries and practices. With the revolutionary event and the toppling of Mubarak, the question of social justice embodied in the slogan 'Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice' surfaced as an important component in the revolutionary imaginary in Egypt. During the eighteen days of the uprising, men and women united in their diversity at the square, allowing for new possibilities of social interactions (Bamyeh, Hanafi, Badiou). Superseding social divisions during the eighteen days, such as between Muslims and Christians, men and women, and among different classes, new possibilities of collective action and interactions were practiced.

Revolutionary youth, those young men and women who took to the streets and still maintain fidelity to the principles of the 2011 revolutionary event, have since been ruthlessly sidelined, particularly after 2013 with the return of the military to power following the toppling of President Mohamed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamzawy). Finding themselves again in the old dynamic of polarized politics between the military and its strongest political opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, revolutionary youth are currently locked in a struggle to impose their presence and go beyond the prevailing political divisions. While the 2011 event brought important questions of social justice and emancipatory politics to the fore, the new political generation forged in the event has yet to find a form of organization to enact their different political ideals and imaginaries.

In this respect, many scholars have grappled with the meaning of the 2011 revolutionary uprisings in the Arab world and in Egypt specifically in its revolutionarity and ability to drive change, suggesting that revolutionary youth did not have a drastically different vision to change the socio-political system nor did they aim at seizing power (Bayat, Abdelrahman). It is particularly the form of organization and mobilization characteristic of the 2011

event—that is, the fact that it was leaderless and cross-ideological—that gives the Egyptian revolution a different appeal similar to other revolutionary movements in this century. Other examples are the Eastern European uprisings at the beginning of the millennium, as well as the other uprisings in the Arab world such as in Syria and Tunisia. The question thus remains: why did this generation of youth act differently than previous revolutionary movements, and what are the political practices and imaginaries that drive their political participation?

To explain the forms of organization adopted in Egypt's 2011 event, some scholars have argued for understanding them within the larger historical context (Zemni et al.). They accordingly suggest that similar mobilization strategies were adopted from previous political struggles in Egypt, most prominently the *Kefaya* (Enough) movement (2004-05) and the Baradei campaign for the presidency (2010) (Abdelrahman, Rennick, Abdalla). Others have argued that these revolts suggest the beginning of a new era that splits from old historical legacies, such as by proposing an end to post-colonialism (Dabashi). Meanwhile, others urge an understanding of the Arab revolts not as revolutions in the old sense of the word, of seizing power, but rather as a combination

between revolutionary action and calling for reforms. In this context, Asef Bayat refers to the 2011 uprising as a 'Refolution' (Bayat).

Bayat claims that revolutions mean simply "the rapid and radical transformation of a state driven by popular movements from below" (Bayat 154). This definition has been expanded since the Arab uprisings in a way that not only focuses on the results of the uprisings in terms of state transformations, but also pays attention to the unfolding changes among revolutionaries. According to Brecht de Smet, "an outcome-centered or consequent centralist approach turns a particular outcome of the revolutionary process into a primary determinant of its success - i.e. the conquest, break-up, and transformation of states" (De Smet). Similarly, Mohammed Bamyeh emphasizes that

successful revolutions are those that usher in a legacy of cultural transformation, and not those that topple systems of grievance. In this sense, enlightenment and revolution go hand in hand, but only insofar as the revolution does away not simply with a political regime as much as with vestiges of authoritarian culture in society at large (Bamyeh 32).

Many of these scholars have thus understood the 2011 revolution as a con-

tinuous or even permanent revolution (Abdelrahman, De Smet), based on a long process of contentious struggle. In that sense, “the revolutionary process is stretched in time, and its movements are dictated by the ebb and flow of its constituting and profound political and economic protests” (Zemni et al.). In a similar understanding, the Egyptian revolutionary uprising is understood in this paper as a long process, yet conditioned by the surfacing of something new through the appearance of, drawing from Badiou's terminology, the event and the subject.

In Badiou's theoretical framework, an event is understood as a break in time through which a new collective political subject emerges. For Badiou, the experience of the event carries in itself clues in which new possibilities for change are embedded. Meaning comes when the newly forged political subject attempts to organize itself in fidelity to the event:

A political organization is the Subject of a discipline of the event, an order in the service of disorder, the constant guardianship of an exception (Badiou 66).

Thus, understanding the new political practices that are characteristic of the 2011 event in Egypt should not seek to simply

explain from where these modes of organization may have been adopted historically, but should also explore them in relation to what type of new political subject surfaced in the event.

Understanding and analyzing the meaning of the loose organizational structures thus requires juxtaposing the political subject(s) that surfaced from the event, including their political practices and imaginaries, with the historical moment in which the Egyptian uprising appeared, which Badiou has coined an “intervallic period”. In his book *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou defines an intervallic period as

what comes *after*<sup>2</sup> a period in which the revolutionary conception of political action has been sufficiently clarified that, notwithstanding the ferocious internal struggles punctuating its development, it is explicitly presented as an alternative to the dominant world, and on this basis has secured massive, disciplined support. (Badiou 38-9)

The disciplined support for the revolutionary ideals of social justice imagined through a diverse collective gave the revolutionary masses in Egypt clues in terms of what they reject, namely discrimination, exclusion of women and minorities (such as Christians and Nubians), unequal power-sharing, and an unfair distribution of

resources. Yet these ideals have not yet been embedded into structural possibilities in an organized politics. These negative ideals, which Egypt's revolutionary youth reject, are still in search of an ‘affirmative element of the idea’:

During these intervallic periods, however, discontent, rebellion and the conviction that the world should not be as it is (...) all this exists. At the same time, it cannot find its political form, in the first instance because it cannot *draw strength* from the *sharing of an Idea*. The force of rebellions, even when they assume an historical significance, remains essentially negative (‘let them go’, ‘Ben Ali out’, ‘Mubarak clear off’). It does not deploy a slogan in the affirmative element of the Idea. (Badiou 40)

As Badiou explains, the formulation of an affirmative idea is essential for inaugurating a new form of politics beyond the intervallic period.

In short, guardians of the history of emancipation in an intervallic period, historical riots point to the urgency of a reformulated ideological proposal, a powerful Idea, a pivotal hypothesis, so that the energy they release and the individuals they engage can give rise, in

and beyond the mass movement and the reawakening of History it signals, to a new figure of organization and hence of politics. (Badiou 42)

Analyzing revolutionary youth's ongoing political struggles in the context of an intervallic period highlights the political subjects' search for a new affirmative idea for the politics to come. As of now, the new politics of Egyptian revolutionary youth is defined on greater social justice and organized around the importance of inclusion of the different segments of society which unfolds in practice by the rejection of a leadership figure in the sense of a hero that strives for change in the name of an ideology.

In absence of an ideology and leader, the challenge for Egypt's revolutionary youth is to find an adequate, alternative form of organization for enacting their political imaginary in fidelity to the 2011 event. Juxtaposing the political figures of Baradei and Aboul Fotouh demonstrates some of the contradictions in the political party as a form of organization and the difficulty of searching for meaningful forms of organization in the absence of a hero figure and an idea. As becomes clear from these contradictions, the party system, as it currently exists, does not offer revolutionary youth

the organizational structure upon which a new form of politics can be born.

The challenge of the cross-ideological and leaderless forms of mobilization is then precisely to find a new form of politics, an idea, and a new type of leadership to organize the revolutionary masses in meaningful ways; that is, in light of the clues that surfaced with the event, the importance of social justice imagined through a diverse collective, that of men and women, Christians and Muslims, people of different classes, and so on. In his book, *Philosophy for Militants*, Badiou argues and asks

'The last man' is the exhausted figure of a man devoid of any figure. It is the nihilistic image of the fixed nature of the human animal, devoid of all creative possibility of overcoming. Our task is to find a new heroic figure, which is neither the return of the old figure of religious or national sacrifice nor the nihilistic figure of the last man. Is there a place, in a disoriented world, for a new style of heroism? (Badiou 34)

The search for a new 'style of heroism' to fuel the energies of revolutionaries to continue their struggle for emancipatory politics is far from easy, precisely because the old hero figures are not representative of

the historical moment in which the uprising unfolded. According to Badiou "the period of the aristocratic warrior is behind us, as is the period of the democratic soldier. So much is certain, but we do not find ourselves for this reason at the peaceful end of History" (Badiou 44). He further states that

the great problem is to create a paradigm of heroism beyond war, a figure that would be neither that of the warrior nor that of the soldier, without for this reason returning to Christian pacifism, which is only the passive form of sacrifice (Badiou 35).

This soldier figure to Badiou was connected to the war situation. The transition from the warrior to the soldier figure came with the French Revolution, in which the soldier figure represents a collective while the warrior before that was foremost important in his individual achievements. The warrior figure "does not formalize a disciplined relationship to an idea. It is a figure of self-affirmation, the promotion of a visible superiority" (ibid 35). Thus, to Badiou, "the French Revolution replaced the individual and aristocratic figure of the warrior with the democratic and collective figure of the soldier" (Badiou 35).



Being 79 years old himself, Badiou's focus on the experience of today's youth in his most recent book, *The True Life*, suggests that youth find themselves in disoriented times in search of new ways of socialization and identification. In the past, for example, "a young man was considered an adult when he had done his military service, and a young woman was considered an adult when she got married. Today, these two vestiges of initiation are no more than memories for grandparents" (Badiou 18). Another decisive difference for Badiou is that "in traditional society, the elders were always the ones in charge; they were valued as such, naturally to the detriment of the young people. Wisdom was on the side of long experience, advanced age, old age" (ibid 19). Although Badiou reflects here foremost on French society, there is some truth to these shifts in Egypt too. Young people's socialization process is shifting away from a traditional society with clearly defined roles for men and women, leadership, and ideology. Though still a patriarchal society, the 2011 revolutionary event in Egypt inaugurated a new process of shifting in the role of women as well as the importance of elders, particularly imagined as heroes. Badiou's understanding of the confusion in the world today in terms of revolutionary politics is convincing. According to

Badiou, "classical revolutionary politics whose goal is justice" reached an end at the close of the 1970s, yet there is no beginning to something new, a new name, idea, or figure to hold on to. Accordingly, he suggests understanding this time, both globally and in the context of Egypt, as intervallic, that is, a moment in which it is clear that something has to change, but no idea is yet strong enough to unify the revolutionary youth towards something other than the vague dream of social justice. According to Badiou:

In an intervallic period, [...] the revolutionary idea of the preceding period, which naturally encountered formidable obstacles, relentless enemies without and a provisional inability to resolve important problems within is dormant. It has not yet been taken up by a new sequence in its development. An open, shared and universally practicable figure of emancipation is wanting. The historical time is defined, at least for all those unamenable to selling out to domination, by a sort of uncertain interval of the Idea. (Badiou 38-39)

Youth of today are born in drastically different times from previous generations, with different experiences affecting their political imaginaries. Asef Bayat, in that sense, identifies the year 1979-80 as the point in which neoliberalism was advanced

and "played a central role in [the] change of the discourse. In place of 'state' and 'revolution' there was an exponential growth of talk about NGOs, 'civil society', public spheres' and so forth - in a word, reform" (Bayat 56). The effect of the neoliberal order on the transition of youth from childhood to adolescence has been highlighted by some scholars in that neoliberal ideas and ideologies are increasingly fused with the image of youth, with an aim to "inculcate neoliberal subjectivities among the young through education, training and youth development programs that promote such concepts as youth entrepreneurship and financial literacy" (Sukarieh et al. 24). As a result, young people spend more time in their lives on education and training. According to Wyn and White,

young people are often forced to seek refuge in education and training institutions because they cannot find work (Wyn et al. 2).

Vera King suggests that youth also experience time differently. Acceleration of time has a decisive impact on youth in as far as new burdens and pressures are imposed on them (King). According to Linda Herrera, another trend among youth due to neoliberal economic restructuring is

widespread precarity. Critiquing the UN's 2016 Arab Human Development Report, she states

The message to young people is that they should pull themselves together, become more self-reliant and take charge of their lives. This distorted framing of empowerment advances a development model in which young people are encouraged to break their collective bonds as “youth” in exchange for facing the future as competing individuals (Herrera).

Youth in general, and Egyptian youth in specific, thus find themselves in a decisively different moment in time marked by the revolutionary event. Due to the event, important questions and reflections in relation to social justice are unfolding until this day. What will follow is an examination of the changed meaning of the hero figure to revolutionary youth through fieldwork done in Egypt in 2014 and 2015.

#### **Superseding one coherent Unity through a Desire for Inclusion in Diversity**

Based on interviews with young former party members of the Muslim Brotherhood and members of the Constitution Party,<sup>3</sup> the following examination of two political party figures, Baradei and Aboul Fotouh, highlights the changed meaning of the

hero figure in the context of the Egyptian uprising in 2011.

#### **The Absence of a Hero Figure**

The mobilization for the Egyptian revolution, though in absence of a hero figure, had certain political figures that made it possible for the movement to unfold into a historical riot<sup>4</sup> in 2011. For example, Mohamed El Baradei, former director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2005, undoubtedly played an important role in uniting the opposition when he proposed running against President Hosni Mubarak in what should have been the 2011 presidential elections. Yet, looking closely at what Baradei stood for in terms of leadership, he did not embody a heroic figure as such, with a new agenda for bringing about change.

According to Amina,<sup>5</sup> a member of the Constitution Party that was formed by Baradei and others, “Baradei is like Ghandi. He is important as an iconic figure” (Personal Interview). Amina, who joined the Baradei campaign for the presidency in 2010, explained that young people were shocked when Baradei eventually decided not to run for the presidency, but noted that

he taught them that this movement is not and shall not depend on him (Personal Interview).

Amina believes “we are the children of Baradei. He taught us that he is not a god-father and that we have to work ourselves” (Personal Interview).

For Amina, Baradei’s Constitution Party is important foremost in protecting youth from detention. Other than that, the party does not seem to offer much, in her opinion. She believes that

revolutionary consciousness (*w’y thawry*) is about doing something for the country without waiting for a result, while ‘political consciousness’ (*w’y syasy*) is about aiming to gain power. The process of political thinking aims at quick solutions, while revolutionary thought is patient in the long run (Personal Interview).

Though affected by Baradei, Amina is more interested in political practices, in which she imagines revolutionary politics to be about a long process that aims eventually towards a politics of greater social justice. For her, political participation is clearly not about gaining power, as she learned from Baradei. Baradei, in that sense, did not resemble the traditional hero figure in terms of following his ideas, but rather following his lead in an aim to

reform the state in accordance with democratic forms of governance.

Amr, a member in the 6th of April youth movement who joined the Constitution Party, but who was not very active, had a similar understanding of Baradei as Ghandi. For him, "Baradei, like Ghandi, is the father figure that inspired and made me join the Constitution Party". Besides being an inspiration, however, the party did not represent much more for Amr in terms of a form of organization that could bring about meaningful change. The image that Baradei represents fits well in the current historical situation in which there is a general absence of the traditional hero figure. Baradei primarily represents a leading figure who encourages the young to participate in politics through democratic forms of governance, such as elections. He does not represent a hero figure in the old sense of the word.

What Baradei resembled is thus the possibility for democracy in the absence of anything revolutionary about him in terms of representing an ideology. He represented the possibility of democratic governance by proposing to compete in the elections; in a broader sense, Baradei embodied the possibility of meaningful reforms of the state and its institutions by breaking the domination of the presidency by one dictator after the next.

Baradei also symbolized the will to go against acting as a hero figure. Instead, he explicitly sought to serve as a focal point, using the wide network that his advanced age and prestige afforded him to mobilize youth. He did not consider himself a hero, as Amina suggests, nor did he aim to bring about drastic change. Rather, he sought to motivate the youth to join forces and push for the changes they hoped for, leading some members in the Constitution Party to perceive him as a 'Ghandi' figure in the sense of standing for peaceful resistance combined with an image of pushing for reforms.

Similar trends can be found among youth who were formerly members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded in the 1920s, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) espouses an Islamic ideology and has an extensive history of mobilization and organization that has long established it as the strongest opposition in Egypt. Having acted as the opposition for an extended period of time, the MB developed into a centralized leadership and rigid hierarchy, which was less appealing to some of its young members. According to Akram, who is 30 years old and was a MB member from 2003 to 2008

When the MB started their first year of rule [in 2012], they had some important challenges in their organization, like

the problem of recruitment. They really did not manage to recruit. And this was something fascinating for anyone who knows them because in the past they recruited members in huge numbers. Their appeal [once they were in power] was not there anymore - they used to present themselves as a moderate movement that fights. But now that they are in power, the appeal of what you had as an opposition was gone". (Personal Interview).

