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Youth Politics in the Middle East and North Africa

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The Project on Middle East Political Science

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Youth Politics in the Middle East and North Africa

Sean Yom, Marc Lynch, and Wael al-Khatib

Youth political activism has been challenging Middle East and North African political systems frequently and forcefully over the last decade. This is not a new phenomenon, of course. Young people have historically stood at the forefront of popular uprisings and cultural movements. Demographic realities in the Middle East have increased the latent potential for disruptive youth activism. Nearly 60 percent of people in the region fall under the age of 30, half of whom are aged between 15 and 29, and in almost every country, unemployment for working-age youth exceeds the overall jobless rate. The failures of the 2011 Arab uprisings to achieve lasting democratic change revealed the limits of street protests, but the underlying problems remain profoundly unresolved. How are young people questioning, subverting, and transforming the boundaries of politics in the post-uprising Middle East and North Africa?

In June 2019, the Project on Middle East Political Science convened a workshop on youth politics in Amman, Jordan, in cooperation with the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies. The workshop's papers and deliberations sought to unpack the meaning of youth politics. What characterizes the latest wave of youth mobilization? How is youth activism, and youth politics, changing public attitudes and government policies? Can any generalizations be made about youthfulness, and the experience of being young and political, in the Middle East today? The essays contained in this volume attempt to answer these questions. They come from scholars who, through intensive fieldwork in varying countries, study the origins and processes of activism among young people through diverse methodologies and orientations.

Studying Youth Activism

In the wake of the Arab Spring, many observers unfamiliar with the Middle East treated the sudden surge of youth mobilization with revolutionary alarmism. Many popular uprisings were led by young protesters, organizers, and advocates who belonged to no extant opposition party or political faction – and thus seemed to come out of nowhere. The result, as one scholar observed, was the tendency to view the region through a "generational narrative" that portrayed young people as rebellious automatons: marginalized by economic downturns and brutalized by repressive dictatorships, youth were framed as impulsive revolutionaries inevitably bound to shake their societies.[1]

Yet by reducing youth to emotional and demographic stereotypes, observers miss what made this latest wave of activism so momentous. As Asef Bayat has noted, terms like "youth politics" or "youth activism" do not simply mean that young people are politicized; rather, they imply that youthfulness as a lived experience intersects with other identities like class, gender, occupation, and tribe to produce new ideas, actions, and strategies to change the status quo.[2] In this way, being young is a distinctive analytical category, and focusing on actors who identify as youth allows researchers to trace how new voices are innovating, leading, and mobilizing within the realm of politics. All the scholars in this volume therefore treat the experience of being young as culturally, historically, and theoretically significant.

There is general agreement that beyond its obvious age connotations – too old to be children, recent graduates of high school or college, but often not old enough to have settled families and children of their own – the label of "youth" is fuzzy. It depends upon the context, because it intersects so heavily with other categories. Take, for instance, the campus feminists and university students whom Sarah Fischer follows in Turkey, the tribal activists in Jordan whom Yazan Doughan and Sara Ababneh interview, and the jobless graduates of rural Tunisia whom

[1] Emma Murphy, "Problematizing Arab Youth: Generational Narratives of Systemic Failure," *Mediterranean Politics 17, 1 (2012): 5-22.*

[2] Asef Bayat, "Is There a Youth Politics?" *Middle East – Topics and Arguments, 9 (2017): 16-24.*

Giulia Cimini observes. Apart from being in their late teens through late 20s, and attacking perceived structures of injustice and oppression, these disparate groupings of young people have different affiliations or ideologies. They question the authority of older powerholders in different ways, and deploy particular strategies and incisive language that make sense only in their context. They are all young, but hardly identical.

Thus, every essay presented here shows a unique site of political action. For that reason, it is critical to underscore that methodologically, studying youth activism today requires serious fieldwork that puts scholars in close contact with their subject. Such field-based research can take different forms. For instance, Justin Gengler's work on youth attitudes in the Gulf kingdoms required highly structured surveys, where stratified quantitative data could be analyzed and surprising results uncovered. By contrast, Makiko Nambu's exploration of heroism norms among Palestinian prisoners necessitated ethnography: there is simply no other way to understand the cultural norms and political effects of legal detention among young Palestinians in East Jerusalem except to immerse oneself in the community, and sensitively parse out how these issues are debated privately and publicly. In between lay studies like Yousra Kadi's investigation of youth attitudes in the contemporary Morocco, where group observations combined with selective interviews revealed that young Moroccans are far from apathetic – but remain disillusioned by the high politics of parties.

With different techniques, scholars benefit from close-range access to, and analysis of, data that comes from deep familiarity with the historical context and social milieu of their cases. Through such work, three themes resonate across the projects presented here. First, youth activism often takes informal structure, well outside traditional channels of mobilization and political interaction. Second, youth activists inject new issues into the political agenda, bringing to bear hitherto neglected or ignored debates for the public. Third, youth attitudes and mobilizational forms evolve over time, particularly as young activists absorb new lessons and react to state responses.

Informality and Organization

First, much youth activism today eschews the formalized organization characterizing opposition parties and civil society, and multiplies instead through social networks that must be carefully tracked and observed. To be sure, many youth actors work with, or through, formal institutions such as NGOs. Begum Uzun's work on political participation in Turkey examines how the dominant AK Party has successfully incorporated youth by pressuring and capturing student groups and municipal organs, thereby turning young Turkish voters into rank-and-file cadres in strategy evocative of corporatism. However, it is more common to see youth political engagement occur through informal spaces. For instance, Matt Gordner's study of leftist and land/labor protest groups in Tunisia highlights how new activists in post-authoritarian Tunisia have spearheaded movements for social and economic justice independent of party politics and labor unions. Broadcast through online venues like Facebook, and utilizing a horizontal structure of mobilization that makes identifying leadership an elusive task, this new generation has launched bold, subversive protests that pressure professional politicians and civil society leaders. This fluidity, as Giulia Cimini's study of Tunisia here shows, also facilitates the movement of rural youth into urban areas, which in turn brings more political attention to economic deprivation.

Why the prevalence of informality? As many researchers understand, the tendency of youth political entrepreneurs to adopt social technology, reject incorporation into civil society, and change politics through means outside the ballot box stems from multiple factors. Generationally, activists today enjoy an incredible array of informational and communication tools, and can instantly connect to one another as well as their political targets more easily than past leaders could. Politically, many have matured in an era where opposition parties, professional syndicates, and other registered entities long framed by outsiders as the vanguard of change have failed to perturb autocratic political orders. As the Arab Spring showed, spontaneous grassroots movements can topple the bulwarks of dictatorship in ways that complex NGOs

and bureaucratized opposition cannot, given the latter's dependence upon state recognition and international funding.

Socially, many tend to prize mobilizational networks that center not upon a single set of leaders or elite authority, but rather atomistic connections between protesters sewn together by common defiance of authority or shared pursuit of an issue. This makes youth-based groups and movements outside the influence of more established actors within the realm of contentious politics, but it may also potentially make it difficult to consolidate success. Dina El-Sharnouby's study of Egyptian revolutionary youth makes this point well. Understandably, many young activists rejected the hierarchical structure of older opposition parties and Islamist actors like the Muslim Brotherhood; instead, they presented their pluralism and diversity as strengths, and framed themselves as a powerful and evolving force capable of creating new ideas. Yet such youth were also frozen out of political transitional processes, and remain excluded and disorganized in an era of renewed authoritarianism. Informality, then, may be a double-edged sword: it enables rapid gains and subversive politics, but it also does not easily translate into the traditional realm of high politics.

Expanding the Political Agenda

In many cases, youth activists succeed in introducing new issues on the political agenda. Their audience consists not only of the general public, but also elites and policymakers who are ignoring social and economic problems that affect large segments of the populace. Sarah Fischer's work on campus-based feminism at Turkish universities is an obvious example, bringing gendered violence and women's rights to the forefront. An equally telling example comes from Aziza Moneer's study of environmentalism and "green dissent" in Egypt, which reveals how young advocates there have helped lead the anti-coal movement in an unexpected but memorable outburst of mobilization. Particularly in what she calls "dangerous" resistance, such activism highlights the paucity of state capacity to regulate environmental matters. Likewise, in Jordan, Curtis Ryan highlights how young protesters and organizers spearheaded the national campaign against the official agreement to buy natural gas from Israel. The issue touched on obvious sensitivities, not only because of the kingdom's large Palestinian population, social enmity towards Israel, but also dire need for more energy at a time of costly refugee accommodation.

In these and other cases, youth activists helped lead new campaigns against either unpopular state policies or existing injustices or harms neglected by ruling elites. The effect is to innovate within the public sphere, creating new practices of resistance while swaying popular opinion. They are not always successful. For instance, in Jordan, the government has no intention of reneging on its natural gas contract with Israeli suppliers, not least because of the kingdom's perennial energy shortages. Indeed, Jordan provides an excellent case study of how youth activism sees success versus failure. Sara Ababneh's exploration of new popular *hirak* movements as well as Yazan Doughan's interrogation of a specific tribal network of solidarity both show how young tribal Jordanians have repeatedly critiqued their state for adopting neoliberal economic policies that threaten the well-being and livelihood of many tribal communities. Given the unlikelihood of the Jordanian government rolling back two decades of privatization and fiscal austerity, an observer might deem such tribal mobilization as failures. However, another perspective holds that these new forms of opposition have succeeded in embarrassing a state apparatus that long burnished its legitimacy upon tribal loyalties, thus making critical talk of its legitimacy and governance commonplace.

Thus, perhaps more so than established social movements led by formal opposition and civil society actors, youth campaigns for change may be evaluated less by their absolute success in changing laws (or, excepting the Arab Spring, regimes themselves) and more by whether they transform the tenor of public discussion. Many young activists understand that rejecting official narratives of progress and disrupting public routines themselves constitute invaluable goals, even in the face of pressures or coercion by the state.

Evolving and Adaptive

Finally, youth activism is adaptive. Certainly, all forms of contentious politics change over time, because modalities of resistance and strategies of participation are never static. However, the research here shows that young people exhibit high awareness of not only national moods, but also their own capacity to sway the political arena – and not necessarily in collective ways that can be legibly described by scholars accustomed to studying revolutions or other large-scale events. This implicates an understudied assumption employed by many scholars, namely that the lived experience of being young is not only analytically distinctive, but socially, and even biologically, meaningful. It connotes that as carriers of the past and thus potentially transformative agents, young activists are cognizant of their generational status, and therefore also the urgency of tailoring their actions to the particularities of each context. It also means that the *personal* becomes political in unexpected ways.

That agency manifests in many of the projects presented here. For example, Aydin Ozipek's study of pedagogical centers in Turkey illustrates how students mediate between their own youthfulness and the demands of piety within a segmented educational system. For these Turkish students, the primacy of politics manifests within the classroom, presenting moments of private reflection – and sometimes resistance. Similarly, Sarah Tobin's ethnography of Syrian refugee youth in Sudan, where overlapping identities of Arabness, race, and nationality collide, illustrate the distinctiveness of their struggle: for these displaced youth, whether or not to engage in politics is a personalized choice that reflects the precarity of being migrants trapped between two authoritarian systems. In these disparate circumstances, the choice confronting youth in political situations is not whether to mobilize and protest, but rather how to react against exogenous constraints and learn how to not just survive but flourish.

This contextual sensitivity is useful when considering cross-national variations, which critically reveal that both "youth" and "politics" are not monolithic categories. Sarah Rennick, for example, focuses on a post-2011 visible wave of demobilization and the resulting "apolitical" activism. Looking at the context of Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, she asserts that different forms of social and cultural activism are in fact alternative forms of political activism. Justin Gengler's survey research in the Gulf kingdoms, where rentierist political economies coexist with (excepting Saudi Arabia) small national populations, discovers that perceptions of efficacy – that is, the belief that one has tangible influence in government, anchored by loyalty or trust – are no higher among youth than other adults. Whether such youth "*un*empowerment," as Gengler deems it, validates the political distortions of rentier dependence or else may simply reflect underlying social complexities remains unclear, but the takeaway is that assumptions regarding youth engagement or interests borne from other countries may not travel so easily in the Gulf.

Conclusion

Youth protests over corruption, services, and the economy have erupted repeatedly across the region, most dramatically in recent months in Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq. Each of these eruptions has surprised observers who saw few openings in hardened, non-responsive political systems. The protests in Egypt and Iraq were more intense and harder edge than earlier protests, with more radical slogans and far less readily manifest political leadership or underlying organization. The repressive crackdowns by the governments which followed were, in turn, exceptionally brutal and indiscriminate, in part because of their difficulty in understanding the identities, motivations and capabilities of their challengers. The ambivalences towards the political observed in the contributions to this collection point towards a new stage in this cycle of youth mobilization and regime response, one which may follow a different script than the one made familiar by the 2011 Arab uprisings.

Youth Politics in Contemporary Turkey:
Political Hegemony, Hybrid Incorporation, and Youth (De-)Mobilization (2010-2016)

Begum Uzun, University of Toronto

Introduction

The image of contemporary youth in Turkey as 'apolitical and apathetic'[1] dramatically changed when young people from different walks of life took to the streets during the 2013 Gezi Park protests. But young Gezi participants returned home after two weeks of street politics, and this grassroots mobilization has so far not turned into a more organized form of oppositional youth politics. Anti-government youth, in general, returned to political quiescence in the aftermath of the Gezi uprising. But young supporters of the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP) became further politicized. As party activists and members of pro-government non-governmental organizations, these youth sectors organized various academic and social events that promoted the ruling party's policies and ideology.

This paper examines the trajectory of youth politics in Turkey in the period from 2010 to 2016. Why and how did the ruling AKP in Turkey encounter youth contention and largely manage to contain it while promoting pro-government youth mobilization? The changing dynamics of elite politics in the post-2010 period led the ruling AKP to reorganize its linkages with social forces and, in particular, with different youth sectors, which played a salient role in shaping youth's relations with politics and political activism. While the AKP aimed to moderate and control the demands of oppositional youth for political participation in ways that ultimately restricted the channels for youth activism, the ruling party elites themselves participated in the mobilization of pro-government youth sectors in ways that enhanced the spaces for conservative youth to engage with politics.

Looking at demobilization of oppositional youth and pro-AKP Turkish youth offers an important corrective to existing studies of the dynamics of recent youth contention in the Middle East.[2] Most of such work exclusively focuses on revolutionary youth activism and pays scant attention to disengaged youths or pro-regime youth mobilization. This creates an uneven explanation on the processes of youth mobilization and demobilization. It is also essential to incorporate the role of elite politics and macro-political dynamics in the trajectory of youth participation in the Middle East.[3] Youth participation has been shaped by and has simultaneously altered the established political systems, state-society relations, and interactions among influential elites.

Drawing upon elite studies,[4] social movement theory,[5] and the studies of political incorporation,[6] this paper investigates the role of political elite-youth linkages on the processes of youth mobilization and demobilization in contemporary Turkey. I define elite-youth linkages as the attempts of the power-holder elites at regulating youth political participation in accordance with their particular interests, and the ways young people benefit from, maneuver through, or challenge elite claims to exert control over youth political agency. The dominant elites establish linkages with youth through the process of "political incorporation" referring to "institutional arrangements, public policies, and legitimating discourses"[7] in integrating youth into the political and economic structures.

Turkish elites have so far undertaken three paths of youth incorporation: partisan incorporation, incorporation as depoliticization and control, and hybrid incorporation. Partisan incorporation entails attempts at politically activating particular sectors of youth conceived as potential societal allies or facilitating the mobilization of already politicized youth sectors. The elites undertake partisan youth incorporation to increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis rival elites or to secure their incumbency. Incorporation as depoliticization and control refers

to elite actions of fostering political disengagement among youth with the ultimate goal of preventing the emergence/recurrence of youth dissent against the state. Hybrid incorporation is when these two forms of youth incorporation unfold simultaneously. In implementing youth incorporation, the political elites alternate between various instruments: pluralist and limited-pluralist policies, various political discourses targeting youth, material incentives, and corporatizing initiatives may function as the primary means of youth incorporation. However, even though the process of youth incorporation primarily relies on non-coercive and formally or informally institutionalized mechanisms, it also includes selective repression of youth sectors that are left outside the incorporating process.

It is the changing dynamics of elite politics that shaped in part the trajectory of youth politics in post-2010 Turkey. During a period of intense elite polarization, the ruling AKP strategically opted for democratizing reforms, which provided the civil society at large with more opportunities for mobilization and organization, in order to weaken the political legitimacy of secularist tutelary elites. However, when the AKP established political hegemony in the post-2010 period, albeit a fragile one, it re-shaped its linkages with youth that ultimately presented threats, obstacles, and opportunities to youth mobilization. When the AKP perceived threats to its emerging hegemony in the political arena, it adopted hybrid incorporation towards youth. On the one hand, the ruling AKP sought to foster political disengagement among oppositional youth. On the other hand, it pursued to politically activate youth sectors with conservative backgrounds in order to benefit from youth activism in consolidating its hegemony.

This study adopts the method of process-tracing to analyze qualitative data as diverse as secondary sources on contemporary Turkish politics, newspaper reports, policy documents, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with the young participants of the Gezi Park protests and with the youth wings members of the ruling AKP. I carried out interviews in Istanbul and the capital city of Ankara during 12 months of field research in total (June 2013-December 2013 and October 2014-April 2015).

The Elite Structure in the AKP Period: From Fragmentation to Fragile Hegemony

The rise of the AKP to power in 2002 became a watershed moment in Turkish politics, restoring intense elite fragmentation in the political arena. Even though the AKP leadership declared that they had dissociated from their Islamist past, the coalition of secularist elites (top military, high judiciary, presidency, and the Republican People's Party (CHP)) frequently claimed that the AKP "preserve[d] a secret agenda to replace the secular state with an Islamic one".[8] Between 2002 and 2010, Turkey thus witnessed a polarized and crisis-driven political arena where the secularist elites used a plethora of strategies to remove the AKP from power and the AKP, through democratizing reforms, aimed to curtail the political influence of the secularist bloc.