Akram, whose family has been in the higher ranks of the MB in previous years, decided to resign from the organization in frustration with the Islamic interpretations the movement adopted and its inability to open up to new ideas in its rigid organizational structure. According to him

The organization of the MB, what keeps it together during times of repression is based on central democracy. The decision-making always happens on a very small scale and very centralized, and then the implementation of these decisions happens also in a very centralized way. (...) The organization does not want people who think. It is not only that they do not want them [those who aim to introduce new ideas], but they become a burden - people they [the MB] do not want. And this explains why many people have left. (Personal

Interview)  
Ahmed, who was a MB member from 1995 to 2009, confirmed this sentiment. Ahmed resigned in 2009 because

I personally felt that the solution [to political change] had to be a revolutionary one, which I realized in 2009 when the constitution of 2007 was adjusted and the heritage [Hosni Mubarak began grooming his son Gamal Mubarak to become the next president of Egypt] started happening and so on. The MB did not go into this direction, while in the meantime, there appeared more youth movements and there were alternatives to the MB who fight the political order in a more revolutionary direction. (Personal Interview)

After the 2011 revolutionary uprising, Ahmed reconsidered joining the MB, but the centralized decision-making process and control over youth's choices was unappealing. Shortly after Mubarak was toppled in 2011, some youth of the MB

got permission [from the MB leadership] to make a conference. Yet shortly before the conference they were told to cancel it. So they [the youth] wondered why, we have already reserved a place and made other arrangements. No, cancel it [they were told]. The idea that youth make their own conference and talk openly about their issues was

considered not feasible, instead they [the MB leadership] wanted them [the youth] to talk to the leaders as their friends. Eventually the MB said we have nothing to do with this conference. But they [the youth] insisted to hold the conference, which of course marked them. When the decision was taken [to do the conference] they [those organizing the conference] were expelled. (Personal Interview)

Ahmed, along with several other former MB members who had all joined the Baradei campaign for presidency in 2010, eventually decided to form their own group/party. For this, they decided they needed a 'famous person':

Some of us thought, let's make a party, and then the idea was, despite whether it was right or wrong, how do we form the party?! We need a famous person to attract people. Then, what about Aboul Fotouh? He was the suggestion as a famous person among the doctors. And we were close to him, so we thought, why not make him the president of the party? And then others would say, why not do a presidential campaign? The idea being to do a presidential campaign to attract people and mobilize them and then, out of it, make a party, because you need 10,000 official sup-

porters in a number of governorates and so on [to form a political party]. So then we started talking to him and decided to do a presidential campaign and not a party. (Personal Interview)

Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, presidential hopeful in the 2012 elections and ex-MB member, though still influential among the MB and famous among its youth members, also did not resemble a traditional hero figure. Instead, he served as an important iconic figure that helped to mobilize youth groups. The Strong Egypt Party, formed by Aboul Fotouh, is an interesting case study for deeper probing, particularly in its ideological component, in as far as Aboul Fotouh appeared as a moderate Islamist, thus attracting attention on this ideological level. Yet, in terms of leadership in the sense of a classic hero figure that finds relevance and strength through ideology, he also did not fit the bill. That is, Aboul Fotouh foremost resembled a possibility for moderate Islamism; in a sense, he offered a way out of the centralized and rigid interpretations of Islam by the MB. Although the case of MB splinter groups needs deeper probing in terms of their political imaginaries due to the complex relationship between Islam and politics in the Egyptian context, the political imaginaries among revolutionary youth, includ-

ing those who left the MB, is not based on a search for a hero figure and a rigid ideology to follow. While this revolutionary movement in Egypt, similar to previous revolutionary movements, aimed to achieve greater social justice, a decisive difference is the absence of a political drive based on a hero figure mobilizing people in the name of an ideology. The political figures of Baradei and Aboul Fotouh resemble important iconic figures used to form groups, yet they do not resemble the hero figure in the Badiouan sense.

Contrasting the political figure of Baradei to that of Gamal Abdel Nasser, for example, illustrates the different character of the 2011 revolution versus the 1952 revolutionary coup in Egypt. Nasser represented a hero figure in the Badiouan sense. Nasser, as spearheading nationalism, was embodied in the figure of the soldier. In this case, Nasser was literally a soldier before the 1952 events. In its symbolic importance, Nasser represented the hero that would free Egyptians from colonialism and lead them to independence. The political project was clearly that of national independence accompanied by the hero figure: Nasser in the role of the *zaiim*, the leader, with nationalism as an ideology. Though Baradei never became President of Egypt, and despite the fact that many

have been critical of the leadership model he proposed, the point of comparison is rather the symbolic representation of Baradei, along with Aboul Fotouh, to highlight the different character of the 2011 revolution. In comparison to Nasser, Baradei was more of a leading figure represented in the democratic practice of competing in elections, similar to that of Aboul Fotouh, than a hero figure that represented something new as such.

### Conclusion

In absence of the hero figure and an ideology, revolutionary politics today in Egypt has diverged from its old historical drive, which was conditioned with wars and independence movements to bring about change through a leader and an ideology. Nasser's popularity in Egypt, for example, is directly connected with his national project of forming the independent nation state and the historical situation of colonialism. The desire for independence at that time was thus the historical condition that made the ideology of nationalism in the hero figure of Nasser a possibility. However, in the absence of wars - the last one in Egypt was in 1973 - this condition is lacking from revolutionary youth's experiences. In turn, they do not see the relevance of a hero figure. Since Nasser, Egypt has been governed by the military through

authoritarian rule and never translated the country's independence movement into greater social justice and more emancipatory politics. It resulted instead in successive dictatorial rule. Thus, the challenge for youth today is, as Badiou emphatically writes, "in disoriented times, we cannot accept the return of the old, deadly figures of religious sacrifice,<sup>6</sup> but neither can we accept the complete lack of any figure, and the complete disappearance of any idea of heroism" (Badiou 33).

Placing youth within the intervallic period—that is, a time in which neither traditional politics based on leadership and ideology are appealing, nor is politics yet driven by a new idea or ideology that could supersede previous pitfalls of revolutionary movements, such as the dictatorship of one leader—leaderless and cross-ideological mobilization strategies suggest a meaningful form of representing revolutionary youth in Egypt. These mobilization strategies are not simply a choice or a tactic used to mobilize others, but are a reflection of youth's experiences during this particular historical juncture. These mobilization strategies promise new possibilities of practicing politics superseding the possibility of dictatorship of one leader and one ideology for all, in as far as they allow for a collective body to unite in their diversity aiming for greater social jus-

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tice and a fairer representation of the different segments of society (religious affiliation, gender, class, and so on). Yet as these mobilization strategies are not yet substantiated within an idea or a representative form of organization allowing for new possibilities of collective action and interaction, they remain a site and means of continued struggle.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Emphasis in original text

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis in original text

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed Case Study of my research go to: El Sharnouby, Dina "Conducting Participant Action Research in the Context of Drastic Change: Understanding Youth's Political Project in Revolutionary Egypt" SAGE Research Methods Cases (2018)

<sup>4</sup> Alain Badiou understands the Egyptian revolution as a historical riot; that is, as a break in time that allowed for new possibilities

<sup>5</sup> All names of my interlocutors are replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identities

<sup>6</sup> Badiou does not mean religious sacrifice literally in terms of religion but rather hints at the idea of militantly abiding by a particular doctrine.

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ISSN: 2196-629X  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17192/meta.2017.9.6835>

## A Confined Youth? Lived Space and Shifting Boundaries in Beirut

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This article questions spatial experiences among students in Beirut. It mobilizes collaborative map interviews to explore the ways young people experiment with space and the social boundaries it incorporates. I argue that their perception of their lived space underlines a crucial shift: whereas their parents experimented the city in terms of sectarian and political divisions, my interlocutors have integrated

these boundaries not as ideological but as the result of daily practices of segregation born during the Lebanese wars (1975-1990). This evolution reveals renewed understandings of the Lebanese complex landscape and contributes to delineate youth as a social shifter.

**Keywords:** Youth; Politics of Space; Memory; Lebanon

Stepping into the streets of Beirut exposes Henri Lefebvre's ideas that "space is political and ideological" (Lefebvre 31). The urban fabric of the Lebanese capital still bears the marks of the violent conflicts that once ravaged the country (1975-1990) and displays countless evidences of its persistent social and political fractures. Flags, graffiti and posters fill the space with ideologies and symbolically prolong the physical divisions that characterized the city during the war (Haugbolle 161). Contemporary Beirut remains a polycentric city in which territories are subjected to powerful identity claims. Having inherited this space molded from past confrontations, when the *Green Line* separated what was referred to as the *West*, mostly populated by Muslims, and the *East*, predominantly Christian, young Beirutis born in postwar Lebanon have, in their daily activities, "to get along in a network of already established forces and representations" (De Certeau 18). In this article, I intend to explore how the youth living in Beirut manage this spatial-temporal heritage. More precisely, I aim at investigating how the memory of the war as well as the practices it inspires inform the ways young people experiment with space and the social boundaries it incorporates. How do today's youth live and make sense of these inherited spatial divisions, and to



what extent are these experiences constitutive of what could be identified as a generation?

While the questions of territoriality and wartime memory have been the focus of many academic works, which have especially insisted on the strength of socio-political territories (e.g. Deeb; Harb) and the difficulties of the country to deal with its troubled past (Haugbolle; Makarem), the position of the youth in regard to this double heritage has received insufficient attention. The Lebanese youth have remarkably remained for the most part ignored compared to other Arab countries, with the notable exception of studies concerned with the prominent issue of migration (Kasparian). Yet, in a post-conflict society such as Lebanon, the significance of youth is crucial to understanding how the notion of generation matters in the reproduction of past boundaries and how the youth could locate themselves in territories marked by violent legacies. Positioning this article at the intersection between the questions of memory, spatiality and youth, I propose to shift the attention to the experiences and imagination of space among Beirut's youth. Starting from an empirical case study grounded in young people's imaginaries, it becomes possible to revisit the question of the spatial and temporal boundaries from below

and to critically engage with the notion of youth and generation from the case of contemporary Lebanon.

### Mapping Students' *Lived Space*

Before considering how the young people I met experiment with space, I deem it important to introduce my methods and data collection techniques in more detail. The past decade has seen a developing attraction for collaborative research (Rappaport 1), which "*deliberately and explicitly* emphasizes collaboration [...]" (Lassiter 15). Following this growing interest, this article relies on collaborative interviews conducted among students of the American University of Beirut. (AUB) Fieldwork took place during the spring of 2016 as part of a French-Lebanese research program on the role of universities in the production of space in Beirut. Within this project, I started from Henri Lefebvre's notion of *lived space* (Lefebvre 33), which is born from the conception of space as both physically experienced (*real space*) and mentally constructed (*imagined space*), invested with symbolism and meaning. After exchanges with my French and Lebanese colleagues, I designed collaborative map-elicited interviews to investigate how students experiment with lived space, i.e. both the materiality of space and its imagination. Individually,

participants were asked to mark with a pen places or areas that bear special meanings in their life on three successive maps at different scales: the first map representing their campus, the second the city of Beirut, and the third Lebanon. In doing so, my intention was to play on spatial scales to locate at once daily routines as well as the imagination and memory embedded in these spatial frameworks. Using this technique, I collected thirteen interviews lasting between one and a half and two and a half hours, complemented with ethnographic material gathered during previous fieldwork among Lebanese students. Participants, recruited with the assistance of AUB professors, were aged between 21 and 27, with one exception of an older, thirty-four-year-old student. They were in majority women (nine vs. four men). These volunteers were studying at the graduate and postgraduate levels, either in the department of Architecture and Urbanism or in the department of Sociology. Four of them were beneficiaries of full scholarships, covering the integrality of their tuition fees. The result is that despite the heavily elitist nature of the AUB, not all the participants belong to upper-class families. These young people, whose names and other identifying details have been modified, agreed to share aspects of their daily routine, memories

and experiences of space. The significance of the selection was then discussed from the commentaries of the participants, in collaboration with me. Adopting a micro-sociological approach, I used these

interpersonal situations as a strategy through which broader social forces, properties, and processes can be understood as constituted in practice (Fine and Fields 131).

Accordingly, the stories presented in this article were not highlighted because they would be statistically representative. Rather, they were selected because of their capacity to illuminate dynamics I observed during the fieldwork years and in my dialogue with the participants. They uncover not only personal but also social imaginaries and collective memories, which, according to Maurice Halbwachs, always “unfold within a spatial framework” (6). More specifically, I analyzed my material using the concept of navigation as a theoretical underpinning. The notion of *navigating* lies “at the intersection of urban and youth studies” (Hecking 57) and highlights the ways

people make sense of and work their way through diverse urban environments, often in context of deep poli-

tical, economic and social inequality (McFarlane and Anjaria 6).

I argue that ways young people reflect on their relation to space underline a shift in the experience of Beirut’s fragmented reality: whereas their parents firstly conceived of the city in terms of its sectarian and political divisions, my interlocutors have integrated these boundaries not as ideological but as the result of daily practices of avoidance of the Other born during the war and its immediate aftermaths. In the next sections of this article, I lay out this central argument in the following manner: First, I describe how their ways of navigating the urban space underline a sense of territorial restriction, articulated around an insider/outsider trope. Then, I describe how this confinement can be traced back to daily practices of segregation born during as well as immediately after the 1975-1990 wars. I make a case that, contrary to the war generations, these limitations are practical in nature rather than ideological, which opens the way toward renewed narratives on coexistence and innovative strategies of bypassing confinement. Finally, I conclude that these experiences of Beirut’s urban space index shifting relationships within Lebanese society and delineate the youth as a specific, relational category.

### Recounting Navigation Practices

In our conversations, Beirut was depicted as a demanding city, difficult to domesticate. *Chaotic*, *vertical* or even *overgrown* were the words put forward by most participants to describe the metropolis. In the maps they drew, three images predominate: first, the depiction of routes describing their ability to move across the city; second, the delimitation of specific areas, conveying the idea of territories, i.e. spaces identified as familiar or, on the contrary, alien; third, the descriptions of boundaries and fault-lines, which are not only acknowledged but also frequently confronted and transgressed. All three features materialize these young people’s sense of navigating Beirut’s urban terrain. A master’s student in sociology, Maya, 34, organizes her experiment with Beirut’s space according to three major areas, each of which relates to a specific life sphere: first, her family house and its neighborhood of Badaro<sup>2</sup>, a residential area marking the frontier between the municipality of Beirut and its southern suburb as well as between Christian districts of Furn al-Chebbak or Ayn al-Rummaneh and Shia inhabited regions; second, the location of her studies, i.e. the AUB and its adjacent district of Hamra in West Beirut, where she has been renting a flat for the last year; third, the region of Sin

el-Fil, a Christian populated suburb in the eastern margins of the city, where she works as an English teacher. She explains:

My space is first where my family is, that is the district of Badaro and Furn al-Chebbak. That's where I was first introduced to Beirut [after moving from Nigeria where she was born]. [...] Then I went to AUB and my space became Badaro and Hamra. And now, I have added Sin el-Fil for work. [...] I negotiate between these three spaces, work, family and studies. [...] I usually spend the weekend at my family house and stay at my apartment during the week, but if I have to work in Sin el-Fil, then I would probably go back to the family house as it makes it much easier to reach my workplace. Traffic makes me negotiate between the three spaces (Interview with Maya).

The ability to circulate in the city is a key component of students' lived space. Practical questions play a prominent part, mostly because contemporary Beirut suffers from severe traffic congestion, complicated by persistent security threats. More symbolically, the issue of navigation also relates to the transitions in between familiar spaces and different life spheres. Circulating between moments and places,

the young participants expose the existence of distinct territories as the daily routes and familiar places they drew on the maps underline *a contrario* the existence of alien spaces in the city, depicted as *unfamiliar* (Interview with Maya) or revealed by the repeatedly heard sentence "I never go there" (e.g. Interview with Nina).

The concept of navigation also resonates with the recurrent distinction made between insiders and outsiders. This opposition surfaces at various levels when it comes to recounting an initiation to a new territory and the rules that organize it, recalling a sense of alienation in an unfamiliar neighborhood, or contemplating the perception of political and sectarian divisions in the city. The story told by Nisrine provides a powerful example of this insiders/outside effect on how space is lived. A fourth-year student in architecture, Nisrine was born in Brazil in a family of the Lebanese diaspora. Because her parents wanted her to study in Lebanon, she moved with her younger sister to Beirut in 2012. She recounts the shock of her arrival as she moved into an apartment situated in the Salim Salam area, at the center of Beirut. She evokes the young men hanging out in front of the buildings, controlling and marking the space of the neighborhood with flags of the political

parties Amal and Hezbollah, two organizations recruiting mostly among Shia Muslims who make up the majority of the population in this area of the city. She also recalls how she had to familiarize herself with this new environment:

I had to adapt to people with different backgrounds. I had to learn the places I could go or not, what kind of clothes I could wear and what I could not. [...] I have been learning the hard way. [...] When I first arrived, I was totally shocked. [...] With all the people looking at you. [...] They know you are not from here. (Interview with Nisrine).

Nisrine confesses having felt depressed and admits that she never settled into the neighborhood, which she now tries to avoid. After a year or so, she moved to another part of the city, closer to AUB, where she feels much better due to a lower density of the urban landscape and a greater diversity in the population, making her feel *less different* (Interview with Nisrine). According to her, she discovered the daily manifestations of sectarianism with equal astonishment and disbelief (Interview with Nisrine). Another key element in her feeling of alienation was her difficulty in mastering Arabic, a language

she had not spoken at home before arriving in Beirut.

Experiences of the distinction between insiders and outsiders also emerge from the stories of students' integration into the surroundings of the AUB, and more precisely the neighborhood of Hamra, historically identified with the Arab left and the cosmopolitan lifestyle in the Lebanese capital (Davie 4). "Hamra is a very exclusive neighborhood, and a specific group of people there has a tendency to bully the newcomers arriving from outside" said one of the participants (Interview with Nina). Clara, a master's student in sociology, similarly highlights the elitism she encountered in Hamra but also explains how she was able to negotiate her position in this environment:

My family originates from Corniche al-Mazraa in Beirut. [...] I only went there two or three times in my whole life. [...] But there are not many people who actually are originating from the city. Sentimentally, I am very attached to Beirut. So I like to brag a little bit about it [...]. That way, I can justify my attachment to the city with roots. (Interview with Clara).