The period from 2010 to 2016, however, witnessed an elite transformation from fragmentation to hegemony: the AKP maintained a "dominant party regime"[9] winning nine elections in total from 2002 to 2015; it managed to curb the tutelary powers of the military and the high judiciary; and the AKP created the "fusion of the state and the party"[10] by infiltrating key state institutions with party loyalists. However, a number of past and new crises at the elite and societal levels soon reinforced the AKP's threat perceptions to its emerging hegemony.[11] First, since the AKP had found itself in a struggle of 'self-preservation' vis-à-vis the secularist elites during its first two terms in office, it still carried the fear of being overthrown by a secularist military coup. Second, the split within the ruling elite – the breakdown of the de facto alliance between the AKP and the religious Gülen movement – became unsettling for the party. Finally, growing 'opposition from below' challenged the party's hegemony. Specifically, a large-scale uprising in the summer of 2013 known as the Gezi Park protests reinforced this crisis of hegemony. [12]

During the period of intense elite polarization (2002-2010), the AKP's major strategy to counteract the secularist

elites was to start a democratization process and to seek membership to the EU. Therefore, the AKP endorsed a series of constitutional amendments, which brought about notable improvements in individual liberties and political rights.[13] While benefitting the civil society at large, these democratizing reforms also enhanced the scope of youth political rights – particularly noteworthy were the amendments that lowered the age for being elected to the parliament and for establishing civic associations. In order to consolidate its nascent hegemony, however, the AKP took an authoritarian turn in its relations with the rival elite factions and the anti-government sectors of society in the post-2010 period. While weakening the parliament and increasing its control over the judiciary, the AKP created a hybrid regime characterized by restrictions on the exercise of political freedoms and by concerted government coercion against dissenting groups.[14] The AKP's authoritarian turn in state-society relations significantly shaped its linkages with youth, which is the major theme of the next section.

Elite-youth linkages in the post-2010 period: Hybrid Youth Incorporation

As part of its broader attempts to weaken and ultimately silence the societal opposition and to keep its support base overtly politicized, the AKP adopted hybrid youth incorporation. While aiming to depoliticize (potentially) oppositional youth (incorporation as depoliticization and control), it concentrated efforts to politically activate conservative youth to benefit from their political activism in sustaining power (partisan incorporation).

Incorporation as Depoliticization and Control

In the post-2010 period, incorporation as depoliticization and control, which primarily targeted anti-government youth sectors, included three components: the repression of contentious youth groups, distribution of material incentives to educated youth, and a shift from pluralism to limited-pluralism in regulating the arena of youth political rights. First of all, the governing AKP applied concerted coercion against politicized youth that caused serious violations on young people's freedom of expression, assembly, and association. As Amnesty International (2013) articulately put it, "students have been a special target of Turkish authorities in their broad crackdown on dissent."[15] Specifically, pro-Kurdish students and organized leftist students faced systematic government repression in the post-2010 period.[16] The major mechanism of repression became the imprisonment of activist students. The number of jailed students significantly increased in the period between 2010 and 2012 reaching a total of 2,824.[17] Activist students also went through disciplinary investigations administered by the universities. While the number of students who went through disciplinary investigations was 2,601 in 2000[18], 6,001 students and 5,871 students were subject to disciplinary investigations in 2010 and 2011, respectively.[19] Finally, young people attending in- and off-campus anti-government rallies also became the target of the government in the post-2010 period. As the government elites condemned and criminalized protesting youth, the police used unbridled force to disperse the youth protestors.

Second, as part of its neo-populist redistribution schemes, the AKP also provided youth, and specifically better-educated youth, with material incentives, in part to reduce the possibility of grassroots student dissent. Among these material incentives were the removal of tuition fees in public universities, the increase in the number of university dormitories, increased opportunities of employment in the public sector, and the expansion of government bursaries and loans to university students. For example, according to the statistics of the Directorate of Student Loans and Dormitories (2012) while in 2004, the number of university students receiving a bursary was 55,724, in 2012 522,679 students were offered a government bursary.[20] The re-foundation of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2011 after 42 years also became pivotal in coordinating the provision of material incentives to educated youth.[21]

However, as side payments to educated youth seemed to make little difference in soothing youth grievances, government repression against youth activists in the period from 2010 to 2013 also backfired. Young people, and

specifically university students, became the forerunners of the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013.[22] The interviews conducted for this study with the young participants of the Gezi Park protests revealed that youth mobilized against the ruling party to express their accumulated discontents with the AKP's monopoly over state power, the loss of judicial independence, and with the restrictions on individual liberties and political freedoms. For example, the research participants believed that "there no longer existed a separation of powers" in Turkey and the political system turned almost into a "dictatorship"[23]; law was used "to intimidate people" instead of keeping order and peace[24], and the ruling party "failed to create a free environment for political expression and public debate."[25] Besides, a sense of political exclusion and threat perceptions to their secular lifestyles led young people to take contentious action against the government. The research participants underlined that the government discriminated against citizens who voted for oppositional parties[26]; alcohol restrictions had felt like a violation of their personal choices[27]; and the government discourses that interfered with women's reproductive rights became particularly disturbing.[28]

Finally, grassroots youth mobilization during the Gezi Park protests further led the ruling party to weaken the capacity of youth as an oppositional force. Therefore, after violently putting down the Gezi protests, the AKP *more* systematically pursued fostering political disengagement among anti-government youth sectors. In order to realize this goal, the ruling party deepened the process of incorporation as depoliticization and control by systematically transforming the pluralist structures of political participation into limited-pluralist ones. Limited pluralism was primarily manifested through the endorsement of new laws that brought significant restrictions on the freedom of expression and assembly. For example, the amendments made to the Internet Law in February 2014 constituted one of the major setbacks in freedom of expression as well as in the protection of privacy.[29] Also, the 2015 Internal Security Package, an omnibus law that introduced amendments to several laws, including the Law on the Duties and Powers of the Police, the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations, and the Anti-Terror Law, imposed serious restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.[30]

Partisan Incorporation

While the perception of threats to elite hegemony led the ruling AKP to moderate the demands of (potentially) oppositional youth for political participation, they also fostered the ruling party to counter-mobilize its youth supporters in order to benefit from youth activism in countering elite rivals and the broader societal opposition. Unlike its linkages with oppositional youth, the AKP thus adopted 'partisan incorporation' towards the young segments of its voter base.

First of all, the recruitment of youth as youth wing members became one of the major channels the AKP leadership used to mobilize youth. Interviews conducted for this study with the youth members of the AKP revealed that by manipulating existing pluralist arrangements to its advantage, the ruling party undertook considerable efforts in the university campuses and local districts to mobilize youth as party activists. In other words, while the ruling party restricted the activities of oppositional parties as well as anti-government youth in university campuses, the AKP activists encountered a highly favorable context and received access to large resources in mobilizing youth into party structures.

The ruling AKP also adopted several informal corporatizing initiatives as part of its partisan incorporation efforts towards youth. For example, the AKP sought to undermine the autonomy of the student councils in the campuses and to render them as state-corporatist institutions by infiltrating the executive council positions with the AKP youth wing members[31]. The AKP also established corporatist linkages with non-governmental organizations and foundations that specifically worked in the area of youth. The Turkey Youth Foundation (TÜGVA), established in 2014, is a case in point. The TÜGVA website states that the foundation was established "to contribute to the young generations of this country by supporting

their social, physical, mental, psychological and spiritual development, and teach them how to be productive, progressive, innovative and valuable for this country. "[32] Critics have argued that the ruling party sponsored the activities of the TÜGVA and provided the foundation with state-owned lands for its headquarters and dormitories, and the Ministry of Education encouraged university and high school students to benefit from the services of the foundation.[33]

Conclusion

The changing dynamics of elite politics shaped the ruling party's linkages with youth. When the AKP perceived threats to its emerging hegemony, it established two types of linkages with young people through the process of hybrid incorporation. What impact did this have on youth political participation? This paper concludes that incorporation as depoliticization and control did not only enable the AKP to prevent the escalation of youth-led protests rapidly and effectively, it also fostered a growing disenchantment among anti-government youth with political activism. The research participants underlined that the ruling party's frequent violations of the exercise of youth's political rights constituted a strong motivation for young people to stay out of organized politics.

In contrast, as partisan incorporation of pro-government youth enabled the ruling party to mobilize a considerable number of youth with conservative backgrounds into party politics and pro-government civic activism, it also triggered the pursuit of militant street politics amongst pro-government youth. According to the AKP Youth Wings' official website, the ruling party had a total of two million members between the ages 18 and 30 in 2015, and in Istanbul alone, the AKP recruited 400,000 youth members.[34]. Similarly, the quasi-corporatist youth organization TÜGVA soon recruited 51,000 youth volunteers, reached out to over 480,000 youth through its services, and established branches in all the cities of Turkey.[35] Finally, the interviews with the AKP youth wing members revealed that the AKP leadership managed to counter-mobilize youth as a political force ready to confront anti-government mobilization in the future. The narratives of the youth wing members manifested that young members of the AKP developed a strong attachment to and identification with the party leader Erdoğan. During the interviews, most of the research participants specifically emphasized that they would not hesitate to take contentious action to prevent the overthrow of the AKP and Erdoğan from power.

Endnotes

1 Leyla Neyzi, "Object or Subject? The Paradox of 'Youth' in Turkey". *International Journal of Middle East Studies 33*, 2001: 411-32 ; Gülden Demet Lüküslü, *Türkiye'de "Gençlik Miti" 1980 Sonrası TürkiyeGençliği.* İstanbul:İletişim Yayınları, 2009.

2 The prominent role played by youth activists during the Arab uprisings has created a resurgence of interest in youth political participation in the Middle East. When explaining the sources of youth mobilization, existing studies emphasize common socioeconomic and political conditions experienced by Middle Eastern youth that have led them to develop a particular form of political consciousness and activism as a distinct political generation. See, for example, Emma C. Murphy, "Problematizing Arab Youth: Generational Narratives of Systemic Failure". *Mediterranean Politics,* vol. 17(1),2012, 5-22; Tierry Desrues, "Moroccan Youth and the Forming of a New Generation: Social Change, Collective Action and Political Activism", *Mediterranean Politics,* Vol. 17, No. 1, 2012, 23–40; Sarah Anne Rennick, *Politics and revolution in Egypt [electronic resource]: rise and fall of the youth activists*, London;New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2018. Alternatively, some studies focus on the significance of new social movements initiated prior to the Arab uprisings such as the Youth for Change and the April 6th Movement in Egypt that transformed into wider youth activism. See, Nadine Sika, "Youth Political Engagement in Egypt: From Abstention to Uprising", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 39(2), August 2012,181–199. Finally, the role of new media and communication technologies in triggering youth revolt has also become an area of interest. See, for example, Linda Herrera, "Youth and citizenship in the digital age: A view from Egypt", *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 82 issue 3, 2012, 333-352.

3 Recent political science research on youth politics in the Middle East addresses some of the understudied dynamics of youth mobilization in the region. For example, Sika's recent book titled *Youth Activism and Contentious Politics in Egypt* (2017) shows how "authoritarian regimes present opportunities, obstacles, and threats to the development of movements and their networks"(p.12). Sika (2017) argues that while the cooptation of the opposition by Egypt's authoritarian regime functioned as an obstacle to youth mobilization (p.33), political exclusion experienced by non-coopted oppositional groups (p.34) and the crisis of regime legitimacy (p.38) provided political activists with opportunities in challenging

the established system. See, Nadina Sika, *Youth Activism and Contentious Politics in Egypt*, Cambridge University Press (online), August 2017. Alternatively, drawing upon historical institutionalism, Bray-Collins' work on youth politics in post-war Lebanon (2016) shows that "the young partisans of Lebanon's political parties contribute to the reproduction and rejuvenation of sectarian political dynamics 'from below"(p.3) through their networking, strategies, and activities that "constitute a 'feedback' mechanism operat[ing] at the grassroots"(pp.3-4). See, Elinor Bray-Collins, *Sectarianism from Below: Youth Politics in Post-war Lebanon*. (PhD Diss.), University of Toronto, Toronto, 2016.

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[8] Ahmet T. Kuru, "Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey: The Case of the Justice and Development Party", in M. H.Yavuz(ed) *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (136-159), Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006,136.

[9] Berk Esen and Şebnem Gümüşçü, "Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey". *Third World Quarterly* vol. 37(9), 2016,1584.

[10] Esen and Gümüşçü, "Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey",1587.

[11] Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Kerem Öktem, "Existential insecurity and the making of a weak authoritarian regime in Turkey", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* vol. 16(4), 2016, 505-527.

[12] As Bashirov and Lancaster (2018) articulately put it "occurring in the midst of ongoing revolutions in the Middle East, Gezi [protests] reminded AKP of the fragile nature of its grip on Turkish society and politics". See: Galib Bashirov and Caroline Lancaster, "End of Moderation:the radicalization of AKP in Turkey". *Democratization,* vol. 25(7), 2018,1220.

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[14] For an analysis of Turkey's transition to a hybrid regime see, for example, İlkim Özdikmenli, and Şevket Ovalı, "A success story of flawed example? The anatomy of the Turkish model for the Middle East", *New Perspectives on Turkey* vol. 51, 2014,5-33; Ergun Özbudun, "AKP at the Crossroads: Erdoğan's Majoritarian Drift". *South European Society and Politics,* vol. 19(2), 2014,155-167.

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[21] It is important to note, however, that despite the ruling AKP's redistributionist agenda in the area of youth policy, the share of public expenditures in the youth sector remained significantly low and largely excluded young people outside the education. See: Kurtaran. "Türkiye Gençlik Alanı İzleme Raporu 2009-2012". 92-93. Drawing upon TURKSTATS 2015, Yılmaz(2017) documents that "the income poverty rate for young people between the ages of 15 and 29 was 23.4% in 2013, while the poverty rate for those above the age of 30 was 16.9%"(p.47). See: Yılmaz, Volkan. "Youth Welfare Policy in Turkey in comparative perspective: A case of 'Denied Youth Citizenship' ". *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 17(1), (2017): 41-55.

[22] Esra Ercan Bilgiç ve Zehra Kafkaslı,"Gencim, Özgürlükçüyüm, Ne Istiyorum?: #direngeziparkı Anketi Sonuç Raporu". Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013,13; Pinar Gümüş,P. and Volkan Yılmaz,"Where did Gezi come from?", in David I. and K. F.Toktamış (eds)*'Everywhere Taksim: sowing the seeds for a new Turkey at Gezi*. (185-197), Amsterdam:Amsterdam University Press,2015, 188.

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[24] Fırat, 24. Interview with the author, Istanbul, June 2013.

[25] Efe, 22. Interview with the author, Istanbul, November 2013.

[26] Emre, 23. Interview with the author, Istanbul, March 2015.

[27] Fulya, 23. Interview with the author, Istanbul,November 2013.

[28] Meriç, 30. Interview with the author, Ankara, December 2013.

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Youth Politics in Tunisia:
Comparing Land/Labor, Leftist Movements, and NGO-ized Elites

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Introduction

Perhaps *the* most coveted achievement in the eight years following the Tunisian uprisings is the attainment of freedom of speech and assembly. However, not all forms of mobilization and messaging are permitted, or even protected, in Tunisia's post-Ben Ali public sphere. Tunisians continue to hold the same grievances that cut deepest in 2010-11—primarily calls for social and economic justice: abuses of corruption, lack of employment, and a decent standard of living. With some notable exceptions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been free to operate as watchdogs over the electoral and civil liberties dimensions of Tunisia's nascent democratic experiment. But recent leftist and land/labor protests directed towards economic and social justice issues have been met with repression. This uneven response to forms of popular mobilization challenges narratives over the attainment of political justice, as the construction of *Tunisianité* harkens back to the controlled *civisme* of the past.[2]

Youth politics in Tunisia today can be understood through a differentiation between *'civil'* society in the form of non-governmental organizations from two *'contentious'* cadres: 'land/labor' protests, on the one hand, such as *Weinou el Petrol* ('Where Is The Petrol'), and 'leftist' movements, such as *Manich Msema7* ('We Will Not Forgive')[3] and *Fech Nestanaou* ('What Are We Waiting For'), on the other. Membership and participation among these three forms of political participation are often shared, and activities sometimes overlap around common struggles for "Work, Freedom, and National Dignity," constituting what Manheim labels a distinct 'generational unit.'[4] But the divisions among this trifurcation of civil society are significant, particularly in the ways in which geography determines and shapes grievances—as Giulia Cimini also finds in the present volume. Differences in their tactical approaches, local vs. national scope, and organizational and decision-making strategies are also prevalent, and oftentimes follow, from this geographic distinction. Significantly, these differences militate against unified political action and often play into the hands of regime strategies to coopt and instrumentalize (*civil),* repress (*leftist)*, and divide and conquer (*land/labor)*. Opposition to the corporatist, elite-led model of democratization and neo-liberal mode of governance thus remains largely unsuccessful despite being repeatedly checked and vociferously challenged.

Tunisia's revolutionaries ousted a regime but were unable to overturn the political and economic elite that supported it. This 'passive' or 'political' form revolution stands as a testament to the endurance of the past; its nascent democratic experiment remains, in many ways, mired in the legacies of authoritarianism that predate it. Calls to mobilize toward the central aims of the revolution oftentimes remain "red lines" in the sand. *Civil* forms of opposition operate within the limits of the "acceptable" as dictated by the Tunisian government, aided by the closely-aligned Tunisian media,[5] and supported and influenced by the hegemony of neoliberal governmentality.[6] *Contentious* forms are constrained by these actors at the same time. Terrorism and renewals of the Emergency Law are used as discursive tools and operational mechanisms to paint leftists and land/labor protesters as vandals, thieves, and threats to security requiring military and police repression.[7] However, powerful new forms of mobilization, activism, and "leaderfulness" (El-Sharnouby, present issue) are on the rise across the region.

NGOs or NGO-ization?

The proliferation of NGOs in Tunisia, taken as proof of

the development of a robust post-uprising civil society, is one of the hallmarks of the Tunisian transition. Yet many Tunisian youth activists view this NGO industry as beholden to international donors and are suspicious of its role in shaping and constraining public discourse.[8] The effect of the "projectization" and "professionalization" of welfare, development, and democratization often serves to depoliticize reforms and distracts from the imposition of neoliberal modes of governmentality.[9] As critics have put it, the NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, nine-to-five job rather than a true challenge to the system.