Family origins hence provide a powerful symbolic resource for claiming a status of insider within a given territory. It confirms

the strength of the heritage of localism and kinship as a key storyline in the definition of one's positioning, understood as the dynamic and relational identification in social interaction (Davies and Harré 44). In this context, the question of borders between territories logically relates to the issue of political and sectarian demarcations and their resulting tensions. Nora, a fourth-year student whose father is an officer in the Lebanese Army, describes her neighborhood as follows:

I don't like my neighborhood because problems always break out there. [...] For instance in the street fighting of May 7, 2008. [...] My school was also politically identified with one party [the Future Movement of the Sunni leader Saad Hariri] but it is located in a district affiliated with a rival group [namely the Amal Movement]. [...] There were always troubles between young men from the neighborhood and some of my schoolmates. (Interview with Nora).

The ways research participants navigate the city acknowledge social and political fractures. The narrative of their spatial understanding along the insiders/outsiders trope unsurprisingly reveals how crucial the question of territoriality remains in contemporary Beirut. Beyond these expe-

riences looms also the heritage of the violent past of the Lebanese capital.

### Revisiting Boundaries

Visions of political and sectarian territories remain ultimately inseparable from the memory of the Lebanese wars (1975-1990). Wartime distinction between *sharqiyya* (East) and *gharbiyya* (West) remains a pivotal element in the imagination of Beirut's space:

I am aware that my spaces are split between the East/West divide [...] as well as built around upper-middle-class milieus. [...] They felt like separated areas not because I was aware of it but because I became aware of it through what people said. [...] I was not aware of it until I was accepted to join the AUB. [...] All I knew was Badaro and my school. [...] It was a postwar reality. Mum was scared. We lived a confined life. [...] It's strange because we are a Muslim family and we were living in a Christian district. (Interview with Maya).

Maya's reflections suggest how the memory of the divide is passed on in interactions, mainly through a sectarian framing. Yet, she questions this sectarian view and notes that, during the wars, a *safe space* was primarily a confined, local space,

where people knew their neighbors and could be equally identified. During the conflict, fear spurred a separation that was a question of localism rather than purely sectarian. Despite their brutal attempts, militia organizations never achieved the construction of homogenized communal territories that they were seeking to create (Picard). Hinting at an intergenerational gap, Maya acknowledges the fact that, for her, the reason for this confinement remained vague. Only crossing the border revealed its existence. This lack of substance frequently surfaced in the words of her fellow students. For instance, Clara elucidates:

For us, separation was just a fact [...]. My father used to work for Tele Liban, in the West. So, we were not necessarily living a confined life, but that [West Beirut] was something I did not know. For us, it was a practical difference, unlike my mother's family. They were engaged during the war [in the Christian Lebanese Forces militia] and had to leave Lebanon. When I see them, I am exposed to their stories and visions. They still live on war mythologies like Phoenicia and these kinds of very stupid things. (Interview with Clara).

The young woman, who confessed earlier in the interview that she had refrained from crossing the former Green Line for years, explains that she changed her attitude when she grew older and started to question "the prejudices [she] was taught, especially about the war" (Interview with Clara). This is in contrast to her exiled relatives, whose last memories of Beirut remain embedded in the reminiscence of the wars. For them, the temporality of conflict seems to have solidified in their imagination of the city. On the contrary, among young people like Clara, if the spatial practices of the immediate postwar period have perpetuated, they have been partly emptied of their ideological foundations. The border remains in young people's imagination, but seems to only work at a practical level, maintained by the habits of a confined life born during and after the wars. Localism, as the young people I met experienced it, was not fueled by ideological, negative perceptions of the Other. Originally imposed by the eruption of violence, confinement then habitualized through socialization and spatial practices. The more practical nature of boundaries makes their crossing more probable and hence paves the way toward renewed narratives on coexistence, as the following story recounted by Nina illustrates:

The place I am living in [Kesrouan] is the opposite of the area where my boyfriend lives. I am now telling in terms of religion or sect. [...] But now [that I visited the area] I am thinking if these two places are different just because I know they are different. And maybe they are not that different after all. (Interview with Nina).

While the description of the two spaces as *opposite* hints at the persistent power of sectarian imaginaries, the end of the account testifies of the possibility of questioning stereotypes. For young people like Nina originating from Christian families, studying at the AUB in the predominantly Muslim West Beirut opens up lived space to territories that have long remained distant and fearsome. Life on the campus, as well as time spent with classmates from various origins or in the cafés and restaurants in Hamra all contribute to daily practices of coexistence making up what Asef Bayat calls "everyday cosmopolitanism" (Bayat 10). These practices challenge inherited representations and fears, all the more readily since they have lost parts of their substance with the return to civil peace. Borders are not exclusively sites of separation, but also of passage and transgression. Youthful spaces are materialized in the city through the emergence of vibrant territories dedicated to arts, cul-

ture and nightlife, whose rapid circulation between various areas of the capital reflects a desire for renewal and for a radical redefinition of urban spaces, partially emancipated from the pressure of social control:

There is a circulation of hangout places [for the youth]. Before [in the early 2000s] it used to be in Monot Street [in East Beirut, near the Jesuit University], then it was Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhail [two Christian populated neighborhoods in East Beirut] and now in Badaro [a mixed, formerly residential district], Qarantina and the River [both situated in the Eastern limit of the municipality, between the harbor and the Armenian district of Bourj Hammoud]. They opened bars, art centers [...]. It [...] brings 'civil life' [i.e. non-sectarian] (Interview with Lisa).

I love [nightlife districts of] Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhail because you can be there with your friends, you can be with your lover, you can kiss or wear clothes that are not [appropriate]. In other neighborhood like Tareq al-Jadideh [a residential Sunni populated area known as conservative][...]they have their own codes and you cannot do whatever you would like to (Interview with Mona).

Youth territories hint at a desire for reformulating social norms and reinventing coexistence in a public space freed from inherited representations of the Other. As Haidar, a master's student in architecture who grew up in a Shia family of the southern suburb of Beirut like Mona, explains:

[Space and sectarian identity] still affect us, in a way, but not as much as it used to be. Because for us, the younger generation, it is not like for the older ones. The borders between areas are not that strong. Especially for us who are born after the war [...]. The younger generation is more easy-going with people from different areas. (Interview with Haidar).

Haidar claims that this changing attitude toward sectarian boundaries and otherness results from a generational gap in the classical sense put forward by Mannheim, i.e. fueled by the alteration of experiences and historical contexts. I think however that this generational claim has to be understood as performative. Proclaiming this shift contributes to delineating youth as a relational category defined by opposition to the war (and immediate postwar) generations in "a shifting and contested historical and social arena" (Durham 593). To declare to be a youth is to position one-

self in regard to the legacy of the past and state not only age differences but also claims for rights, agency and authority. As such, youth appears as "a social shifter": "when invoked, youth indexes sets of social relationships that are dynamic and constructed in the invocation" (Durham 589). With their pens and their words, the young people I met pinpointed spots, places and areas that not only represent spaces, but also assert powerful dynamics of change. Presented with the map of the city, Gloria, 25, a master's student in architecture who grew up in Jounieh, immediately gave a hint how she learned to navigate through and around the fears populating the narratives of the elders:

During and right after the war, East and West Beirut were divided. My parents used to think that the West was dangerous. [...] They were always scared of West Beirut. [...] Even, according to my father, all Beirut is unsafe. Even now, when I come home late, I don't tell them that I was there [...]. (Interview with Gloria).

She concretely located the time and space of her realization of this weighty heritage by marking the road intersection where a decisive argument erupted with her fiancé. From the evocation of this intimate

episode unfolds the narration of what she perceives as a struggle between the old and the new. The time and space of the incident has become the symbol of a turning point in her life and experience of the city. Following this line of thought, she distinguishes her old habits centered around the conservative environment of her hometown from her present eagerness to discover Beirut and feel the energy of its youth, presented as secular, cosmopolitan and willing to emancipate from the taboos of Lebanese society, particularly regarding sexuality (Interview with Gloria). Her words describe how she now challenges the practices of avoidance adopted by her parents, as well as the sectarian and patriarchal structures in which she grew up, by deliberately spending time in the Western part of the city and socializing in cafés and restaurants renowned for their cosmopolitan and liberal ambiance. However, her call for emancipation and gender equality bears limitations, exposing the complexity of intergenerational navigation:

If it was just for me, I would not follow the rules of the Lebanese society [...] especially for girls because you cannot make your own decisions [...]. [For example] I would not get married. [...] But at the same time [...] I really want my parents to approve me. [...] So it

is conflicting. [...] [But] 10 years ago, no one would have dared to say such things like having relations before marriage. Now women ask why is that men can do things women are not allowed to do? (Interview with Gloria).

Some among the research participants have gone further in their denunciation: Lisa, a fourth-year student in architecture, decided to confront the sectarian divides in her university by joining AUB's secular club and took an active part in the civil campaign "Beirut Madinati", which challenged the power of traditional sectarian political forces during the 2015 municipal elections (Interview with Lisa). Her classmate Tareq lives an even more radical rupture. Our map-elicited conversation details how he has learned to discover the sites of gay Beirut and decided to frontally defy the prejudices of his society by exposing his own homosexuality both in his family and publicly with his fellow students as well as through his engagement in the Lebanese LGBT movement *Helem* (Interview with Tareq).

### Conclusions: Youth as Shifting Social Relationships

In this article, my intention is not to claim that social and political boundaries are disaggregating in contemporary

Lebanon, but rather to underline some dynamics of change at work among young people through the study of their lived space. If the practices and imaginations of space collected during this project remain imprinted by the memory of the 1975-1990 wars, they nonetheless expose a clear inflection. Contrary to their parents, whose vision of the city was directly affected by violence, the students I met have experienced spatial fragmentation as the result of daily routines. Accordingly, their ways of making sense of boundaries are radically different. As a postwar generation, they inherited the consequences of forced segregation without, however, having a direct knowledge of its origins. Consequently, while their visions are not free of prejudices and identity assignments, they have lost parts of their traumatic charges and thus seem more prone to engage in renewed experiment with alterity.

Even more fundamentally, designating themselves as young, the research participants were able to take their distance from this war heritage and claim a renovated understanding of space and social relationships. Discovering and uncovering Beirut becomes for these young people part of a more general calling for emancipating the country from sectarianism, corrupted practices of power and patriarchal

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authorities, in particular regarding gender equality and sexuality. Invoking youth is a political act, asserting a shift from previous norms and practices and specifically the heritage of the wars. In that sense, youth's lived spaces reveal a generational change toward a transformed comprehension of political and social pluralism as well as new forms of engaging with it. As such, the stories of the students I met are stories of agency, part of the daily efforts coming from the margins celebrated by Asef Bayat, which "instigate change, rather than waiting for a savior or resorting to violence" (26). This willingness to get rid of the legacy of conflict, fears and confinement to explore new possibilities is encapsulated in the words of Lisa, who concluded our conversation as follows:

I would like to be there when time of change eventually comes in Beirut [...] and participate in this transformation toward a secularized life [...]. Beirut is an opportunity! (Interview with Lisa).



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Materials used for the purpose of this article have been collected during a fieldwork trip funded by Campus France as part of a wider CEDRE project entitled: "Les Universités, acteurs de la production urbaine à Beyrouth" (2015-2016).

<sup>2</sup> In this article, I use the most common Lebanese spelling for the names of organizations or places, which might differ from the conventional English transliteration from Standard Arabic.

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## Frantic Waiting: NGO Anti-Politics and “Timepass” for Young Syrian Refugees in Jordan

Ann-Christin Wagner

Drawing on Sukarieh and Tannock’s political economy of youth approach, this paper explores how Syrian *refugee youth* is constituted in protracted displacement in Jordan. It investigates a juvenile population often overlooked in Forced Migration Studies, disenfranchised rural Syrians, who fail to develop practices of youthfulness, yet in exile are subjected to alternative productions of *youth* by the aid sector. Depoliticized NGO youth programming overlooks Syrians’ limited access to the labor market and higher

education. While educational trainings aim to produce entrepreneurial and citizen refugees, they ultimately contribute to the creation of *timepass* and precarious lives. This research is grounded in 2016/17 of ethnographic fieldwork with Syrian refugees in a border town in northern Jordan.

**Keywords:** Syrian refugee crisis; Jordan; rural livelihoods; urban displacement; NGO youth politics; timepass

### Introduction

Having “reeked of lives on hold”, is how Betts and Collier recently described refugee existence in Zaatari camp, Jordan, evoking standard tropes of displacement-induced waiting (viii).

Yet, contrary to common depictions of refugees as immobilized and passive, I found young Syrian refugees in Mafraq, a Jordanian town a mere 10 miles away from the Syrian border, to be surprisingly busy with studying English, Quran and IT, sewing and hairdressing courses, even a wedding photography class. Offered by local churches and mosques as well as Jordanian and international NGOs, these programs kept my informants occupied on most days. As many of them lasted no longer than a week, young refugees would complete one course after another, exchanging information about upcoming educational offers with their peers on WhatsApp and accumulating official-looking *certificates*, usually issued by humanitarian agencies themselves.

Yet, over time, I began to have my suspicions about the ultimate value of so much bustle. As Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention on refugees, Syrians in the country are subjected to the same labor migration regulations as other migrants. Limited access to the formal

labor market – restricted to low-skilled jobs and requiring work permits difficult to obtain – and to higher education makes it unlikely that young Syrians could put newly acquired skills to use in the near future (Lenner). As a Syrian woman jokingly remarked to me: “We learn English so we can receive foreign [NGO] visitors.”

The obvious mismatch between NGO programming and young Syrians’ exclusion from the formal economy in Jordan led me to question both the humanitarians’ and young people’s motivations for engaging in what seemed like an endless loop of educational training of all sorts. In doing so, I rediscovered the “strangeness of improvement” of other people’s lives (Li 3). Eventually, challenging NGOs’ youth politics made me reconsider the meaning of *youth* itself. In offering training explicitly advertised for *young* Syrians, what kind of *youth* did NGOs have in mind?

Conceptually, this paper draws inspiration from two bodies of literature. First, in investigating productions of *youth*, I rely on Sukarieh and Tannock’s *political economy of youth* approach. Instead of taking *youth* as given, I ask how *youth* as a social category is constituted. However, a political economy of youth is not limited to an analysis of youngsters’ economic rela-

tions; rather, it brings into view how a complex web of circumstances – economic, social, and cultural – transforms, or fails to transform, young people as an age cohort into *youth*.

Second, to make sense of how Western NGOs produce Syrian *youth* as a humanitarian object which they can subsequently act upon, this research positions itself in the continuity of postcolonial critiques of development. Putting to use Foucault’s seminal concept of discourse as *practice* (cf. Hall), postcolonial scholars have investigated how institutionalised knowledge productions are imbued with power and have material effects. Demonstrating how *Others* are constituted as objects of knowledge that states can discipline and govern, (e.g. Bhabha; Hall; Said and many others), they have highlighted the embeddedness of cultural representations in histories of colonialism, slavery and imperialism. While this paper can only allude to the rich tradition of thought, it takes seriously Spivak’s objection to postcolonial intellectuals’ ambitions to restore the subalterns’ voice: while first-world critiques remain entangled in hegemonic ways of speaking, attempts at passing the mic to the *working class*, *Indian women*, and other marginalized people overlook the heterogeneous nature of these groups.

Hence, this paper does not claim to juxtapose humanitarian endeavours with *what young Syrian refugees really want*. Rather, it brings to the fore longstanding histories of dispossession, while concerning itself with the ways in which young aid beneficiaries are silenced through gendered and class-based violence, but also through humanitarian project design in exile.

When it comes to development interventions, “the colonial notion of European superiority” lingers in the subdivision of the world into more or less developed countries; Western capitalist economies and consumer societies are held up as the universal ideal of humanity (Ziai 128). In this paper, I demonstrate how humanitarian action attempts to forge neoliberal model refugees, overlooking the after-effects of economic disenfranchisement in pre-war Syria and power differentials between Syrian refugees and aid workers in Jordan. This line of thought owes a great deal to Ferguson’s (*The Anti-Politics*) seminal study of rural development projects in Lesotho, where he resorts to Foucauldian discourse theory to demonstrate the – often unforeseen – material consequences of development discourse. As NGOs and international organizations invent Lesotho as an isolated subsistence economy, ignoring its longstanding

embeddedness in regional economies and migration circuits, mismatched agricultural schemes fall short of reducing poverty, leading to the expansion of state bureaucracy instead. Pursuing *development* as a depoliticized project, international organizations fail to account for existing power relations that shape Lesotho's economy, overlooking the role of corrupt bureaucratic elites and painting an undifferentiated picture of the aid-receiving people. Li points out a more fundamental "contradiction between difference and improvement" (14-5): While the development industry aims at ameliorating aid beneficiaries' living conditions, making them *more like us*, it crucially depends on constituting them as less developed *others* in order to retain them as objects of interventions and, ultimately, justify its *raison d'être*. Aid beneficiaries are thus relegated to the "waiting room of history", never quite developed enough to govern themselves (Chakrabarty 8).