Starting in 2011, Western governments and international financial institutions (IFIs) have provided more assistance to Tunisian NGOs than to political programs themselves.[10] A critical mass of revolutionaries of the Qasbah Square transitioned into NGO work following the formalization of party politics. Entry into the NGO workforce became a sub-culture in itself replicating a "Silicon Valley" model which "impregnates" Tunisian NGOs and youth organizations with "neoliberal values and discourses." Many youth organizations develop their own "newspeak," where catch-phrases, shorthand idioms, and inside jokes incorporate English, French, and Tunisian popular references that are used so extensively that they can alienate the recipients of NGO services. English has become a dominant requirement for employment in NGOs: grant forms, progress reports, and donor meetings require a high proficiency.[11]

NGO-ization thus perpetuates developmental unevenness in access and assistance. Most NGO offices are located among the Tunis-Sfax axis, thus privileging Tunisia's urban centers or employing those who can afford to migrate internally.[12] This unevenness is a source of distrust among local communities who view the targets of NGO "assistance" as elite or top-down endeavors that "fail to engage with groups in civil society, much less to adopt more than a tokenistic approach to consultation, partnership, and voice."[13] NGO-ization therefore alters the landscape of contentious politics away from counter-hegemonic culture, disempowering social movements with its emphasis on issue-specific projects and pragmatic strategies[14] and taking the form of funding non-contentious modes of opposition to the state as well as the reproduction of a benign mode of citizenship education.[15]

Leftist Movements: Manich Msema7 (MM) and Fech Nestanaou (FN)

Youth resistance outside this world of NGOs has experienced both success and failure, and different forms of state response. Two leftist movements - Manich Msema7 and Fech Nestanaou – exemplify this trajectory. MM and FN can be considered two campaigns of the same social movement in that they were organized by the same core group of activists.[16] Many of the core activists participated in the Qasbah Square sit-ins beginning in January 2011; were active in subsequent campaigns such as *Hatta Ana Haraqt Markaz* ("I, Too, Burned Down a Police Station") and *Hasibhum* ("Make them Accountable"); haled from the Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie (UGET); remain connected to the Union des diplômés chômeurs (UDC)[17]; were or are members of political parties on the center-left spectrum; adopted horizontality as an organizational and decision-making strategy;[18] and allied around the central slogan *iskat an-nidham* ("overthrow the regime").[19]

Manich Msema7 began in response to the 14 July 2015 Reconciliation in the Economic and Financial Sectors Bill that President Beji Caid Essebsi introduced to parliament to provide amnesty to political and administrative figures of Tunisia's post-independence regimes. The hashtag developed in August 2015 over online conversations and a Google group shared among a small number of youth discussing the bill's subversion of the transitional justice process enshrined in the 2013 Transitional Justice Law.[20] Mobilizations were met with infiltration, surveillance, repression, and arrests, all of which added to the movement's legitimacy and momentum.[21] The campaign quickly took off across the country and garnered international support. Between August 2015

and September 2017, approximately 70 mobilizations took place, the most notable of which brought cross-class coalitions of political parties and civil society organizations onto the streets numbering in the thousands.[22]

Cultural and intellectual forums like slam poetry, jam sessions, and invited speaker series were fused with protests and "signified a new strategy of activism beyond the purely political."[23] Other tactics included calling upon football chants and cartoon slogans; a "Whose dog are you?" song accompanied by flares and fireworks; plastering "WANTED" signs with allegedly corrupt businessmen across public spaces; and sending letters to politicians calling on them not to discuss the bill in parliament. The campaign also included targeting alleged money laundering in Majel Bel Abbes (Kasserine), dirty hands in the Marina Gammarth construction project, and support for the Kamour and Jemna protests over land and labor issues, among others.[24]

While MM had only 100-200 core members, its Facebook page boasted over 70,000 followers. Membership was open to any and all who wanted to participate in the cause so long as they did so as individuals while also drawing upon many forms of material and logistical support from established organizations.[25] Because MM was able to bring together disparate groups, the movement was partially successful: the parliament was forced to amend its proposals on July 2016, April 2017, and September 2017, only to be passed as the Law on Administrative Reconciliation on 20 October 2017. Named Organic Bill 49-2015, the law ultimately granted amnesty to administrators—but notably, not to politicians.

Fech Nestanaou (FN) was created in response to the austerity measures imposed on Tunisia by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through the Finance Law of 1 January 2018.[26] Five members of the Communist Party's youth wing started the movement in anticipation, on 25 December 2018.[27] That number was expanded to a committee of 25 members comprised of individuals from the Communist Party, Tayyar Democrat, Femme Democrats, Manich Msema7, and UGET. Like MM, this slogan was the product of an online brainstorming session. FN was launched along with a Facebook page, protest, and tagging campaign on 3 January 2018.[28]

A 6 January meeting brought 180 people together to agree on targeting the Finance Law, protesting the arrests of activists and the killing of Khmaies el Yerfani,[29] and, like MM, adopting horizontality as a model of management and decision-making. "We decided to walk from Jeanne d'Arc to the Ministry of Interior. We were aggressively beaten up by the police that night. We were around 100 people, but not no one was arrested. We heard the police saying: we are not allowed to arrest them; just beat them up!"[30] After posting photos and videos on social media, the group's "likes" rose to over 30,000. By the third meeting of 8 January there were 18 committees across the country with only six regions unrepresented.[31] A national protest was planned for 14 January with the goal of breaching regional governorate offices. Of the 18 committees, nine mobilized. In Sousse, Kairouan, and Monastir protesters managed to breach governorate offices. Activists met with local governors who listed the protesters' demands before sending them home. In Tunis, around 1000 activists encountered roadblocks and were met with violent repression.

The official stance towards FN hardened further when it began reaching out directly to popular neighborhoods, a move that proved successful in sparking local discussions and support. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) responded with overt surveillance and intimidation.[32] Between 14 and 22 January, police arrested 1000 activists across the country in an attempt to halt the movement's momentum. "The government understood that it's no longer a good idea to put leaders in jail because they can mobilize public opinion. So, they jailed the masses instead."[33] The movement proved to be short-lived in part because rioting erupted during nightfall,[34] thus permitting the media and government to paint the movement in a negative light, and in part because the UGTT released a statement through its ranks to stop supporting the protests, thus denying FN

the cross-class coalition that was so germane to the latter's success. Tayyar Democrat claimed that they were too busy preparing for municipal elections (to be held two months later), and members of prominent NGOs walked back their commitments thereafter.[35]

The final protest, set for 26 January at Bardo, was "a huge deception."[36] Activists hashtagged prominent monuments downtown, and "clown brigadiers" distributed pamphlets across the city in preparation.[37] The Facebook page garnered 80,000 clicks to "attend," but only around 1,700 participated. The counter-terrorism and anti-riots unit were in the wait, with police outnumbering the protesters. In the end, the event devolved into violence, thus marking the effective end of FN as a campaign.

Wein al-Petrol and Land/Labor Protests of Tunisia's South

Land/Labor protests encountered a very different set of challenges and responses. *Winou el Petrole* ("Where is the Oil?") began in response to the Dutch Mazarine Company's 1 May 2015 announcement of the discovery of an oil field in the town of Faouar in the Kebili governorate.[38] The Ministry of Industry, Energy, and Mines linked the find on its Facebook page on 5 May, leading residents of Faouar to go on site demanding job recruitment, social corporate responsibility (CSR), and investment in infrastructure. On the same day, the TAP news agency published an article uncovering scandals implicating the Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas (STEG), the Tunisian Company of Refining Industries and the Tunisian Company of Petroleum Activities (ETAP) that was relayed *en masse* by the media.[39] Neighboring Douz and Golaa joined the protests with similar demands aimed at Winstar and Parenco who were allegedly given sweetheart deals through suspicious circumstances under the Ben Ali regime, some of which implicated local Tribal/Management Councils (T/MC) responsible for the allocation of collective (tribal) lands.[40]

The issue was sidelined, however, with media coverage focusing on the granting of a license to an LGTBQ association and a shootout at the Bouchoucha barracks. In an attempt to refocus attention on the discovery and series of scandals, cyberactivists coined the hashtags *Narja3ou el Mawdhou3na* ("Back to Our Subject") and *Winou el Petrole?* ("where is the Petrol?"). By 25 May, calls for *Winou el Petrole* abounded. Protesters burned police stations, and the police intervened, provoking a 2.5 month sit-in. Citizens in the capital began brandishing the *Winou el Petrole* slogan on signs, banners, and empty gasoline containers in support, thus drawing national attention to the campaign.

The UDC, members of local associations, and selected protesters from each town were chosen to represent the collective at the table across from ETAP, who represented the oil companies. While deals were reached in each particular case for employment and CSR between ETAP and the protesters, none of the agreements were honored in full. Similar protests broke out across the country contemporaneously and thereafter, including the Kerkennah (2015), Kamour (2017) and Kebili (2017) protests in which protesters shut down pipeline production. The regime response in each case was to either threaten or deploy military intervention. And in each case, the government's response was to treat each town on a case-by-case basis, promise reforms, employment, and investment, and then fail to deliver. In Kebili, for example, a return of protests in 2017 was met by various concessions to Golaa, Faouar, and Douz.[41] To date, however, each locale has yet to claim victory in their struggle(s).

Conclusion

Tunisian youth activism has proven resilient, but the trifurcation of their participation militates against the kind of unity often required for large-scale change. Leftist activists have altered their strategies deploying increasingly creative tactics to spark discussion and entice mobilization. Horizontality—inclusive though often inefficacious—is used in temporary and conditional campaigns as a decision-making and organizational strategy to appeal to previously apolitical or inexperienced youth. However,

their geographic 'isolation' along the north-west and coastal areas has yet to reach critical participation from the southern and central regions. Likewise, though demonstrations in the capital exist in limited form in solidarity with land and labor protests in the hinterlands, this issue space is off the radar for most activists who reside outside of the Tunis-Sfax axis. Regime repression has proven effective against the leftists; while divide and conquer bodes well for those seeking greater government and corporate responsibility in the interior. The parochial demands of the latter and the national and geopolitical ones of the leftists remain unconnected in any meaningful way, as of yet, despite their apparent shared concerns for economic and social justice.

One frustrated Tunisian activist summarized the struggle as such:

> In Tunis we went too quickly for this ready-for-use-democracy with this constitutional ready-to-use-system and this process all with the help of NGOs. I think that we didn't take enough time to think about all the alternatives and options… The sad part is that we moved forward, and we now face the reality that we lost our chance. We face a classical system … there is no way to radically change things now. We are forced to accept the reality of the situation and all we can do is figure out how to make it better.[42]

Endnotes

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[2] Eva Bellin. "Civil Society in Formation: Tunisia," in *Civil Society in the Middle East, Vol. 2*, ed. Richard Augustus Norton (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

[3] Matt Gordner. "Manich Msema7." *Participedia.net* (2019): https://participedia.net/case/6252

[4] "Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute generation units" (Manheim 1970, p. 304)

[5] Marc Lynch. "How the Media Trashed the Transitions." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (2015): 90-99.

[6] Emel Akçalı ed. *Neoliberal Governmentality and the Future of the State in the Middle East and North Africa*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[7] Corinna Mullin. "Tunisia's 'transition: Between Revolution and Globalized National Security." Pambazuka News (12 October, 2015): https://www.pambazuka.org/global-south/tunisia's-"transition"-between-revolution-and-globalized-national-security.

[8] NGO-ization refers to a global process, internationalized by the 1990s, in which international financial institutions and Western states encourage the adoption of structural adjustment programs (lower subsidies, impose austerity measures, and privatize public utilities) which includes offloading development and welfare responsibilities to non-governmental organizations. In the absence of government-funded services, relatively miniscule sums are doled out for otherwise robust development and welfare programs and 'sub-contracted' to NGOs.

[9] Islah Jad. "NGOs: Between buzzwords and social movements." *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4-5 (2007): 622-629.

[10] Sarah Yerkes. "Where Have All the Revolutionaries Gone?" *Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution* (2017).

[11] Omar Somi. "Youth Policies in Tunisia: The Internationalization of Youth as a Public Policy Issue." *POWER2YOUTH*, Working Paper no. 9 (2016).

[12] *Jamaity*, an organization that tracks civil society organizations in Tunisia, accounts for approximately 3,000 NGOs on its website. Of these, around 800 are located in Tunis, 240 are in Sfax, 165 in Monastir, 135 in Sousse, and 120 in Hamamet-Nabeul (the Tunis-Sfax axis). In Sidi Bouzid, a city of nearly 50,000 people with ten times the population of Monastir, there are only 90 registered NGOs.

[13] Paul Stubbs. "Community Development in Contemporary Croatia: Globalisation, Neoliberalism and NGOisation," in *Revitalizing Communities in a Globalizing World,* ed. Lina Dominelli (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

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[22] Number of protests obtained through internal MM documents (many of them were independently verified by the author).
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[24] Matt Gordner. "The Association for the Protection of Jemna's Oasis (APJO)." *Participedia.net* (2017): https://participedia.net/organization/4991
[25] Interviewees with the author identified the following supporters: the political parties and coalitions of the Popular Front, Democratic Current, Republican Party, iWatch, al-Bawsala, UGTT, UGET, UDC, Femme Democrats, LTDH, FTDS, Tunisian League Against Torture, RAJ, and YouthCan. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch released reports about the arrests of MM participants.
[26] "It is a question, meaning: 'What are we waiting for [to revolt]?' It's a revolutionary call, or '*ta7ridh,*' a provocation or incitement to revolt against the government." Interview with Activist, Beja, 10 February 2018.
[27] The five members began with four main goals in mind: (1) Addressing the rising cost of living, (2) Employing one member of each poor family across the country, (3) Increasing welfare payments, and (4) Halting the privatization of public institutions and facilities. Interview with Activist, Tunis, 28 June 2019.
[28] That date was selected as a symbolic gesture for its alignment with the Bread Riots of 1986 and acted as a "trial" run with the release of political pamphlets advertising the campaign.
[29] El Yerfani was run over by a police vehicle in the first week of the FN protests.
[30] Interview with Activist, Tunis, 28 June 2019.
[31] The six regions were: Mednine, Tozeeur, Tatouine, Kebili, Kef, and Zaghouan.
[32] In Beb el-Falla, for example, the Ministry of Interior set up a tent outside of the local coffee shop as an intimidation tactic. Interview with Activist, Tunis, 28 June 2019.
[33] Interview with Activist, Kef, 9 February 2018.
[34] In an interview with one FN activist, the individual claimed that the only violence from members occurred when police attacked them during the day. Interview with Activist, Tunis, 28 June 2019.
[35] Interview with Activist, Tunis, 28 June 2019.
[36] Interview with Activist, Tunis, 28 June 2019.
[37] Interview with Activist, Kef, 9 February 2018.
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[40] Interview with Activist, Golaa, 25 December 2017.
[41] Interview with UDC Representative, Faouar, 24 December 2017.
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Missing Youth in Tunisia?
Implications of Regional Disparities and Center-Periphery Divide

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In the post-2011 euphoria, the Tunisian revolution was unanimously labelled as 'youth revolution,' both domestically and internationally. 'Youth' were taken to embody dynamism and positive change, often presented as a synonym for the 'marginalized,'[1] the mistreated and repressed part of society most suffering from authoritarian rule. The expectation which followed is that after 2011 this marginalized 'youth' could finally release its energies and make its voice heard.

But Tunisian youth continue to face many of the same challenges eight years on as before the revolt: high unemployment rates, economic exclusion, and political disillusion. This simple conclusion is misleading, however. While there is no question that youth conditions are as troubled as before across the country, the problems are not evenly distributed across the country. Young Tunisians in the south and in marginal communities face very different, and more severe, challenges than do those in the coastal and major urban areas. A spatial differentiation would provide a more comprehensive and detailed account of the situation facing 'youth' in Tunisia.

Regional divides have a greater descriptive and explanatory power than the generational divide *tout court.* What does this mean for the discourse of 'youth'? This essay first examines the emergence of 'youth' as a hybrid social and political category in Tunisia, pointing to the 'fluidity' of such a concept, even in the official state-led discourse prior to and post 2011. It then accounts for regional disparities among youth in terms of 'center-periphery' dynamics, in particular providing insights from the governorate of Tataouine, traditionally one of the most marginalized regions in the country.

Interestingly, whereas people in their twenties and thirties constitute the bulk of demonstrators over the last years, "youth" or "young people" became a synonym for unemployed, regardless of a clear-cut age definition. Hence, the youth protests in Tataouine and the interior regions incorporated diffused (e.g., the quest for social justice and jobs) as much as local claims (e.g., context specific underdevelopment or environmental issues) in their discursive frames, focusing on the demand to locally exploit local resources. As Matt Gordner points out in his contribution to this collection, land and labour protests in the South distinguished from nation-wide campaigns and movements like Manich Msameh and Fech Nestannou for the tribal dimension coming in and the ways authorities negotiated with them.[2]

It should be no surprise that notions of *karama* (dignity) and *hogra* (a feeling of abandonment whose corollaries are social exclusion and humiliation) linked to spatial inequalities have represented a common thread among youth across the country's marginal areas, kick-starting the 'Alfa grass' revolution in 2011, better known as the 'Jasmine' revolution.[3] Not all of these protests impact the national level. But there has been a steady stream of localized contentious outbursts which punctuate the country's political trajectory with strikes, sit-ins, blockades, and rallies of unemployed graduates on a sporadic or on a day-to-day basis.[4]

'Youth' as a problematic category

'Youth' persists as a problematic analytic category within literature, not least for the 'fluidity' of its concept. This is evident, for instance, when referring to the shifting age range it encompasses, or to the categories of people it includes as object of governmental policies. In Tunisia, youth as a demographic category has been significantly stretched beyond traditional practices to include also the population in their thirties, as well as young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs) in addition to the traditional educated unemployed.[5] Moving

the age bracket by a few years does not dramatically change the portrait in terms of unemployment figures or other relevant indicators.

But this shifting attitude does have significance in terms of subjectivity and governmental attitude. On the one hand, it highlights the postponement of the transition to adulthood itself, linked to one's integration into the social community, an aspect strictly related to a delayed achievement of individual autonomy, social responsibility, and independence; and, on the other hand, to the official and social recognition that past policies failed to target the youth question.