Finally, I paint a picture of the humanitarian landscape in Mafrq, Jordan, not as a civil society alternative to neoliberal states, but rather as deeply embedded in market-based logics. To this purpose, the exponential growth of NGOs since the 1990s needs to be briefly situated within a wider transition towards "the neoliberal restruc-

turing of capitalism" (Hirsch 10). While neoliberalism refers to a macro-economic doctrine centered on private enterprise, free markets and a retraction of the welfare state, it also entails blurring the very boundaries between the private and the public sector through the intrusion of "new, market-based techniques of government within the terrain of the state itself" (Ferguson, "The Uses of Neoliberalism" 172), including the outsourcing of social services to NGOs (Harvey). However, the shrinking of the state *from within* also comes with its internationalization, through an increasing reliance on international financial markets and the expansion of international organizations (Hirsch); hence, I found myself working for a European NGO in a Middle Eastern backwater. Yet NGOs usually continue to be contingent on funding from governmental agencies and on the legislative and executive frameworks of states within which they operate. They also lack democratic structures on the inside and often fail to give a voice to those they claim to represent (Hirsch, "The State's New Clothes"). Humanitarian engagement of multinational companies, as in the form of *philanthrocapitalism*, is a more extreme example of how private sector actors pursue technocratic, top-down

approaches to development based on business models (Wilson).

In the footsteps of Ferguson (*The Anti-Politics*), I thus provide a case study of young Syrian refugees in the Jordanian province for whom pre-war dispossession and cross-border displacement in Jordan have rendered youthful lifestyles inaccessible. I go on to show how development discourse – particular representations of young Syrians – translates into concrete development practices: NGOs in Mafrq, Jordan, constitute young Syrian refugees as a *lost generation*, i.e. a humanitarian object worthy of intervention. Projecting Western models of adolescence upon them, they provide Syrian beneficiaries with a variety of learning opportunities. Yet, in striking contrast to widespread appreciations of Middle Eastern youth as political actors during the Arab Spring, Mafrq-based NGOs aim to produce an apolitical, entrepreneurial refugee *youth*, in line with wider neoliberal agendas. However, NGO youth programming in Mafrq does not achieve what it sets out to do: in the absence of long-term employment perspectives for young Syrians, NGO-channelled youth engagement becomes a sort of time pass, compensating for the lack of access to higher education and dignified labor, while also

justifying NGOs' ongoing engagement in the Syrian refugee crisis. Humanitarian actors also accidentally create new opportunities and spaces for *becoming youth*. Eventually, this leads us to reconsider the production of precarious lives for young people in the Middle East and beyond.

In doing so, I hope to help fill two conceptual gaps in Forced Migration and Development Studies. First, while there is a sizeable amount of research on children in conflict (e.g. Boyden and De Berry; Hart, *Years of Conflict*), the situation of displaced adolescents has been understudied (Chatty, "Researching Refugee Youth"). In particular, it is rarely asked how humanitarian intervention *forges* certain types of refugee youth, notable exceptions being Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's study of the role of transnational care for Sahrawi children in reproducing a nation-in-exile (e.g. Crivello and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh) and a desktop study on making *citizens* of returning refugee youth in Angola (Auerbach).

Second, recent studies on young Arabs tend to focus on the predicaments of urban middle-class youth, especially endemic graduate unemployment. Unable to secure economic livelihoods, many Arab men cannot afford to pay the considerable costs of marriage and hous-

ing (Singerman; Dhillion, Dyer and Yousef; Joseph; Brown et al.). As they fail to achieve markers of social adulthood, young men become stuck in a liminal state of *waitthood*, somewhere between being children and grown-ups (Mulderig). Much has been said about this generation-in-waiting's transformative potential for social and political reforms and its role in the revolutions of the Arab Spring (e.g. Honwana), often with a special focus on youngsters' creative use of social media for formulating new modes of civic engagement (Herrera). Yet, *waitthood* is something that young people need to be able to afford – it requires certain resources, including parental support and educational capital. What about young rural, distinctively non-middle class populations prevented from becoming part of youth movements not only by virtue of living far away from major cities, but also because of their low level of education?

This paper draws on one year of ethnographic fieldwork in 2016 and a two-month follow-up study in summer 2017 in Mafraq, a mid-sized provincial town in the north of Jordan, as part of doctoral research on Syrian refugees' mobilities and *waiting* experiences in exile. Since early 2012, Mafraq's cityscape has been reshaped by the massive influx of Syrian refugees.

While exact figures vary between 80,000 (UNHCR) and 100,000 new Syrian inhabitants (Mafraq Mayor Ahmed Hawamdeh, Personal Communication, April 2016), i.e. roughly 50 percent of Mafraq's current population, this makes Mafraq one of the urban centers most affected by the refugee influx (CARE).

### **Mafraq's Lost Generation (in Hiding)**

W.'s fate is symptomatic of many young Syrians in Mafraq. One night, she proudly produces a yellowed picture that shows her hiding in an olive grove, a shy teenager in a formal school uniform – a stint in school she fondly recalls, but which ended too soon when, at the age of 15, she joined her large family to work in a chicken farm on the outskirts of Aleppo. In 2009, the family started coming to Mafraq and the nearby Jordan Valley regularly for work in agriculture. When the Syrian civil war broke out, the family moved to Jordan on a permanent basis, capitalizing on old employment networks to find – increasingly scarce – work. When I first meet W., now in her early twenties, she spends most of her time confined to her parents' flat, occasionally interrupted by weeks of hard labor in the field, usually in the company of her father and unmarried sisters.

Unsurprisingly, Mafraq's refugee population is very young. In a recent survey in Mafraq Governorate, CARE found that 50 percent of Syrian respondents were under 18. However, beyond their demographic significance, young Syrians have also been constituted as a prime object of humanitarian and media attention, more specifically, as a *lost generation*, an expression forged by international media (Brown; Latonero; Mednick; Paton; Sinjab; Yahia and Zreik, and many others). By way of illustration, a 16-year-old girl from Damascus, living in a refugee camp in the north of Iraq, is quoted as: "My adolescence... Maybe it was taken" (Akaja). In a similar vein, a photo essay for CNN describes a married 15-year old Syrian girl with one child of her own as: "Marwa was a woman who had lost her childhood" (Patterson). This approach is also reflected in the UNHCR's *No Lost Generation* initiative, launched in 2013 and focusing on education and child protection. While childhood and adolescence seem to be somewhat confused in most reports, the loss at stake usually refers to obstacles to continuing one's education and its consequences, such as child labor and early marriage. Furthermore, young people are often presented as *psychologically damaged, traumatized, suffering from PTSD*, etc.

In my own volunteering work with Syrian children in Mafraq, I witnessed numerous NGO-led attempts at creating *child-friendly spaces, bringing back childhood, let children be children*, etc., through activities thought to be appropriate for children, such as visits to the zoo, school camps and so on. Psychosocial support for children offered by local and international organizations also speaks to an understanding of Syrian youth as *damaged*.

However, as if echoing foreign media and humanitarians' obsession with young Syrian refugees' loss of childhood and adolescence, being *young* did not seem to resonate with my Syrian informants in Mafraq. While designations such as *bint* (girl, young woman) and *shāb* (young man) are widely used, they are solely understood with regard to marital status, not age. Moreover, young Syrians in Mafraq fail to do what young people in Jordanian cities *usually* do: wearing fashionable Western-style clothes (or at least moderate Islamic dress), attending university and gathering in shopping malls and coffee shops. While they certainly use mobile phones to communicate with friends like young Jordanians do, they mostly employ them for staying in touch with relatives in Syria or abroad, as well as with aid agencies in town.

As time went by, I started to wonder what it meant to be *young* and displaced in a messy urban environment such as Mafraq, having my suspicions about appropriate analytical categories. While there were certainly a lot of *young people* around, is it possible that *youth* simply did not exist?

To make sense of this apparent contradiction, I suggest going back to Bayat's ("Muslim Youth") distinction between *young persons* as an age cohort and *youth* as a social category. The latter is conceived of as a modern urban phenomenon and distinguished by "youthfulness", "a particular habitus, behavioral and cognitive dispositions that are associated with the fact of being "young" – that is, a distinct social location between childhood and adulthood, where the youngster experiences 'relative autonomy'" (Bayat, "Muslim Youth" 28; cf. Sukarieh and Tannock). In particular, being *youth* comes with "a greater tendency for experimentation, adventurism, idealism, autonomy, mobility, and change" (Bayat, "Muslim Youth" 30). Access to education, free time activities, leisure mobility, and mixed-gender socializing are all formative experiences for experiencing *youth*. Moreover, for *young people* to turn into *youth*, they need to reclaim *youthfulness*. Yet, these claims are not realized via institutions and

organized social movements, but rather through the formation of “passive networks” (Bayat, “Muslim Youth” 31), e.g. via shared fashion styles, symbols and meeting places, and exerting one’s presence in public. Perhaps unsurprisingly, according to this definition, most young Syrians in Mafraq have never been *youth*. Yet humanitarian actors in Mafraq set up various educational programs, assuming that the category of *youth* is meaningful to their beneficiaries.

#### Humanitarians’ Quest for the Universal (White) Child

That NGOs in Mafraq seem to find Syrian *youth* everywhere is the result of a two-fold misrepresentation: the humanitarian sector’s blindness towards non-Western models of childhood and adolescence, as well as its ignorance of a specific history of dispossession which has shaped rural Syrians’ access to *youthfulness*.

In truth, educating young people often presupposes an understanding of youngsters as *tabula rasa*. Hart (“Saving children”; *Years of Conflict*) and Chatty (“Palestinian Refugee Youth”) draw attention to prevailing Western models of childhood in child- and youth-focused humanitarianism, retracing how *children* became objects of study and humanitarian con-

cern, from the earliest League of Nations’ Declaration of Children’s Rights (1924) until the seminal UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). What pertains to my analysis is how humanitarian understanding of *childhood* and *youth* are informed by Piagetian models of developmental stages, constituting them “as a phase of life that was special, carefree and distinct from adulthood” (Hart, “Saving children” 6). It is noteworthy, though, that the universalised and depoliticised view of young people which often characterises humanitarian intervention is symptomatic of a wider process of dehistoricization and depoliticization of aid recipients (cf. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*). This leaves little room for individual – and often conflicting – displacement narratives (Malkki).

In Mafraq, there is plenty of evidence that the *youth* NGOs have in mind is modelled after Western models of adolescence, with extended schooling and no involvement in (waged) labor. UNICEF’s Makani centers, but also a local church and other small NGOs in Mafraq, offer elementary education to younger and older children out of school. However, different outlooks of parents and educators often clash: when a local Save the Children learning center started to pay parents a small

monthly amount, it created strong expectations among Syrian parents to receive compensation for their offspring’s school attendance. While many NGO workers, especially Western foreigners, were scandalized, they failed to grasp a simple truth: that in Syrian families of rural background, minors have always constituted a valuable resource and contributed to the family income.

The dreams aid workers encourage students to indulge in are equally telling. While volunteering with a small Western NGO’s informal education project, I heard teenagers being groomed to envision themselves as doctors, teachers and engineers, regardless of their parents’ non-existent financial and educational resources and structural obstacles to higher education in Jordan.

The unfitness of humanitarians’ conceptualizations of *youth* for capturing Syrians’ life worlds led me to adopt a *class lens*: while NGO programs prepare young beneficiaries for Western middle-class life models, they overlook the socioeconomic background of their target group. In particular, they fail to grasp that young Syrians’ survival mechanisms – including child labor and early marriage – cannot be attributed to displacement solely. Rather,



they have long been a part of rural households' coping mechanisms based on the contribution of all family members, including minors. The life story of my friend W., whom we encountered earlier in this paper, reveals that even before 2011, hard physical labor and little education, but also frequent circular cross-border mobility, were the norm, rather than the exception, for many young Syrians from the lower classes.

While most academic and NGO research to this day explains displacement patterns during the Syrian civil war through tribal and family networks, I argue that what brought my informants to Mafraq are longstanding pre-war labor migration ties. Mostly small-scale farmers and recently sedentary Bedouins from remote rural areas in the Homs and Aleppo governorates - regions with high rates of poverty and illiteracy -, they frequently engaged in short-term seasonal migration to work in agriculture and construction in the Bekaa Valley, Beirut and Mafraq before 2011. As in other regions in the Middle East, circular mobility helped to complement income from farming and keep precarious rural livelihoods afloat (cf. De Haas), insecure existences compounded by large-scale agricultural reform, and, more recently, neoliberal projects in Syria (Azmeah). Far

from being cosmopolitan travellers, informants took part in highly circumscribed, translocal mobility schemes - as one Syrian woman put it, "Mafraq was the only place we knew in the world".

Devoid of other resources - economic, social, and educational - my informants' ability to move and access menial employment networks in the Levant was thus their only asset (Van Hear). Seasonal labor migration was facilitated by open state borders, a phenomenon well documented for Syrian labor migrants in Lebanon (Chalcraft), but also labor-receiving countries' migration policies (De Bel-Air). While Jordan depends on foreign labor for low-skilled jobs in agriculture and the construction sector, it also assures that their migrant workers' stay remains temporary, by keeping them in legal limbo. Forced into irregularity, rural Syrians often moved under the radar of state authority and did not appear in regional migration statistics.

After 2011, when the Syrian Civil War pushed rural populations out of their regions of origin, entire village communities, often bound together by kinship ties, managed to capitalize on transnational connections previously established by some of its members, to seek refuge, employment and housing abroad. Syrians

often left their villages of origin in a hurry when fleeing from the regime bombings, without further preparations or the time to gather their belongings. However, anecdotal evidence from Mafraq suggests that some Jordanian employers proactively reached out to former Syrian farm workers, inviting them back on their lands.

When state borders eventually hardened, circular, menial migration patterns were disrupted, turning formerly mobile labor migrants into refugees. Hence, contrary to common humanitarian beliefs, low educational levels, child labor and early marriage are not a direct result of *becoming refugees*, but have long been a feature of insecure lives in pre-war rural Syria. Economic pressure aside, deeply rooted survival strategies at least partly explain why Syrian refugees keep engaging in practices punishable by Jordanian law and despite manifold incentives by aid agencies to keep children in school and out of the labor and marriage market.

This said, precarious lifestyles that render youthful behavior in Bayat's ("Muslim Youth") sense almost impossible are exacerbated by cross-border displacement to Jordan. The threat of deportation to Jordanian refugee camps and even Syria for working without a proper permit

pushes men into invisibility, while fuelling child labor (Human Rights Watch). As I learned from my friend W., women and children as young as 10 years old, known to be less targeted by labor patrols, often work long hours in agriculture around Mafraq, earning as little as 5 JD (ca. 6 EUR) a day. During the agricultural season, W. and her sisters were picked up by a bus at 4 am and did not return home until the late afternoon. The strenuous work – picking fruits on the field and sorting products into pallets, often in the blazing sun, rudely pushed forward by Egyptian foremen – would frequently make her teenage sister faint. In addition, although governmental schools in Mafraq run double shifts, overall schooling rates for Syrian children are low. Many students drop out of education at an early age because they have to provide for their families (for boys) or because of widespread sexual harassment (for girls), making them lose out on schooling as a formative experience for extending adolescence and establishing peer networks.

Finally, the shortage of opportunities for *youthful behavior* is compounded by Mafraq's missing metropolitan identity; despite its urban appearance, it is hardly a *real* city at all. Given the lack of public facilities and its tight-knit tribal society,

people's lives take place behind closed doors and in the company of family members.

A comparison with Proudfoot's research on Syrian rebel-workers in Lebanon sheds further light on my informants' failure to develop a *youthful* habitus. Before 2011, Proudfoot's young rural informants sought work in construction and restaurants in Beirut to generate remittances for families back home, while simultaneously acquiring a degree from a local Lebanese university. Yet, they also eagerly adopted a Beirut cosmopolitan identity, showing off (fake) Western-style clothes, exercising, and dating Lebanese women. When the Syrian civil war broke out, they took a pro-active stance in the conflict and, for some of them, even joined the fight back home.

Their attempts at being visible in Beirut's public life, as well as their later mobilization in the Syrian civil war, are reminiscent of Bayat's description of youth movements, formed on the basis of shared consumption patterns and leisure time activities, ultimately through the mere "art of presence" (Bayat, "Politics" 125), in public space.

Naturally, my informants' lives in Mafraq differ greatly from these successful attempts at youthfulness and political

mobilization. While having migrated as part of family units severely limits their freedom of movement, economic pressure, Jordanian labor patrols and the extremely conservative, tribal and gender-segregated environment in Mafraq make it impossible for young Syrians to exert their presence in public or socialize with people their age outside their immediate family, preconditions to becoming *youth*.

### **Superwomen, Start-Up Entrepreneurs and Good Citizens - Producing Humanitarian Fantasies**

Nine months into our friendship, W. asks me to visit her at an NGO course on removing landmines. Previously, I have come to know her as a conservative young woman who wears the face veil and does not take taxis on her own for fear of interacting with strangers. Yet, to my great surprise, I now watch her chat freely with the male Jordanian instructor. Some days later, she spreads out the newly obtained certificates on the carpet in her parents' living room, proudly handing me one after the other. Her enthusiasm is moving, reminding me of the earnest look on the school girl's face in her sole childhood picture. W., who has never worked outside the family network, suddenly dreams about working for an NGO and contributing to Syria's reconstruction after the war.