What I refer to as 'fluidity' of youth also means the heterogeneity of this 'category,' which is often underestimated in the mainstream narrative. Youth intersects with other analytical concerns such as class, gender, and geographical belonging. I am particularly interested in how regional disparities affect the life of youth in many underappreciated ways, including great differences in the access to employment opportunities and labour-market information, quality of public services, as well as patterns of mobility. In sum, the experience of being young is deeply affected by the place one is born into and that of residence, which is also associated to a different extent of what has been referred to elsewhere as a 'multiple marginalization' based on intertwined manifestations of estrangement.[6]

Being young in marginalized regions: Evidence from Tataouine

Whereas the chances of young people to find employment still depend first and foremost on their family background, spatial inequalities also continue to foster unequal competition among Tunisian youth. The 2011 popular protests thrust the long-standing issue of unease spatial development into the spotlight. More attention was given to the 'two-speed country' stemming from the spatial division: first, a rural-urban divide within each region; and second, a regional imbalance between the coastal areas and the internal regions. It is in this context that a 'decentralization' set of reformist ideas came to the forefront of political and social debate in Tunisia, promising to optimize resource allocation and be the solution to persistent inequalities.

The southern governorate of Tataouine is a well-known hub of instability for its socio-economic marginalization and contentious street politics such as the El Kamour protests in 2017 and their revival in April 2019.[7] Although Tataouine's oil supplies amount to about 40 percent of national production, the population fails to benefit from according levels of employment and redistribution of state resources. This perceived neglect drives complaints about the lack of services and infrastructural development as a deliberate strategy pursued by the ruling elites.

The persistence of major obstacles to youth's inclusion and self-fulfilment based on regional inequalities is also reflected in a number of statistical indicators. Tataouine has the highest unemployment rate in the country, set at around 32 percent, over twice the national average (15.4 percent),[8] and affecting mostly young people.[9] Also, it is at the tail end of the ranking based on the regional development index elaborated by the Ministry of Development, Investment, and International Cooperation, together with other southern and center-western governorates.[10] Decades-long selective policies aimed at improving the productivity and competitiveness of those regions where the national elites originated from and also deemed as offering comparative advantages with respect to the global market unlike internal regions, have contributed to the general impoverishment of the area, cutting it out from the manufacturing network among others. For instance, all industrial companies (92 percent) are overwhelmingly located around three major cities, Tunis, Sfax and Sousse.

Tataouine lags behind tremendously in terms of private investments. Tunis and Tataouine account for 20 percent and 0.9 percent respectively of the national distribution of private companies,[11] with negative consequences for labour demand that strongly penalize the South. Despite the importance of public investment and strong incentives

favoring private investments, the interior regions did not take much advantage of such opportunities and benefits.[12] Paradoxically, public investments by inhabitants between 1990 and 2005 were higher in the interior regions than in the coastal area,[13] yet they failed to attract the private sector and to jump-start a sustainable model of local development.

One possible explanation sticks out: public investments did not create local jobs, but spurred local-based production whose profits were drained from other areas, those marketing the products. The export-based model of development has created a two-tier economy where the offshore sector, mostly located in the coastal areas, developed rapidly while the onshore sector struggled to develop and to create jobs. As a result, the inhabitants of inland regions far from the ports had to either migrate to coastal towns offering more lucrative job opportunities or focus on rural activities in low-productivity and, therefore, low-income.[14]

The economy in the interior and southern regions like Tataouine is less diversified than in the coastal ones, and highly dependent on external revenue sources (like remittances, informal business or seasonal tourism), making them more vulnerable to market- and external shocks. Indeed, most of my interlocutors complain about the lack of economic diversification, and argue in favor of tapping into the region's underutilized potential to improve its competitiveness. Agricultural activities are also a main obstacle to development, with difficult issues such as the use of collective lands and the exploitation of water resources by private companies.[15]

Disparities in education exacerbate such differences. Since the modernizing and secularizing efforts of Bourguiba's political project, education has been one of the pillars of the post-independence state, resulting in sustained public funding compared to other MENA countries. Education, and university education in particular, were conceived as means of social mobility and gender equality.[16] Traditionally, education has also been the battleground of political forces to ensure political loyalty and support (on this point in Turkey, see Ozipek's contribution). In the case of Tunisia, the expectations of young people, particularly among graduates, have remained increasingly unmet over the last decades. In fact, a puzzling paradox has emerged: the higher the education level, the harder it becomes to secure employment, as shown by the higher unemployment rate for holders of higher degrees.[17]

Again, delving into spatial differentiation helps to unpack these differences across youth. Whereas the rural-urban divide within each governorate still accounts for the most striking differences in terms of illiteracy and access to education, school attendance rates and the quality of teaching are lower in central and southern regions compared to the national average, further reducing the access to the labour market for a segment of less-qualified people.[18] Likewise, lower scores obtained at national exams for the high school diploma are discriminating factors to access most prestigious faculties with potentially greater employability.[19] The uneven geographical distribution of schools and universities greatly favoring Greater Tunis[20] and the Tunisian coast accounts for an unequal distribution of resources and increases the burden of students from peripheral areas with additional expenses for accommodation and travel to those regions.

In Tataouine, for instance, there are but two higher (public) institutions belonging to the University of Gabes: the Higher Institute of Technological Studies and the Higher Institute of Arts and Crafts (ISET and ISAM in their French acronyms) focusing on IT and design respectively, which replicate twin institutes in other governorates according to a top-down national planification for higher education that does not take into account the peculiarities of the local economic fabric. All this has an impact on the quality of youth education, and their employability as job-seekers.

Furthermore, as some observers point out, 'the growing stress on the need to increase youth education and skills, and on youth self-entrepreneurship, also had the advantage of placing the burden of youth labour market insertion on the youth themselves, rather than on the state' also in post-2011 Tunisia.[21] Without questioning the

economic model itself, the education gap rhetoric – i.e., the mismatch between the competencies required by the labour market and what young people study in higher education – remains a central tenet to explain youth exclusion as it was in the past.[22] The need for a more diversified and differentiated education became increasingly urgent with regard to the failure of the traditional state's great investment in massive over-education as a solution to youth employment.[23]

Youth and migration's temptation

In the absence of viable alternatives, migration – like smuggling and odd jobs – is always a strategy on the youth's agenda to cope with the situation, and not always for despair, but in the search of a better life and financial success.[24]

The persistence of inequality of opportunities related to unequal regional development is a push factor for greater mobility from regions like Tataouine. Indeed, most of the migration flows are internal to the country.[25] Drawing on the last census (2014), the Greater Tunis stands as the most attracting pole for human capital, with the center-west regions (Kairouan, Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid) as the least, followed by the north-west. Since this mobility is mostly motivated by the search of employment, unsurprisingly, the attractive pole has the lowest poverty and unemployment rates, the highest concentration of enterprises per thousand inhabitants, as well as the highest regional labour market distribution rates and public investment (25 and 48 percent respectively). By contrast, the latter group of governorates poorly performs according to the same indicators.[26]

Emigration abroad is another phenomenon involving mostly youth (more than 73 percent are aged between 15 – 30).[27] Not unusually for youth of Southern governorates like Tatatouine, France looks closer than the Tunisian capital, not least because of the links with the diaspora community already settled there. Families play a big role in encouraging youth emigration. 'They don't understand the loss of human capital for our territory' sadly stresses a former teacher 'and when their sons reach the destination, they celebrate and even sacrifice sheep and rams.'[28] After all, it is not to be forgotten that the diaspora resources represent an important portion of both the local and national economy, in the form of remittances and labour-market assets sent or brought home by migrants or those who return. In 2018 alone, the World Bank estimated US $2 billion in remittances were sent to Tunisia, representing 4.9 percent of the country's GDP.[29]

On the other hand, central to the interviewees' experience is a mixture of frustration – for being still dependent on their parents for a living, – and of intolerance to social constraints. In other words, a life abroad become tantamount to a freedom difficult to gain within one's own community.[30] Emigration hence represents either a way to answer social and family pressure, and the best way to assert their own identity by escaping the surveillance of parental authority and the pressing social constraints of the community.

The persisting neglect of this region hardens the disillusionment with the political process and the representative institutions manifesting in continuous contentious politics and reduced participation to electoral politics among others. In May 2018 municipal elections – a new achievement of the post-revolutionary era – Tataouine's voter turnout was under the already very low national average (33 percent) with 28 percent. Newly elected municipal councils, but the same can be said for MPs, still need to win people's trust, whereas tribal allegiances play a major role in shaping political preferences and act as intermediaries with the central power.[31] Forthcoming presidential and legislative elections will be a litmus test for citizens' detachment, and to see to what extent independents or anti-system forces are gaining ground in a region that is considered highly conservative and a stronghold of the Muslim-democratic party of Ennahda.

Looking ahead

Spatial disparities call for differentiated solutions contrasting to the 'one size fits all' approach. This implies

region-tailored answers for youth within a strategic plan for long-term sustainable development. By contrast, political short-term approaches – as a result of, on the one hand, continuous government reshuffles and 'political tourism'[32] hampering accountability and, on the other, of ad-hoc solutions aimed to plug-up the emergencies[33] – risks to further alienate youth, exacerbate their precariousness by reproducing, rather than mitigating, disparities and push for continuous emigration flows.