While long at the margins of humanitarian attention – the UNHCR office in Mafraq only opened in 2014, while Syrian refugees started arriving as early as January 2012 – Mafraq has slowly emerged as a provincial humanitarian hub. In the initial absence of inter-agency cooperation, numerous aid agencies, including faith-based charities, often replicate existing services, creating rifts within the refugee community while also distorting local economies through untargeted donations (cf. Dickinson). Given that most Syrians do not work on a regular basis, they heavily rely on aid supplies, but also spend much of their free time taking part in NGO classes. Financial compensation for food and transportation is another strong incentive for signing up for these classes. As A., a Syrian university student in his mid-twenties, explains to me, he earns about 250 JD (ca. 302 EUR) a month as a volunteer with various organizations, enabling him to pay the rent for his entire family – fifty JD more than he gained working up to sixteen hours a day in a local supermarket.

However, what I am concerned with in the last part of this paper goes beyond the immediate economic benefits of NGO engagement for young Syrians. In the introduction, I outlined how NGOs' depen-

dence on state funding and legal frameworks, as well as the professionalization of aid, make it more difficult to present them as a morally superior civil society alternative to retreating welfare states. Another aspect of the intertwinement of humanitarian and neoliberal agendas is the latter's often-overlooked role in shaping the way we perceive everyday reality and ourselves. Ferguson ("The Uses of Neoliberalism") reminds us that in the Foucauldian sense, neoliberalism also refers to "techniques of government that work through the creation of responsibility-citizen-subjects" – the production of the rational *homo economicus*, carefully weighing risks and operating "as a miniature firm" (172). In other words, neoliberal capitalism as a hegemonic mode of discourse also produces certain *subjectivities*, or, in McGuigan's words, "neoliberal selfhoods" (224). As examples, he quotes "successful entrepreneurs", "youthful billionaires" and "celebrities". *A priori*, young destitute refugees seem to be cast out from the neoliberal charade, being prevented from spending, building careers and individualized lifestyles. Still, I argue that NGO youth politics in Mafraq are a prime battlefield for turning disenfranchised non-youthful youngsters into model refugees of a certain kind, i.e. a neoliberal refugee youth.

Importantly, Syrian refugee *women* play a significant role in these educational programs. Gender equality has been mainstreamed in humanitarian action for the last 20 years, branding refugee men as pre-modern perpetrators of domestic violence, powerful gatekeepers within the refugee community or emasculated troublemakers (Olivius, "Displacing Equality?"; "Refugeemen").

At the same time, humanitarian programs obey neoliberal governmentalities, more focused on heightening interventions' efficiency than tackling underlying power relations and structural inequalities. Following this logic, displaced women are co-opted into aid programs because they are considered *better* refugees, i.e. more family-oriented, cooperative, and reliable than men.

In my own fieldwork, I witnessed many NGOs, both international and local, courting female refugees. Many training programs specifically target young Syrian women by offering traditionally *female* skills such as tailoring, hairdressing and cooking, or requiring participation on a daily basis that working men cannot commit to. While this reflects the reality of numerous female-headed households in Mafraq, it overlooks culturally specific divisions of labor and structural inequalities that Syrian men are subjected to, including

heightened security checks, exploitative labor and deportation threats. In plain words, refugee women are turned into micro-level entrepreneurs able to procure for themselves and their families, as evidenced by numerous home-based work programs for refugee women and the provision of working equipment.

By way of illustration, my friend W. was once given a hairdryer by a European NGO. Yet, while W. eagerly indulged in daydreams of new career prospects, she lacked both the vocational skills and a proper work permit to find employment in a local hair salon. Moreover, the limited surface of her family's apartment hardly offered any space to start a business of her own - a difficulty compounded by severe gender restrictions prohibitive to house visits of female clients. Hence, although a well-meant gift, a hairdryer did not make a professional hairdresser yet.

Moreover, NGO training funded by Western countries often seems to reflect donor interests more than the situation of refugees in the Levant. In late summer 2016, a German political foundation came to Mafraq for a one-day crash course on democratic institutions. A mixed group of two dozen young Syrians, with educational levels anywhere between primary school and university education, eagerly

engaged in heated debates, guided by highly motivated Syrian trainers their age. Yet there was a striking mismatch between participants' goodwill and opportunities for political participation in Jordan, let alone Syria. This led me to question the value of *citizenship* as a concept in development work: reclaiming refugee integration makes little sense when even Jordanian *citizens* lack civil and political rights. Against this backdrop, NGO programming seemed to reflect ongoing debates about civil society inclusion of Syrian refugees at the municipal level *in Germany*, i.e. in a radically dissimilar policy environment (for an example of comparable workshops with refugees in Germany see Tribowski) - a prime example of how even political education can become depoliticized.

Finally, while an emancipatory effect of NGO trainings in Mafraq cannot be denied, it needs to be contextualized as part of a neoliberal endeavor to create highly mobile (preferably female) subjects. However, NGOs and Syrian recipients often have different understandings of proximity and reasonable distance, a case in point of how well-meant humanitarian interventions overlook existing restrictions on female mobility in public space. For example, the Western NGO I

volunteered with offered English courses outside the city center, encouraging young Syrian women to venture out on their own. Sadly, the initiative backfired, with numerous participants dropping out of the course because of the distance perceived as unwalkable.

Still, it cannot be denied that getting involved in humanitarian work does have the potential to increase Syrian women's range of movement, both in the literal and the figurative sense (cf. Chick, for refugee women in Lebanon). In fact, many young Syrians in Mafraq appreciate opportunities for rare mixed-gender sociability within NGO facilities, often rendered tolerable to watchful parents by the prospect of additional humanitarian assistance. My friend W. found it acceptable to take off her face veil and interact with male volunteers in the office of a local NGO she often visited for training, and even for mere hanging out with fellow students. Over time, her younger sisters and even her parents began to regularly join her at the premises, building a close relationship between the family and the NGO's Jordanian director. Moreover, volunteering with charities presents a rare occasion for mingling with local youth. As A., the student mentioned above, highlights, Syrian-Jordanian friendships forged in

NGO offices often lead to mutual visits and shared leisure activities, such as barbecues, visits to coffee shops and the gym – all of them reserved for men.

Sadly, in the end, NGO courses are often no more than a short, pleasant interlude before marriage and childcare take their toll. When I visit W. in summer 2017, she has become the second wife of an older Syrian from Raqqa, himself a migrant worker in Jordan before the war. Newly pregnant and locked into her husband's tiny apartment in Ma'an, a highly conservative town in the south of Jordan, she is terribly bored and greatly misses her regular visits to the Jordanian NGO center in Mafraq.

### **Conclusion: Aborted Neoliberal Subjectivities and Timepass**

This article set off by countering common representations of refugees as being stuck in space and in their lives, portraying the manifold NGO-led activities provided to young Syrian refugees in Mafraq, a result of the presence of multiple aid agencies on the ground. Taking Ferguson's (*The Anti-Politics*) critique of the humanitarian "anti-politics machine" as a blueprint for my own analysis, it demonstrated how NGOs constitute young Syrians as humanitarian objects, subsequently carving out

spaces and opportunities for *youthful* behavior for a population of youngsters who, due to longstanding disenfranchisement at home and in Jordan, have never really been *young* before. Still, due to restrictive migrant labor regimes in Jordan, they ultimately fail to produce young entrepreneurs, good citizens and independent women, i.e. the apolitical *neoliberal subjectivities* humanitarians have in mind.

On a final note, the mixed success of NGO youth programs in Mafraq invites more general reflections about the type of *waiting* marginalized youth find themselves in. Comparative evidence comes from Jeffrey's study of lower middle-class men in northern India who have the resources to acquire higher education, but lack the social capital to find matching jobs. In the meantime, they keep accumulating – eventually useless – university diplomas, while also developing "timepass cultures" of their own, such as exerting their presence in the public sphere through performing hyper-masculinities (Jeffrey 475). Notwithstanding their potential for bringing about political reform and innovative lifestyles, timepass, in the end, "was what one had to do because more meaningful ways of engaging with the world were unavailable" (Jeffrey 471). It seems all too

easy to draw parallels to the situation of young Syrians in Mafraq who, despite amassing home-made NGO certificates, keep being excluded from the formal labor market and higher education. That they fail to make themselves visible on Mafraq's streets, instead preferring to go unnoticed, can be ascribed to the legal limbo and deportation threat they find themselves in.

Yet, while failing to yield ideal-typical neoliberal subjectivities, the aid sector unintentionally reproduces a youth experience characteristic of the globalized world in which flexible labor markets demand easily disposable workforces. Thus, displaced or not, many highly educated youth find themselves in a situation of recurring short-term contracts and training, ongoing job insecurity, lacking career opportunities and thus perpetual existential insecurity (Standing). Quite fittingly, what is striking about Jordan is the coexistence of other young populations with starkly different socioeconomic profiles, yet equally prone to *timepass*. In a country where almost every fifth university graduate is unemployed (Middle East Monitor), the humanitarian sector has grown into one of the biggest employers for young locals – often retaining them on short-term contracts for years. For the displaced and

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locals alike, keeping oneself busy coincides with forever delayed meaningful futures. Yet stark class differences make that young Jordanians and Syrians in Mafraq experience *waiting* in different ways: while the former can afford lives of leisure in shopping malls and coffeeshops, the latter are constantly on the move, struggling to get by on a combination of odd jobs and humanitarian assistance – *frantic* waiting instead of idleness.

Ultimately, while this article took a critical stance towards NGOs' entanglement with neoliberal policies, it might be time for critics to go beyond denunciatory analyses (Ferguson, "The Uses of Neoliberalism"). Ferguson's (*Give a Man a Fish*) most recent work is thus concerned with carving out pro-poor policies *within* neoliberal frameworks, taking as a starting point the encroachment of market-based economies in the Global South which has paradoxically been accompanied by an *expansion* of social assistance programs. As countries like South Africa have transitioned from a situation of labor shortage to a massive labor surplus, this leaves huge populations, including HIV orphans and widows, but also young men fit to work, without realistic opportunities for integrating into the labor market. Ferguson thus investigates the mobilizing potential of basic income grants for these popula-

tions. The caveat of this approach is that it is coupled to citizenship; yet these social experiments cannot fail to remind us of the situation of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in Jordan surviving on a combination of humanitarian assistance and irregular work in the informal economy. Amidst the extension of work permits in low-skilled sectors to Syrian refugees in Jordan (ILO), there are currently (summer 2017) rumors about a downscaling of the UNHCR cash assistance program, following significant funding cuts in the WFP's food voucher scheme in 2014 (Achilli). While there is no denying the benefits of granting Syrian refugees access to education and formalizing Syrian labor, which shields refugees from legal insecurity and exploitative working conditions, access to the formal labor market accompanied by *decreased* protection seems an unrealistic scenario in a country characterized by a largely informalized economy and widespread graduate unemployment. Hence, we might grudgingly have to accept that in the foreseeable future, handing out cash to *most* of the displaced might be the only way to help Syrian refugees to stay afloat.

### Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my Syrian informants in Mafraq, as well as the aid workers who granted me insights into their everyday work with Syrian refugees in Jordan. I first presented this paper and received valuable feedback at *Talking 'bout my Generation – Concepts of Youth and Generation in Research on the MENA Region and Beyond*, an international workshop at the Philipps Universität Marburg on 30 Nov – 2 Dec 2016.

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## What Does It Mean to Be Young for Syrian Men Living as Refugees in Cairo?

Magdalena Suerbaum

This article deals with Syrian young men who fled to Egypt after the uprising in 2011. Their lives were affected by the challenges stemming from displacement, such as their confrontation with new responsibilities, unknown vulnerabilities

and emotions, liminality and precarity. They suffered from forced displacement in a gender- and age-specific way.

**Keywords:** Youth; Masculinity; Displacement; Syria; Egypt

### Introduction

Young Syrian men in Cairo have held various roles since their arrival in Egypt following the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011: they were refugees and sons, part of the younger generation, in one way grown-ups having increased responsibilities, but simultaneously not yet uncontested adult men in the traditional Syrian sense. This article examines how young men from Syria in Egypt made sense of the changes in their lives stemming from forced displacement, and intends to discuss the challenges and struggles they faced and went through because of their position as young men.

I argue in this article that coming of age in the context of forced displacement is not a linear process from one coherent, holistic life stage to the next. Rather, being young as a forced migrant means walking a blurry, partial, unstable and jumbled path into adulthood. Young men were challenged and struggled in a specific way because of their age and gender: they were often the main reason why their family decided to flee from Syria, they had lost trust in the older generation, and they could not find for themselves an uncontested form of masculine adulthood but instead often remained in the position of sons vis-à-vis their families.

### Data Collection

I engaged in ethnographic fieldwork over fourteen months in Cairo in 2014/2015. Through interviews, intense participant observation and daily informal conversations with Syrian and Egyptian men and women of all ages, I aimed to examine how the experience of displacement impacts specifically on Syrian men and changes constructions of masculinity. Men and women I met in Egypt came from various cities and villages in Syria and predominantly identified themselves as having a middle-class background.

As a PhD student from the Global North who had studied the Middle East and Arabic and had lived in Egypt, Syria and Palestine for extended amounts of time, I was able to conduct semi-structured interviews, life stories and informal conversations in Arabic, but was nevertheless predominantly perceived as a stranger, outsider, guest or visitor. Thus, it took time to create relationships with participants that would eventually allow for recorded, in-depth interviews to take place. Other challenges I faced over the course of my fieldwork were witnessing and dealing with some Syrians' severe impoverishment and neediness and doing research in Egypt during a "new era of repression" (Hamzawy), which was marked by an empowering of the military, intelligence

and security services and the employment of scare tactics and police brutality against citizens causing a sense of suspicion, fear and insecurity in everyday life (Hamzawy; Nassif).

I met young Syrians, the protagonists of this article who were between 18 and 30 years old, in various ways, mostly through my work as a voluntary language teacher. Furthermore, I got in touch with volunteers of a student-led association that provided support for Syrians who wanted to enroll in Egyptian universities. Conducting research among young Syrians I perceived predominantly as relaxing: it was easy to bond with them, and I sensed that they were often less suspicious than older interlocutors. Frequently, they were eager to express their political opinions and share with me their experiences during the uprising.

### Syrian Refugees in Egypt

Syrians who came to Egypt after the uprising in 2011 share the Egyptian population's fate of living in a country that struggles with political and economic instabilities and witnessed the establishment of President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi's repressive authoritarian regime. Since Egypt does not host refugees and asylum seekers in camps, most Syrians settled in urban areas, predominantly in the governorates

of Alexandria, Damietta, Mansoura, and Cairo (Ayoub and Khallaf 7). In particular, 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, a satellite town approximately thirty kilometers north of Cairo, has become known for its large Syrian community. Most Syrians I met had fled to Egypt between late 2011 and early 2013. By that time, there were no visa regulations for Syrians and then-President Muhammad Morsi repeatedly stated Egypt's support for the Syrian Revolution. He announced that Egypt would give Syrians free and full access to health and educational services (Norman 34). When Morsi was toppled in the summer of 2013, the situation for Syrians in Egypt changed drastically: they became the subject of a government-organized media campaign that labelled them as *terrorists* and allies of the newly banned Muslim Brotherhood. This led to an increase in xenophobia and discrimination against Syrians in the Egyptian population and a decrease in financial and material support (Norman 20).

Additionally, refugees, asylum seekers and generally foreigners in Egypt face challenges and legal restrictions when they try to enter the Egyptian labor market. Syrians were thus driven towards the informal labor market and frequently had to change their occupation and take up less-skilled jobs (ILO 20; Ayoub and Khallaf 27).

### Why Youth?

Over the course of my fieldwork, I came to realize that young Syrian men often shared similar doubts, aspirations and problems: predominantly, they were the reason why their whole family decided to leave Syria, they had to assume new responsibilities for their families, they needed to come to terms with so-far unknown emotions, and they could not find for themselves a smooth transition into masculine adulthood. Most were aware of being at a stage where they “ought to be finding their place in society as fathers, husbands, protectors and providers; in short: as men” (Turner 1) and expressed their wish to find this place. However, they were similarly aware that becoming a man in their situation was difficult because of the various challenges they were facing during forced displacement.

Most literature dealing with youth during displacement, for example Palestinian, Sahrawi, Burundi and Afghan youth (see Chatty; Hart; Sommers), looks at the context of prolonged displacement and consequently does not speak to the case of Syrian young men, who had been displaced for no more than two or three years when I first met them. Literature dealing with young people’s work migration predominantly describes their movement as a linear transition into adulthood and a

“rite of passage” (e.g. Horváth; Monsutti; Osella and Osella; Massey et al.). I argue that this perception does not fit the juggled path young Syrian men had to take to reach a form of masculine adulthood they themselves and others in their surroundings could accept. As far as recent literature dealing with masculinity and displacement is concerned, there is a recognition of the invisibility of male migrants and refugees in the study of forced migration and a call for the deconstruction of the homogenizing, generalizing and negative image of the *migrant man* (Charsley and Wray 404). Male migrants merely receive public attention as the *illegal immigrant*, who is both villain and victim, anonymous and out of place, and bereft of national belonging (Charsley and Wray 404; Andersson).

In order to conceptualize the intersection of masculinity, refugeeeness and youth at which my interlocutors were positioned, I build on the following arguments: first of all, refugeeeness can be described in Victor Turner’s words as a liminal phase of being “betwixt and between” and of being in an “interstructural situation” (93). Simon Turner, who analyzed the situation of young Burundian men in a Tanzanian refugee camp, used this definition and extended it by declaring that “refugees are neither here nor there, neither this nor

that, they cannot be classified as boys or men” (7). I understand masculinity as a composition of resources available in a man’s surrounding and as subjectively and actively constituted (see Connell; Wentzell). With the term *youth* I refer to a category that is socially and culturally constructed. Especially in the Middle East, its boundaries are considered fuzzy and stretched, since the majority of young men are unable to marry due to economic difficulties, and consequently, they belong to this category well into their thirties (Singerman; Swedenburg). Furthermore, I follow anthropologist Jennifer Johnson-Hanks, who defines life stages, such as youth, as fluid, articulate composites that are dependent on the social context and a person’s agency (868-69). She argues that there are multiple paths toward adulthood, and differing aspects of adulthood might be reached at diverse times and are often reversible.

### Reaching Partial, Incomplete Manhood

Several young Syrian men I met in Cairo had interrupted school or university to work, or worked and studied at the same time in order to support their family. This was the case with Fadi<sup>1</sup> who should have been in his first year of university. By the time I met him, he only worked occasionally, as he had to prepare for his final

school exams. One day, he took me to his workplace, a lingerie shop owned by a distant relative of his. While Fadi showed me around, a female customer interrupted our conversation in the shop asking for the best body-shaping underwear. In a professional tone and manner, he recommended one model and then referred her to his female colleague. Afterwards, while we were smoking water pipe and playing backgammon, he told me:

It is not my dream job. I would like to become a programming engineer. I find it embarrassing to work in this job because the girls who shop there flirt with me.

He described that coping with work while also studying for his final exams in high school made him feel “older” than his peers and “impatient” and “depressed”, sensing that this double burden distinguished him from others. He said, “I feel that I am not supposed to handle of all of this”. Nevertheless, Fadi was also proud of his abilities to work and study at the same time:

Men should be strong. They are stronger than women. They should support the family. I work and study at the same time. This makes us men. We stand more than we can.

Taking into consideration what traditionally defines manhood in many Middle Eastern contexts, namely, marriage, completed education, a professional career, fatherhood and knowledge about one's society (see Ghannam; Inhorn; Peteet), Fadi does not qualify as a man. He had not completed his education when he started working and was not able to save his income to move out of the parental home and get married. Nevertheless, in an environment with limited resources, he spoke of the burden of simultaneous work and study as a threshold to manhood. He transformed the heavy workload he was facing on a day-to-day basis, which distinguished him from more privileged people of his age, into a sign of masculinity and a proof that he had transcended from boyhood to manhood. Fadi took the resources that were available to him in his social context and used them to discursively define himself as a man.

I also discussed young men's responsibilities with Muhannad, a student of dentistry and founder of an NGO led by Syrian students, who was either busy studying for his exams or involved in organizing events, planning future activities and raising funds for the NGO. Muhannad spoke from a privileged perspective: unlike Fadi's family, his family was in a very good situation in Cairo, with his father being able to pay

the high tuition fees of Cairo's private universities for his children. Thus, Muhannad neither needed to work nor was he forced to interrupt his studies:

I don't work because I need money; I work because I feel that it is necessary that I work. As an adult guy, one should be able to take care of one's family. Also, I should not remain a problem for my family. There are people who are spoiled and they are against working while studying.

Muhannad, like Fadi, describes himself as a man in a specific social context, namely, when comparing himself with other young Syrian men, who did not work and study at the same time.

### Remaining the Son

The incompleteness and partiality of Muhannad's and Fadi's self-ascribed transition into manhood are obvious when contrasting their accounts with Fadi's memories of his flight from Syria. He told me that the main reason for his whole family's escape was concern about his safety in Syria. Young men were perceived to be in danger of being recruited into al-Assad's army, or being arrested, kidnapped or killed, and thus Fadi's whole family decided to leave. Davis et al. declare

that men, even if they do not carry weapons, are assumed at the very least to be willing to fight and are consequently viewed either as an asset or as a threat to the regime or the opposition movement in Syria (35). Likewise, Jones argues that the most vulnerable and constantly targeted population group in situations of war is non-combatant men of *battle age*, since they are perceived as a threat to the forces at war (452).

In Fadi's case, an acquaintance of his, whose father was working with the *mukhābarāt* (secret service), had seen him in a demonstration and threatened to tell his father that Fadi was supporting the opposition. Even though Fadi tried to resist his family's subsequent decision to flee, he had to eventually accept it:

I didn't want to leave my country but my father forced me to go with the family. I couldn't believe that I had left my country. I was so sad. [...] I should have been in Syria. I should defend my country. I shouldn't have left.

His eventual compliance with his parents' decision implies a patriarchal household structure, where family members care for each other, and in which Fadi was still primarily regarded as the *son* and was thus subject to his father's authority (see

Kandiyoti 278-79). Despite speaking of work and study as the context for his transition to manhood, he still maintained an immature status in front of his father, who forced him to leave Syria with the family. Furthermore, it is significant that Fadi bemoaned being prevented from staying in Syria to defend his country. Thus, he was unable to take over a form of masculinity that was related to military, army and war, and to the defense of his country. The only acceptable versions of masculinity he could assume in Egypt were being *student* and *son* providing support for his family. Similarly, Ghassan, a student in his last year of high school, had to accept his parents' authority and consequent absence from Syria.

Magdalena: Who made the decision to leave Syria?

Ghassan: My parents. The reason was their concern for their sons. We lived in an area that was not very safe. My uncle had some problems. They arrested him in this area. There were some people who brought the security service to my cousins only to arrest them as well.

In Ghassan's account, it is obvious that young men were perceived to be in acute danger in Syria due to their gender and

age and thus they became the main reasons for their families to leave.

Consequently, I suggest that young Syrian men in Egypt faced a specific form of suffering and vulnerability, since they had to come to terms with their inability to transgress into masculine adulthood and to escape the external ascriptions based on their gender and age. They had to make an effort to discursively define themselves as men but were only partially successful.

### The Guilt of the Parents' Generation

In addition to being subject to their parents' authority, young Syrian men had to come to terms with the guilt they ascribed to their parents' generation. Bashar, for instance, a student of medicine in his mid-twenties, explained his disappointment in his parents' generation in the following way: "we blame the older generation because we say: if it [the uprising] had taken place earlier it would have been better." Similarly, 'Abd al-Rahman, who was in his late twenties and worked in an NGO in Egypt that supported the Syrian revolution, remembered the fights he had with his father after the outbreak of the uprising:

The process of brainwashing in combination with the fears of our parents, who always told us that this is wrong,

made us continue in the wrong way. I had a dispute with my father at the beginning of the *thawrah* (revolution). I told him: 'It is your fault. Why didn't you tell me before that massacres of the Kurds in Syria took place in 2004 and that they had started a revolution?'

'Abd al-Rahman felt left in the dark by the older generation and left ignorant about revolutionary developments in previous decades.

Bashar and 'Abd al-Rahman both use the pronouns *we* and *us* to differentiate between themselves and the older generation. In doing so, they create distance between their generation and the generation of their fathers. Moreover, they manage to give a reason for their own failure and ignorance - it is blamed on their parents' lack of political activism and the older generation's silent acceptance of the regime. Young men's critique and opposition of the older generation can be perceived as fundamental and radical when relating it to Annika Rabo's ethnography on traders in Aleppo, in which she contends that sons are not supposed to voice any kind of criticism of their fathers. Instead, fathers and other members of the older generation should be listened to and respected. In Egypt I sensed, however, that young men's trust and respect in

the older generation was affected by the feeling of not having been informed properly about the cruelty of the Syrian regime. Furthermore, I recognized a feeling of loss of role models and of a point of reference evoked by the uprising.

### **Maturity through Devastation and Hardship**

In addition to their struggle with their parents' generation, several young men recognized changes in their lives after having experienced the uprising and forced displacement. While their thoughts and aspirations in Syria were focused on material items, their work and career, the uprising and the confrontation with death, danger and devastation had taught them to have a more mature, realistic and responsible approach to life. Frequently, young men stated that they felt that they had aged and had lost peace of mind, normalcy and ordinariness in their lives:

I think that I grew up faster here. I feel that I am more mature and more responsible here. [...] I grew older and understand more now. When I graduated, I started to think about what I should do. At the end of Ramadan in 2011, two of my friends died as martyrs. They were living in the same house. They died in the demonstrations. I was

here in Egypt. Now I am older and I understand more. In Syria, I never thought about all these things. My life was normal. I thought about having a job, a house, a family in Syria, but now it is different. Here, I think about my future, my situation, my family, about where I should go and what I should do.

Mazin, a dentistry student who came to Egypt with his elderly parents, defines his experience of hardship during the uprising as a transition to maturity. It is significant that in his narrative he juxtaposes his absence from the conflict in Syria and his friends' death. I suggest that his consciousness of this contrast added another layer of severity and maturity and a desire to make something meaningful out of his life. Mazin not only talked about responsibility and adulthood but also acted accordingly. In the late summer of 2015, he decided to travel via Turkey to Germany after trying, unsuccessfully, to obtain a visa at the German embassy in Egypt. Knowing that his elderly parents depended on him, he took them with him on his two-week long journey to Germany, where he currently attends language courses in order to work as a dentist to be able to provide for himself, his parents, and his new wife. Likewise, Mazin's friend Hani, who also studied at a private university in Cairo,

told me of the changes he had observed in his approach to life since the outbreak of the uprising.

The events changed many things. It changed my mentality, my way of thinking. I learned more about life. Life taught me many things. When we were in Syria, we were thinking in an easy way about life. But really, life is difficult and it needs effort. Life has become difficult and the Syrian starts to compare death with death in order to find a country where he can live a good life. We thought about a good job, a car, a house, a nice position in the social class background in Syria. I remember that a long time ago, there was hardly anyone who went by the sea to Europe, but now there are many. [...] These people risk their lives. They either die or arrive.

Hani states that the uprising taught him to see the hardship in life and to assume responsibility rather than to take life easily. He describes the severity of his condition in which everything *ordinary* that used to define his life has faded into the background. Instead, in his perception of life, since the uprising it is defined as full of dilemmas, dangers and devastation. While both Mazin's and Hani's account may remind the reader of Julie Peteet's

argument that violence directed at young male Palestinians during the first Intifada was construed as a rite of passage into manhood and thus became a creative act of resistance, I dispute this connection by stressing that young Syrian men could not rely on a dominant, widespread discourse that elevated boys into men after having experienced the uprising and displacement to prove their manhood (31). There was no overall, collective account that the experience of the uprising turned a boy into a man; it was rather the effort of every individual to accumulate material from his surroundings to demonstrate his manhood. Instead, I suggest that the narratives just presented show how young men were thrown into a hostile reality in which they could no longer rely on previously known conditions, but they simultaneously did not know how to act and respond as young men in the new context.

### Dealing with Unknown Emotions

Carolyn Nordstrom asks in her groundbreaking ethnography on war and violence: "And how does violence feel?", suggesting that it feels like hopelessness, loss of future, and existential crisis (59). She argues that death and violence change in their meaning; they become sentiments rather than mere facts. In the following, I

delve briefly into a discussion of how war and violence felt to young Syrian men. Dawud, who had found work in an Egyptian agency and lived with his sister in a well-off neighborhood in Cairo, summarized the state in which young Syrian men found themselves in the following way:

There is a sadness and difficulty like: 'I don't have an income, I cannot find a job, I cannot pay my rent, I cannot marry, I cannot send money to my family...'. The people are not anymore like they were in the past. Maybe the crisis made young men very old before they should have become old.

As already implied by Mazin and Hani, Dawud describes sadness, the severity of being unable to assume a responsible masculinity and a form of ageing, of becoming worn out and fragile, due to young men's consequent exhaustion, depression and despair. Likewise, Akram, a primary school teacher, speaks of previously unknown emotions and consequences when remembering his experiences in Syria during the uprising:

During the last two years in Syria I was afraid of sleeping and waking up only to find someone arresting me and taking me to I don't know where. Maybe



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a bomb or a missile will fall on me and kill me. This fear put a heavy weight on our shoulders. When I arrived in Egypt and I heard any fireworks I was afraid. I thought that there were bombs and attacks. [...] Even if we are young people and we have a big capacity to stand these situations we really became exhausted.

Akram felt that he was supposed to tolerate and endure fear easily because of his young age. However, he had to realize the burden of constant insecurity, distress and anxiety that he describes as a feeling of being pulled down by a weight put on his shoulders. Likewise, Rafi, who was at the beginning of his twenties, had interrupted school and worked on a construction site, described hitherto unknown experiences of emotions:

The bad thing is that I lost feelings. Even if I hear a lot that my friends died or that my relatives died I don't have any feelings. The feelings died and this is the bad thing. In Syria, when someone died, we cried for him, but not it became normal and we don't cry anymore. We got used to it. In Syria, bombs flew over your head and there were bullets in the air, but now it's normal. We became used to it. The violence planted in

us toughness. There are no more tears and nothing else.

Rafi finds no emotions or tears in himself to mourn the multiple deaths of loved ones around him. There is nothing in him that can respond to the catastrophe he experiences.

Akram's and Rafi's descriptions of their emotional states resonate with the investigation of war and trauma by psychologist Yolanda Gampel in *Reflections on the Prevalence of the Uncanny in Social Violence*, in which she argues that the confrontation with an “unreal reality” that is incompatible with anything experienced before creates an overwhelming feeling of “uncanniness”, anxiety of one's imagination and a loss of trust in one's senses (50). The pain and terror of war cause the destruction of the individual's capacity for perception, its representation, and symbolisation (Gampel 55). I suggest that the specific challenge for young men lies in the accumulation of insecurity, uncanniness and agony, which they not only experience as refugees and survivors of a war, but also as not yet uncontested adult men, who need to find a way to transition into masculine adulthood in a situation of utter despair, instability and liminality.

### Conclusion

Young Syrian men who lived as refugees in Egypt faced various troubles that were distinct to their specific position. As young men, they were perceived to be in acute danger in Syria, and thus they were often the main reasons for their family's flight. Their coming of age was not a smooth process, because traditional markers of masculine adulthood could not be gathered without difficulties. Additionally, young Syrian men experienced loss of trust in the older generation and were confronted with unknown emotions that they could not easily handle. They frequently described a painful process of reaching a form of maturity or ageing and only sporadically described the challenges they faced in Egypt with pride. Consequently, I suggest avoiding the perception of being young and coming of age during forced displacement as a stringent and *simple* process. Rather, being a young man living in exile signifies a specific position that is marked by particular characteristics, such as vulnerability and uncertainty, as well as loss of grounding and context.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of my participants, I use pseudonyms and only give a vague idea of their background.

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## The Sportive Origin of Revolution: Youth Movements and Generational Conflicts in Late Colonial Algeria

Jakob Kraiss

Starting in the 1920s and 30s, youth came to be seen, in colonial Algeria as elsewhere in the Arab world, as a social category that educators, academics and politicians had to deal with in one way or another. Modernizers and many young men and women established a host of youth movements from the 1920s onwards: cultural circles and student associations, sports teams and scout troops as well as youth wings of political parties. In this contribution I examine such youth movements and the generational conflicts they brought with them in

French Algeria from around 1930 until the achievement of independence in 1962. Based on theories by Johan Huizinga and José Ortega y Gasset about the generative potential of generational communities centered around play, I will demonstrate the importance of allegedly non-political youth groups for the social and political transformations in late colonial Algeria.

**Keywords:** Algeria; Anti-colonialism; Youth Movements; Play-communities

### Youthful Potentials

Starting in the 1920s and 30s, youth came to be seen, in colonial Algeria as elsewhere in the Arab world, as a social category that educators, academics and politicians had to deal with in one way or another (see also Pursley 160-2). Young men and women were often regarded by their elders as potentially troublesome, a group that had to be controlled and molded into the right form so as not to follow a deviant path and put the functioning of society at risk. Pedagogues and psychologists began publishing articles in the press about the problems of adolescence and how to deal with them (e.g. Sellal; Bouamrane). On the other hand, the young represented the future, especially in the view of social and political activists, ranging from Islamic reformism to communism and radical nationalism (e.g. “Et la Jeunesse!”; “Niḍāl al-shubbān”; Yazid). In short, youth represented the dangers of disturbance and decadence as well as the hopes of modernizers, or, as El Shakry has put it with regard to Egypt, both “peril and promise” (591). To actualize the promise of youthful potentials, these modernizers and many young men and women themselves established a host of youth movements in Algeria from the 1920s onwards: cultural circles and student associations, sports teams and scout troops as well as

youth wings of political parties (as an example see the account by Amouchi).<sup>1</sup> In this contribution I examine such youth movements and the generational conflicts they brought with them in French Algeria from around 1930<sup>2</sup> until the achievement of independence in 1962. Based on theories by Johan Huizinga and José Ortega y Gasset about the generative potential of generational communities centered around play, I will demonstrate the importance of allegedly non-political youth groups for the social and political transformations in late colonial Algeria. Historical research on this period still largely focuses on the various political movements, their doctrines, evolution and relations between them, and ignores the social importance of organized youth and generational conflict.<sup>3</sup> I argue instead that youth movements, particularly sporting *play-communities* with a marked generational dimension, were major harbingers of anti-colonial nationalism and the main sites of socialization for revolutionary activists - maybe even more than political parties.

### **Generational Conflict and State-Building**

During the 1930s, colonial Algeria witnessed a growth in associational life, with newly established cultural circles, labor unions, charitable associations and sports

teams complementing the rising number of political movements. At about the same time, two influential European cultural theorists, José Ortega y Gasset and Johan Huizinga, posited youth movements with their playful elements as the main builders of state and culture.

In his 1930 essay "The Sportive Origin of the State" ("El origen deportivo del estado"), the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset called into question the utilitarian understanding of human creativity and emphasized the importance of seemingly self-referential activities, such as sports. He argued that generational communities of young men and not kinship ties had been historically instrumental in the creation of the first state institutions. Young men, organized in brotherhoods and "glowing with solidarity like a football team" (26), would not, according to Ortega, realize a preconceived plan to establish a political community, but rather act for the sake of action itself, out of their youthful energy:

We have seen, then, that the first human society is precisely the opposite of a reaction to imposed necessities. It is an association of the young [...]. Rather than a parliament or a cabinet of bigwigs, it resembles an athletic club (30-1).

Ortega sees state-building as a deliberate creative act, carried out by a community that is, first of all, defined by generation. The philosopher even views the nation not as a historical given with a basis in a group's common past, but as an active construction, "as a splendid programme for the morrow" (*Revolt* 174).

This idea is particularly important for the case of colonial Algeria, where no indigenous state-structure existed at all. In contrast to the protectorates and mandates that characterized colonialism in the Arab world to a large extent, Algeria was divided between a northern part legally incorporated into metropolitan France as regular *départements*, and the territories of the south under military rule (with a superimposed colonial administration headed by the governor-general in Algiers). Hence, there was no proto-nation state as in the Sultanate of Morocco or the Syrian Republic, which, though also under French colonial rule, enabled nationalist leaders to be active within the institutions that served as a blueprint for the independent state to come. As a consequence, actors of civil society and generationally defined groups were much more important and the voluntarist approach to state-building much more pronounced.

The Algerian historian Mohammed Harbi, then a young nationalist activist, recounts

the ideas which influenced him in the late 1940s:

Voluntarism occupied an important place in my political approach. I was fascinated with the dream of modernization. My generation did not hesitate to try and engage our people, if necessary by force, against those who refused our cult of science, our belief in reason and progress<sup>4</sup> (81).

He even seems to echo Ortega's assertion that "in the beginning there is vigor and not utility" ("Sportive Origin" 31) when he writes about his engagement in the major nationalist party at the time, the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (*Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques*, MTLD):

[...] the MTLD did not have any doctrine [...]. The life of the movement, its history depended entirely on the activities of its members. [...] Like for the young people around me, my engagement was spontaneous, so to say natural. (75, 77).

The growth of Muslim civil society as well as the radicalization of anti-colonial nationalism were the results of a new generation leaving their mark on social and political

movements. In many cases this generation was also the first to belong to the emerging indigenous middle class: many nationalist activists and intellectuals born in the interwar years were actually the first members of their families to acquire a modern education in French schools (M'Hamsadji 84-7, 96-9; Drif 26-30, 58-9; Ighilahriz 27-8; Bin Jadid 34). At least as important as fighting French colonialism, for them, appears to be the break with the older generations within their own community. Zohra Drif, an undergraduate student at Algiers University in the 1950s, emphasizes that the "radicalism of the youth" (77) led to a conflict with their elders, who were marked by fatalist quietism, as exemplified by her friend's father, a well-established *cadi* (judge in an Islamic court):

Samia's father believed neither in Man nor in his ability to change the course of History, let alone in the principle of free will. [...] For him, the colonial system with its host of evils inflicted on our people on a daily basis was a multitude of trials which Allah sent us to test our faith; our liberation was subject to divine will. This philosophy constituted a great point of disagreement with his wife and daughter (195).<sup>5</sup>

According to Harbi, the American invasion of 1942 had already ushered in a period of youth revolt against traditional authorities that were seen as backward, timid and accommodating towards the colonial power. When talking about the local elections of 1947, he contrasts the new generation's activist style to the traditional politics of notables:

The electoral campaign was marked by a rare violence. The young generation did not follow the practices of the notables (banquets, meetings between the heads of clans, distribution of gifts and other clientelistic practices) anymore, but militant models (marches, rallies, leaflets, posters, use of symbols, anthems and the flag ...). (54).

Carlier has analyzed the generations of nationalist activists during the 1940s, who laid the basis for the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale*, FLN) and the war of independence it started in 1954. The definite rupture with the older moderate politicians had occurred with the riots of May 1945 and the following repression (Carlier 140-9).<sup>6</sup> The new generation of nationalists now drew the conclusion that only full independence could be the goal and only armed revolution the way to achieve it (Ben Khedda 97-107;

Harbi 43-5, 81; Bin Jadid 46-9; Drif 45, 72; Mizyani Madani 12-3). Hocine Aït Ahmed, one of the historic leaders of the FLN, who was 19 years old at the time, sees the significance of May 1945 in the rising political consciousness of young people:

Forced to fly by our own wings, we became more attentive to the effervescent realities of a society in search of expression, a youth trying to organize. (44).

#### From Play-Communities to Revolution

While Ortega used “sportive” in a rather vast sense, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga in his work *Homo Ludens*, originally published in 1938, demonstrated the social significance of playfulness. He went beyond the definition of play by its staying outside of normal life: on the contrary, he affirmed that play was “an integral part of life” and even “a necessity both for the individual [...] and for society” (9). Taking examples from ancient history and present societies deemed to be archaic, Huizinga saw games and ritual feasts involving young people as constitutive for social interaction (46-75). A central aspect are enduring communities which evolve out of a game:

The outlaw, the revolutionary, [...] indeed heretics of all kinds, are of a highly associative if not sociable disposition, and a certain element of play is prominent in all their doings. A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over. [...] the feeling of being “apart together” in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game. [...] It would be rash to explain all the associations the anthropologist calls “phratría” – e. g. clans, brotherhoods, etc. – simply as play-communities; nevertheless it has been shown again and again how difficult it is to draw the line between, on the one hand, permanent social groupings [...] and the sphere of play on the other. (12).

Evidence for the importance of generational (and rather homosocial) play-communities can also be found in autobiographical accounts from the period. Several Algerian authors talk at length about childhood games and their function of community building and “teaching to think” (M’Hamsadji 171; see also Dib

63-8). The independence activist Louise Lghilahriz recalls:

We learned a sense of responsibility at a very young age, by playing *big*. Maybe it was not a game, but our personalities which were in the process of formation. (58)

And Si Azzedine, a prominent commander in the National Liberation Army (*Armée de Libération Nationale*, ALN) after 1954, claims he had been able to become a successful military strategist by his experience as an almost professional checkers player during his adolescence (38).

Another important aspect of Huizinga’s theory is the fact that games have their own sets of rules which cannot be questioned. Even someone who tries to cheat has to accept the rules in principle - otherwise there would simply be no game at all (11-2). In this context another particularity of French Algeria comes into play, namely its character as a settler colony. Even more than in other colonies, in Algeria the colonizers of European origin (approximately one tenth of the total population) controlled not only the administration and the economy, but also public and cultural life, especially in the big cities and in the productive agricultural areas. In this specific

colonial situation, games and sports were effectively the only realm in which colonizers and colonized competed on an equal footing. While the educational and legal systems discriminated against the colonized in a multitude of ways, on the sports pitch - where the rules were the same for everyone - it was possible for them to prove their abilities and to actually beat the French (on settler colonialism in Algeria see Stora 29-43).

Whereas the professional careers of the aspiring new generation of Muslim Algerians were regularly blocked by the colonial system - for example, indigenous teachers would normally teach only on the primary level, indigenous officers would rarely rise above the rank of captain (Faci 9-17, 23-7; Zerguini 30-1) -, Muslim Algerian athletes from the late 1920s on became part of the national and international sporting elite in various disciplines. Many autobiographical accounts attest to the importance sporting achievements acquired in the minds of young colonial subjects. The anti-colonial activist Mahmoud Abdoun reports at length the successes of Algerian athletes during the later colonial period (see also Zerguini 19-20) and recalls one of the earliest great triumphs of Algerian sports:

In 1928, just before the end of the Am-

sterdam Olympics, France, despite having participated in all competitions, had not yet won any medals. Everyone was waiting, on the last day of the Games, for the most beautiful challenge, the marathon. The frontrunners were the Finns and the Swedes, but the winner was the "French" El Ouafi, originally from Biskra [an oasis in eastern Algeria]. [...] That was the only medal won by France. (Abdoun 44).

The author does not conceal his satisfaction at the fact that the nation of Pierre de Coubertin,<sup>7</sup> in this instance, needed a Muslim Algerian subject to procure it the only Olympic medal (see also Terret and Roger). In the same vein, the writer Kaddour M'Hamsadji singles out the first Algerian cyclist to compete in the *Tour de France* - a major symbolic event for the French national community (Vigarello) - as an example for indigenous achievement:

For us, this was proof, once again, for the physical and mental capacity of the *Arab* to rise, even regardless of his political stance to the Algerian problem, up to the sportive level of any French athlete of the colonial period (195).

But it was not only the admiration for top-level athletes and their function as role

models, putting into question colonial hierarchies, which drew the Muslim community towards sports. In a situation where there existed no indigenous political institutions and parties representing Muslim Algerians were repeatedly banned, sports clubs functioned as an important aspect of community life and the formation of a national identity. Harbi affirms: "It was in sport - as if it were a substitute for politics - where the sense of belonging to a community appeared the strongest." (68) In the settler colony, many teams represented an ethnic community - a lot of clubs founded by indigenous Algerians actually used the term *Muslim* in their denomination (Fatès) - and competitions between them became loaded with political symbolism and occasionally led to inter-communal violence (Dine and Rey 28-31). Azzedine describes the soccer matches of his youth in the early 1950s as such politically meaningful encounters:

I was part of a club, the USMMC, the Muslim Sportive Union of Maison-Carrée. Our "eleven" consisted exclusively of Algerians. Depending on the neighborhoods, the teams we played were European or mixed. Sport was for me a school of nationalism, and the pitches were my first battlefields. At the matches, we were defending an idea,



still vague, but we already had the consciousness of fighting for our country. (40; see also M'Hamsadji 209-18; Drif 41-2)

In short, sport was “one path among others leading towards nationalism” (Abdoun 32), or, in the words of Algeria's future president Chadli Bendjedid “an expression of belonging to a nation and a faith” (54).<sup>8</sup>

A particular play-community were boy scout groups where different games formed a central part of the pedagogical methods that aimed primarily at character formation and had their origins in 19<sup>th</sup> century British “games ethic” (Mangan 44-70). Harbi remembers about his adolescence: “The *medersa* [Islamic school] was less stimulating than scouting with its open air activities, its debates, the learning of patriotic songs [...]” He continues to specify the role of singing with the boy scouts:

Through songs, scouting had taught us patriotism. They exalted the role of youth: ‘We are the youth. We are the future with its sacred glory. We have religion in our heart and light in our eyes.’ (42, 45)

The Muslim scout organizations that had been developing since the 1930s, some close to the Islamic reform movement, others rather leaning towards radical nationalism, were widely perceived as the most effective means to educate a new generation which would be able to bring about a revolution against the colonial order (Kaddache). And in fact, young scouts were at the forefront of the May 1945 protests as well as in the ALN during the war of independence (Aït Ahmed 40-4; Azzedine 31; al-Hasani 20; Drif 70-1; Bouhassane et al.).

Sports and scouting thus functioned, for many young Algerians, as the first sites of association with their peers and as places where they first came into contact with the national idea. A focus on the strictly political movements of the time occludes significant aspects in the biographies of the young activists. They were not just members in one of the political parties, but were active in a whole variety of movements and initiatives, often starting precisely with the boy scouts, as some examples can illustrate.

‘Abd al-Hafiz al-Hasani, for instance, born in 1926, was a member of the Muslim scouts and the moderately nationalist party Friends of the Manifesto and Liberty (*Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté*, AML)<sup>9</sup> by the mid-1940s. At the same time, he

taught Arabic and religion in a private school adhering to Islamic reformism and founded his own reformist circle in a village close to Sétif (in north-eastern Algeria), the Progress and Advancement Club (*Nādī al-Taraqqī wa-l-Taqaddum*). Finally, al-Hasani settled in Paris, where he became secretary-general of the French section of the Association of Algerian Muslim ‘*ulamā*’ (al-Hasani 23-31).

Harbi, who was born in 1933, had attended a reformist private school. During the 1940s, he first became leader of a boy scout troop and then of a youth section in the radically nationalist MTLD (some of whose young cadres would later form the FLN). In his home town Philippeville (Skikda, also in the eastern Constantinois region), together with some friends and fellow activists he established a sports association, Widad Athletic Philippevillois. Like al-Hasani, Harbi then moved to France where he tried to organize nationalist cells among Algerian immigrant workers and came into contact with the labor movement (Harbi 42-3, 86-7, 108-9).

**Towards a Transnational History of Youth**  
From today's perspective, informed by post-colonial and other critical approaches, it is easy to criticize Ortega and Huizinga, for instance for their mixing of ancient history with the ethnography of

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supposedly *primitive* societies in a general anthropological theory (implying civilizational hierarchies) or for their privileging of male agency. Still, their ideas about the "sportive origin" of state structures and generationally defined "play-communities" can offer valuable insights into the origins of Algerian anti-colonial nationalism. A perspective of social and cultural history which looks at the concrete experiences of young activists on an everyday level - a perspective I have tried to outline here - will contribute to a better understanding of social transformations underlying the history of political ideas and doctrines that has long dominated research on the subject. Also important is the fact that Ortega's and Huizinga's very insistence on the social role of play-communities at this specific historical moment hints at a transnational contemporaneity of youth movements.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of scout movements, in particular, for the formation of an indigenous middle class with a self-ascribed modernization agenda has been demonstrated for other parts of the colonial Arab world as well, especially for Egypt and Syria (Jacob 92-124; Watenpaugh). Sports on the level of local clubs and teams, on the other hand, seem to have been of special importance in settings where a confrontation between different ethno-reli-

gious communities took place on an everyday basis: besides French Algeria, the best example would be the British mandate of Palestine (Khalidi). In general, the emergence of a self-conscious middle class, of new nationalisms and also new gender relations, primarily among the young segments of the population, all formed part of the experience of colonial modernity (Jacob 186-224; Pursley) and the new mass society (analyzed by Ortega, *Revolt* 11-77). But the mushrooming of life-reform and scouting movements, the expansion of modern sports and the attraction of a mass audience to nationalist youth organizations were obviously by no means limited to the Arab world during the interwar years, nor were they simply adaptations of a pre-existing Western model. If we consider them instead as contemporaneous global phenomena, it is possible to move beyond the diffusionist Westernization paradigm and open up new perspectives for a transnational history of youth.

Of course, this history of youth movements does not stop with independence. In Algeria, sports, particularly soccer, have played a role in the challenge that new movements, Islamist as well as Berberist, have posed to the FLN regime since the 1980s (Amara 41-7). In other Arab countries, too, soccer has once

again acquired political meaning, perhaps most prominently in Egypt around the turmoil of 2011 (Tuastad; Rommel). A major shift, though, consists in the fact that it is now the (again, transnational) phenomenon of ultra supporters and the stadium as a meeting place for the youth which delineate soccer's political potential: the play-community expresses its dissidence no longer through active sports, but rather as spectators in the structures of fandom (Amara 47-55; Bin Jalid). Nevertheless, the realm of sports continues to function as a central vehicle for the aspirations of a young generation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In many instances, the youth wings, such as the Islamic-reformist Youth of the Algerian Muslim Congress (*Jeunesse du Congrès Musulman Algérien*, JCMA) or the moderately nationalist Youth of the Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto (*Jeunesse de l'Union Démocratique du Manifeste Algérien*, JUDMA), actually appear as the most active components of movements and parties, if we follow the contemporary press (from the many examples see "Shubbān al-mu'tamar"; "Grande Excursion"; "La Vie de la J.U.D.M.A."). According to Ben Khedda, in 1944 the youth wing of the nationalist Algerian People's Party (*Parti du Peuple Algérien*, PPA) in the Algiers neighborhood of Belcourt had 500 members, while the regular section (made up of adults) had only 350 (129). A little later, the PPA even had its own central youth committee, parallel to the regular central committee of the party (Aït Ahmed 103-6).

<sup>2</sup> The year 1930 was marked by the colonialist triumphalism of the *Centenaire* celebrations, marking the 100th anniversary of French conquest, but the following years were crucial for the development of indigenous Algerian social and political movements that became more and more visible in the public (Jansen).

<sup>3</sup> Standard references on colonial Algeria make no mention of youth movements (e.g. Stora), while a recent volume features only one brief article on the Muslim scouts (Bouchène et al.), which is actually a shortened version of previously published text (Kaddache). Some articles on youth movements can be found in two specialized collections (Bancel, Denis, and Fatès; Belabed-Mouhoub).

<sup>4</sup> All translations from French and Arabic are by the author.

<sup>5</sup> Although accounts on this period are often male-centered – including Ortega's theoretical approach – young women, too, played an active role in the new movements. By breaking with the older generations, young women also challenged a whole system of patriarchal social structures (Mizyani Madani 67-79; Ighilahriz 88-94) – a point famously highlighted by Frantz Fanon, the Algerian revolution's most prominent intellectual (105-16). Algeria here is no exception to other Arab countries, for which male-centered narratives of the period have increasingly been called into question (Efrati; Pursley 180-7).

<sup>6</sup> On May 8, 1945, Algerian nationalists turned the celebrations of Allied victory in Europe into demonstrations for independence. In Sétif and other towns in eastern Algeria, these demonstrations turned into violent clashes between protesters on the one hand and French security forces and settler militias on the other. The repressive measures that followed over the following weeks left thousands of Algerians dead and many more imprisoned (Stora 91-2).

<sup>7</sup> Pierre de Coubertin, founder and first president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), was also interested in Algerian sports. He had even planned to hold African Games in Algiers in 1925 – a proposal blocked by colonial governments who feared precisely that sporting successes would lead to a rise in patriotic fervor among colonized populations (Bancel and Clastres; Jacob 127-35).

<sup>8</sup> Maybe the best known instance of sporting nationalism during the Algerian struggle for independence was the national soccer team, formed in 1958 under the auspices of the FLN by professional players who had broken their contracts with French teams to publicize the Algerian cause. In contrast to the examples mentioned here, though, this was not an initiative at the level of mass sports stemming from the Muslim community, but rather a public relations campaign devised among political leaders (Krais 236-46).

<sup>9</sup> The reference is to the Manifesto of the Algerian People, published in 1943 by the nationalist leader Ferhat Abbas, who founded two parties on the bases formulated there, first the AML, then the UDMA (Stora 90-1).

<sup>10</sup> Ortega's "The Sportive Origin of the State" was first published during a time of revolutionary changes in Spain, between the demise of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the establishment of the Second Republic. In his major work *The Revolt of the Masses* (*La Rebelión de las Masas*), also published in 1930, the philosopher deals in detail with the social transformations that have led to the dominance of *common* attitudes and pastimes and their political implications. Huizinga, for his part, intimates his concern with the rise of fascism in Europe on the last pages of his work (210-11).

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# REVIEW

## Armando Salvatore: “The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power and Civility.”

Igor Johannsen

Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2016; pp. 344; ISBN 978-1-119-10997-6 (paperback)

With this book, Armando Salvatore, Professor of Global Religious Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, presents the first volume of a forthcoming trilogy on the sociology of Islam. This introductory volume focuses especially on the role and function of civility in Muslim thought and practice, considering mainly the timespan of the Middle Periods, which are in academic and public discourse often associated with the slow cultural, religious, and material decay of the realm of Islam, up until the postcolonial present. In contrast to resting on the simplified and defective notion of retrogression, Salvatore challenges the reader to dare go beyond those rather naïve and basic (dis)qualification in a quest to examine the unique and ambivalent ways through which civility was crafted and remained intact in the Muslim world. To accomplish this, the book introduces a row of adjustments to key significations that are relevant in the respective academic and public discourse. Crucially, the very notion of *civil society* – a recurring trope in the analysis of Islamic societies and their presumed deficiency regarding their modernizing potential – is unmasked as a quite distinct feature of an essentially European quest for modernity and in its static and circumscribed quality unfit to present itself as a coherent concept for evaluating the

attendant qualifications in non-European societies. Another word and concept that is crucial for understanding Salvatore's approach is the term “Islamdom,” borrowed from Marshall Hodgson, to clarify the three-dimensional frame of comprehension followed through in his analysis: the religious (Islam), civilizational (Islamdom), and meta-institutional or traditional (Islam/Islamdom nexus and node) aspects of what is commonly referred to by using the disclaimer *Islam(ic)* (286). By understanding *civil society* as the specific way of institutionalization of civility in a European context, determined by the theory of the State as it emanated from the Westphalian order and attendant political theory, Salvatore argues for a more open conceptualization of civility to be able to incorporate divergent forms of comprehending and instituting forms of the knowledge-power equation.

In acknowledging the challenge that Islam poses to solidified sociological categories, Salvatore reminds us about the strong focus (or obsession) of sociology as a field of knowledge production with the concept of modernity and equates that with “initial paradigmatic limitations of Western sociology”, as it proves unable to escape the comparative mode of sociological research (2). Here, he rephrases an argument he made in the edited volume *Islam*

*and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, where he expounded that “if the sociology of religion of European origin is intimately connected with the sociology of modernity, which has been primarily understood as a distinctive product of European civilization, then Islam is both internal and external to this historical trajectory: while it constitutes an ensemble of social and cultural potentialities that never became ‘Europe’, and, so, truly modern, it has posed a permanent challenge to European modernity through the development of a lively and for a long time [...] powerful counter-model.” (Masud et al. 13-4). Commonly, then, sociology keeps being trapped in the “iron cage” of Western modernity from where all observations are questioned through a blueprint of the Western paradigms, making it impossible to research respective phenomena and conceptualizations on their own terms as they emanated from diverging cultural or religious patterns, leading to much more diverse theoretical considerations than a strictly Western perspective could accommodate (143). As a case in point that specifically relates to the case of Islam, sociology tends to conflate religion with tradition, understanding both as the principal opposite of modernity and its related social and cultural qualifications, like *civil society* or *civility*.

This form of Western universalism inhibits crucial insights as it substitutes a “multi-universe” of perspectives on human agency into a universe where the sole existence of patterns and ideas originating in the specific course of European history are tested and compared to the original blueprint (Masud et al. 15, 258). A sociology of Islam with a critical angle, proposed in this book, would in contrast enable *Western modernity* to free itself from universalizing its unique way of rupture with tradition. Salvatore understands civility as based on spatial and temporal specificities and as a form of meta-institutional force that recreates reality by providing a civilizational reservoir for shaping solutions to social problems (13). Civility is thus negotiated in the realm between knowledge and power, what Salvatore describes as “imperfect metaphors of the dialectic between material coercion and social cohesion.” (16). Modulating tensions in the knowledge-power equation, civility depends on a shared idiom and is best recognized in *everyday life* rather than in the workings of institutions. Its formula consists of the management of ego’s relations to alter with recourse to a “bit of symbolic and material violence” and by implementing a connective modus on the premise of a corpus of shared social knowledge (63). Accordingly, “civility is intrinsically plural

and prone to circulation, transgression, and metamorphosis”, as it covers the intersubjective nexus among agents and the mode of subjectivity and agency (64, 65). In the book, Salvatore singles out two distinct features of the Islamic ecumene – a term deliberately chosen by Salvatore to refer to “a mobile set of patterns of normativity and civility” (10) – that are crucial to understand the specific ways of approaching the question of civility in Islamdom as they crystallized and institutionalized themselves during the Middle Periods: the Sufi brotherhoods (*ṭarīqah*) and religious endowments (*waqf*). Both concepts help in comprehending the ways in which the relationship between knowledge and power furthered civility as a social force negotiating the space between the ruling class and the sphere of knowledge production. Salvatore stresses both, *ṭarīqah* and *waqf*, as meta-institutional rather than merely institutional due to their “elastic yet formative relation to Islamic normativity” (80). In describing the brotherhood of the Sufis as “dynamic mode of social connectedness” that shape weakly institutionalized, broadly consensual models of civility, Salvatore is able to convincingly argue for their key role in instituting and preserving civility during the Middle Periods (88). While the authority of the jurists and the legal system (*fiqh*) instituted a judicial dis-



course based on the *sharī'ah* and the *ḥadīth* that embraced self-rule and furthered social autonomy up to a certain point it remained unable to provide the populace with permanent trust, something the brotherhoods endeavored to approximate through their focus on *ḥaqīqa*, i.e. the uncovering of the underlying truth in religious scripture and the example of the prophet (149, 78-82).

In contrast to the understanding of civility as the collective body of those living inside the city walls, i.e. assuming a principal urbanity as crucial for the establishment of civil society, Salvatore argues that in the Islamic case civility contains a connective bond and agential capacity over long distances (99). This is due to not only the recourse to the normative idiom that is strongly connected to concepts like *‘aṣabiyya* (tribal solidarity) and the specific mode of expansion of the Islamic realm, but significantly to the Sufi brotherhoods whose spread depended significantly on travelling masters, instrumental in the diffusion of the teachings and practices of the brotherhoods. This solidarity, rooted in the pre-Islamic social bond constitutive for tribal communities, is for Salvatore a better-suited substitute for what Max Weber famously coined *charisma*, a faculty the founder of sociology in the West identified in exceptional leaders who were able

to alter the formula of the knowledge-power equation and foster civic cohesion (111). Rather than through formalization, institutionalization, and personal attributes of charismatic leaders as well as a strong focus on urbanity, the Islamic mode of civility is characterized by movement, multiplicity, flexibility, and a prominence of the interrelation between urban centers and the desert or steppe. This unusually flexible social order of Islam remains unmatched in history according to Salvatore, with hindsight to the fact that Muslims derived rights and gained social access through identity rather than locale (114). This, he argues, can additionally be observed through the consideration of the role of the *waqf* for long-distance trade, as markets, schools, mosques, and fountains were often provided through its mechanisms (118). These institutions, which were neither private nor public but rather cutting through both spheres in pertaining to the “ultimate Other,” i.e. God, were additionally able to facilitate a flexible and inclusive understanding of the civil (119). *Waqf*-institutions included the commoners in their consensus regarding their “living goal” through considering their expressions of interests and their acceptance or dissent (121).

In his argument for understanding meta-institutions like the ones outlined above as

instrumental for the emergence and enduring relevance of a civility that is specific to Islamdom or the Islamic ecumene but still qualitatively comparable to other civilizing enterprises in the world, Salvatore contends that “the golden nexus between particular and public interests is [...] provided by the communicative process itself [...]” and goes on to claim that “while the legal and communicative process is universal, the type and level of institutionalization is subject to civilizational and cultural variations.” (156). Clearly, then, the comparative model that places the European experience at the center, reducing all other impulses for the transformation of the knowledge-power equation to mere “useful backgrounds for elegant comparisons,” is discredited (154). This, for Salvatore, represents the *real problem* with the Orientalist approach: it frequently trivializes the complex antinomies of the knowledge-power equation within Western modernity and adopts it as the self-evident benchmark of comparison (166). Outlining his argument further, he describes the Orientalist paradigm of an inherent tension between Islam and modernity – a “natural” outflow of this trivialization – as “beyond essentialism” and “gravely lopsided ideologically and methodologically.” (168). The European success should not be seen as a token of inherent and

transhistorical superiority (168). The “iron cage” that limits the scope of comprehension is thus responsible for not only a lack of academic scrutiny and analytical precision; it additionally limits the ability to understand the manifold forms civility is able to take due to the wider socio-historical context to the effect that

country- [or cultural-] specific trajectories of social and cultural transformations can only be understood as simultaneously integrated and dislocated across permanently shifting centers and peripheries, each with their own agencies and resources. (208).

“Civility,” Salvatore argues,

is rather interesting, theoretically and empirically, precisely for its resistance to being folded into a fully globalist and conceptually universalistic normalization (241)

giving us a hint as to why he singled out this concept for the initial volume of his work on the sociology of Islam (241). In trying to institute the idea behind this approach he stresses the need for the academic discourse on the matter to realize that civility “depends on cultural patterns and traditions” and account for the “vari-

ance of the knowledge-power equation underlying the variety of networks at play.” (242). This is to be observed even more scrupulously with hindsight to the complex relations the two dimensions of the equation inhabit depending on the wider material, cultural, and discursive context. Culture, history, and the self are crucial in understanding and balancing the equation and point to the generally fluid and globally heterogeneous character of respective factors. The processes of civility, its recurrence and transformations, and its institutionalizations and patterns, are “deeply marked by ruptures, unequal levels of knowledge of rules and resistance against these rules.” (246). This is furthered by the fact that, as Salvatore claims, “the habitual internalization of power through knowledge is not centrally steered, not linear, and not irreversible” but presents itself as the simultaneous working of external factors and the inner, individual construction of the citizen (247). Thus, and crucial for Salvatore’s argument for a sociology of Islam,

civility is not merely a dystopian ghost of the fading civilizing mission of the West but a transversal tool to better appreciate civilizational, intercivilizational, and transcultural dynamics (257).

Understood like this and followed through in such a way as presented by Salvatore in this important and timely treatise, the idea and concept of civility – stripped of the “defective universality” the Western perspective too often still includes – represents a highly functional tool for the comprehension and analysis of patterns of civility on their own terms.

Considering the theoretical depth and the brilliance of the argument, this book is highly recommended for those interested in and working on the sociology of Islam but also to anyone interested in religion, ethics, culture, or even sociology, historiography, and social science in general. Not only does Salvatore accomplish his goals through his convincing and concise as well as well-written treatise to establish a theoretical framework through which a sociology of Islam can be stripped of the universalizing bias of its academic discipline; the arguments made are additionally sufficient to serve as starting point to critically engage with theoretical paradigms and patterns in other disciplines and can be used to question universalizing frames of knowledge production, aiding in the quest for a more nuanced and profound perspective on respective research and observation. Despite this, Salvatore is obviously bound to use vocabulary that originates in the European

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intellectual tradition, which remains his principle audience. That might serve as an explanation for his reluctance to engage in a theoretical discussion of *culture* understood as those practices, languages, signs, and symbols that humans use and constantly re-create to make sense of themselves and their surroundings. While reading *The Sociology of Islam* one might repeatedly wonder how Salvatore constantly refers to culture without using that exact term. While he explains his reluctance to do so at the end of the book, his argument refers to culture ("cultural determinants") in a much more static way – which strikes the reader acquainted with cultural theory as rather odd (257). This can be even more the case through considering Salvatore's use of *culture* in his introduction to *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, where he argues that "a civilization always combines power and culture in original ways" (Masud et al. 8). While it is clear that in his recent thinking culture is replaced by knowledge, the relation between culture and knowledge remains rather sketchy considering the vast scholarship on the matter. However, considering the potentially wide audience for his book, Salvatore might be right to dismiss the term as central to his theory. "Civility" is not as overused and re-inscribed as a theoretical construct and by

that arguably more prone to serve as a focus point in this context.

In this recent publication by Salvatore, he is able to follow up on his older arguments in *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* and develop them further. The essentialism of much scholarship on the question of *Islam and modernity*, a recurring and distorting theme now unmasked thanks to Salvatore himself among others, as well as the critical questioning of the position and role of the researcher, are focal points in his work. Raising attention to the context of the researcher or observer, he claimed already in 1999 that

Islamic, 'faith-driven politics' begins to be a phenomenon in the moment the authorized (mainly Western) observer feels the urgency to reflect on it (Salvatore, *Political Discourse* 143)

and urged us to realize the need

of recognizing Islam as 'true' and autonomous, capable of developing a dynamic subjectivity, not merely a shadow civilization (Salvatore, *Political Discourse* 143,161).

Going well beyond the concept of "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt) due to the theoretical depth and complexity of his

assessment of civility in Islamdom, Salvatore continues to successfully and convincingly make a case for the re-evaluation and critical questioning of general paradigms of knowledge production, especially regarding the transcivilizational discourse on Islam and the West but applicable and suitable for other areas and fields as well. Finally, the possibility of inciting original thinking and a critical assessment of the discursive, material, spatial, and temporal context of the subject as well as the institutional frames of knowledge production makes Salvatore's book extremely relevant and urgently needed.

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## Knowledge Production in the Arab World: The impossible promise.

Sultan Al-Maani

Hanafi, Sari and Rigas Arvanitis. *Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), 2016. 345pp. ISBN 9781138948815 (hardback); 9781315669434 (ebook).*

*Knowledge Production in the Arab World* provides a wealth of vital and useful insights on the dynamics of research in the Arab region. This meticulously well-researched volume is an inside look at what goes on behind the doors of Arab universities, research centers, and policy-makers' saloons to find "exits" or possible ways out of the current research impasse. The book, authored by Sari Hanafi, a professor of sociology at AUB (American University of Beirut), and Rigas Arvanitis, a sociologist at IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement), examines the factors that render research in the Arab world an irrelevant and ineffective experience, a difficult mission, or 'an/the impossible promise' at national, regional, and global levels. In contrast to the optimistic views—funded by some Arab governments—that promote globalized models of the knowledge economy as the simple solution to the Arab knowledge production crisis, the authors believe this is "nothing but a rhetorical tool" to obscure reality. A careful reading reveals that the objective of this impressive project is not to locate failures or celebrate successes but to "pursue the retrospective in search of the prospective".

To achieve the book's promise, the authors, both of whom have longstanding experience in undertaking research in this

field, review their sources, evaluate the reliability and validity of the research methodologies and methods available (in-depth interviews, online survey-questionnaire, census, desk review, case study), and provide appropriate criteria for their interrogations and choices. Considering its appendices, bibliography, and index, this book would be helpful for undergraduate and postgraduate students, academics, or research agencies interested in developing a sophisticated study on research in developing countries, educational sociology, policy studies, and development studies.

The authors' arguments and style(s) of writing are unpretentiously clear, and the structure and organization of the book is polished. The book is divided into two parts: The first comprises four chapters (with compelling conclusions in each of their sub-sections) on the architecture and typology of Arab research systems, the growth of research publications' (considering issues of diversified specializations, citations and ranking, and local-regional-international scientific partnership), and the complementary interrelations between Arab society, political-economic policies, universities, and research. The second part focuses on the characteristics of Arab social research, the marginalization of the Arabic language, and refer-

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ences among researchers in sociology, imperialism of academics and experts, and academic policies of disengagement from the public debate (taking Lebanon as an example).

Finally, the authors' thorough and perceptive analysis in this well-documented, coherent, and functional piece of scholarship offers an engaging vision of the future—to transcending the 'impossible'.

## IMPRINT

### **Issue**

Middle East – Topics and Arguments  
#09 (December 2017)

### **Published by**

Philipps-Universität Marburg  
Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies  
Deutschhausstraße 12  
35032 Marburg  
Germany

### **Editorial Team**

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Via Grafik Gestaltungsbüro

[www.meta-journal.net](http://www.meta-journal.net)



This online journal is funded by the German  
Research Foundation (DFG).