To cope with youth redistributive claims, the process of Decentralization enshrined in the 2014 Constitution and activated in the May 2018 municipal elections, has promised to more equally reallocate resources in order to better value local human capital and natural resources. However, in order to deliver concrete results, it requires an effective power transfer, first and foremost financial, which has not been the case thus far.

In the absence of a well-defined legal framework, autonomous financial tools and coordination mechanisms among stakeholders, the proper functioning of a new local administration governance model will be sensibly slowed down and still highly dependent on central management. By falling short of youth's expectations to reduce if not sort out persistent regional imbalances, the decentralization process is likely to act as a further element of frustration and disconnection of marginalized communities rather than a driver for reconciliation with the central state.

Endnotes

1 Maria Cristina Paciello, Renata Pepicelli and Daniela Pioppi, "Youth in Tunisia: Trapped Between Public Control and the Neo-Liberal Economy," Power2Youth Working Paper No. 6 (February 2016). Available online at: < http://power2youth.iai.it/system/resources/W1siZiIsIjIwMTYvMDMvMDkvMTFfMzdfMDFfOTk1X3AyeV8wNi5wZGYiXV0/p2y_06.pdf >

2 Manich Msmah (I will not forgive) and Fech Nestannou (What are we waiting for?) are the anti-reconciliation and anti-austerity movements since 2015 and 2018 respectively.

3 Some observed how the marginalized region of Sidi Bouzid, cradle of the revolution, is better represented by the alfa grass than jasmines that grow instead in the coastal areas. Although the 'center' later identified with the rallying cry from the 'margins', it is symptomatic that the 2010-11 popular protests originating – as other protest cycles before them – from the poorest interior regions have been labelled by the mainstream narrative with a symbol that is more clearly consistent with the imagery of richest and 'central' regions. See on this, Habib Ayeb, "Social and Political Geography of the Tunisian Revolution: The Alfa Grass Revolution", *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 38, No. 129 (September 2011), p. 467-479.

4 Examples of major post-2011 outbursts of contentious politics – all originating from marginalized regions – include the *Winou el Petrol*? (Where is the Oil) campaign in 2015 starting from Tataouine, the Kasserine's protests over the suicide of a young unemployed in January 2016, the manifestation against the oil company at the Kerkennah islands in April 2016, and the El Kamour movement in 2017.

5 See Maria C. Paciello et al., "Youth in Tunisia"

6 Larbi Sadiki, "Regional Development in Tunisia: The Consequences of Multiple Marginalization" *Brookings Doha Center*, 14 January 2019.

7 In April 2017, the blockade at the oil extraction site of El Kamour in the governorate of Tataouine lasted for over three months, leveraged on two main intertwined demands: first, the re-investment of oil profits locally, and second, the creation of more jobs for residents by the locally active private companies. After a violent repression by the police, leading to the death of one protester, run over by a police car, the Chahed's government negotiated a package of measures. Due to a partial fulfilment of those promises, a new movement, El Kamour 2, has recently re-emerged.

8 Figures come from the World Bank's 2018 dataset, which for Tunisia draws upon International Labour Organization estimates. (Data retrieved in April 2019).

9 Tunisian National Institute of Statistics (INS), at <http://www.ins.nat.tn/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/Note_ENPE_2T2018_F.pdf >

10 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Études économiques de l'OCDE: Tunisie 2018" (Paris: Éditions OCDE, 2018).

11 Ibid., 122

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Tunisian Ministry of Regional Development, "Une nouvelle vision du développement régional : Livre blanc" (Tunis, 2011)

15 The preferential exploitation of water resources by big companies at the expense of local communities has a far bigger impact in other regions like Gafsa and Gabes (Personal interviews by the author in Gafsa, Metlaoui and Redeyef, Tunisia, April 2019). See also the 2014 documentary "Gabes Labess" (All is well in Gabes) < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_wkggqYCBg > and the Tunisian Observatory for food sovereignty and environment at www.osae-marsad.org

16 Isabel Schaefer, *Political revolt and youth unemployment in Tunisia: exploring the education-employment mismatch* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018)

17 Samah Ben Abada, "A university diploma is no longer a source of pride in the Maghreb", *The Arab Weekly*, 15 July 2018. <https://thearabweekly.com/university-diploma-no-longer-source-pride-maghreb>

18 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Études économiques de l'OCDE"

[19] In the municipality of Tataouine, the success rate at national exams for the high school diploma stands at 26 percent, as shown by the joint report from the Office du Développement du Sud and the United Nations Development Programme, "Communes en chiffres. Rapport du profil sectoriel de la commune de Tataouine" (Tataouine, 2018, 61)

[20] The greater metropolitan areas of Tunis comprises 4 governorates (Tunis, Ariana, Manouba and Ben Arous)

[21] Maria C. Paciello et al., "Youth in Tunisia," 5.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Isabel Schaefer, *Political revolt and youth unemployment in Tunisia*

[24] Personal interviews by the author in Tataouine, April 2019.

[25] National Institut of Statistics, *Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat 2014: caractéristiques migratoires* (Tunis, 2017)

[26] Vanessa Szakal and Lilia Ben Achour, "Migration interne, marché de l'emploi et disparités régionales" *Nawaat*, 9 March 2016. Accessed May 11, 2019. <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/03/09/migration-interne-marche-de-lemploi-et-disparites-regionales/ >

[27] National Institut of Statistics, *Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat 2014*

[28] Personal interview by author with a former teacher and civil society activist in Tataouine, Tunisia, April 2019.

[29] World Bank Migration and Remittances data (updated April 2019).

[c] http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data >

[30] Malek Lakhal "Tunisia: Illegal migration and brain-drain, two sides of the same coin" *Nawaat*, 7 May 2019. <https://nawaat.org/portail/2019/05/07/tunisia-illegal-migration-and-brain-drain-two-sides-of-the-same-coin/>

[31] Author's interview in Tataouine, April 2019.

[32] Since 2011 legislative elections, Tunisia has witnessed five prime minister and major government changes, and several minor reshuffles. Also, MPs frequently changing parties or splitting off from their original party to create new ones has characterised the country's political landscape thus far. Suffice it to think at Nidaa Tounes, the incumbent party, which lost more than half of its deputies in less than a legislature.

[33] For instance, along the lines of a format experimented after the 2008 protests in the mining region of Gafsa in response to social pressure, new ad hoc service companies have been created to hire part of the local workforce like young graduates. See, for instance, the Environmental, Plantation and Gardening Companies in Gafsa, Tataouine and Gabes, in connection to the big companies of phosphates, oil and chemical products respectively. But the extent to which employees have a real job is debatable, as many critics point out that the disbursement from the companies of a monthly salary is a way to keep social peace in exchange of no service. Personal interviews of the author with labor unionists and civil society activists in Gafsa, Redeyef, Metlaoui and Tataouine, April 2019.

Youth Political Participation and Attitudes in Contemporary Morocco

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This paper aims at examining the political attitudes and participation of Moroccan youth, mainly through their engagement in two main political activities: voting in local and national elections and participating in decision-making institutions, such as the parliament and political parties. It attempts to shed light on the current political situation of youth in Morocco with a particular focus on their participation in formal and informal politics and their new forms of engagement in politics. It aims to shed light on what lies at the heart of young people's apparent disengagement from formal politics in Morocco: political apathy or a sense of political alienation. Moroccan youth largely support the democratic process, but are cynical of the way the Moroccan political system is organized and led by politicians. They are turned off by people in power in general and the political parties in particular. However, there is no standardized youth orientation to politics.

Morocco is suffering from an increasing disconnect between young citizens and electoral politics. Declining youth involvement in traditional forms of politics has manifested itself in lower voter turnout and a dramatic shrinkage in their membership of political parties. They are stifled and repressed and any attempt to express dissatisfaction on their part is considered a rebellion and rejection of the laws of the state. This attitude rests on a foundation of a tradition of patriarchal and tribal obedience: Moroccan youth have always been silenced by the patriarchal and tribal concept of respect of seniority. In the presence of seniors, the youth are taught to keep silent and listen to the elders who have more experience. This attitude prevents them from expressing their opinions or becoming part of a political elite.[1] Indeed, the whole political and social arena is off limits to them, as the elders dominate the public realm. Hence, the level of participation of youth in formal politics and decision-making is excessively low, and as a result Moroccan youth are in constant search of new ways and forms of political engagements[2].

Studying Moroccan Youth

Morocco has a rather young population; around 30 percent of Moroccans are aged between 15 and 29 years of age, representing 9 to 10 million young people. More educated and more aware of their global context than prior generations, these young people are facing a crossroad of major change in the country. Historically, Moroccan youth played an imperative role in resisting French colonialism and afterwards creating post-colonial institutions such as parties and student movements. However, in the last three decades, their participation in the political spheres has been dwindling especially when it comes to participation in decision-making, within political parties or civil society organizations.

This essay is based on both quantitative and qualitative research methods: visits to the sites of the informants, interviews, and document analysis. The study makes use of a mixed research approach. It also uses three main data-collection instruments: frequent visits to political parties' headquarters to interview their leaders, activists, and young and female members. Witten interviews lasted between 25 and 40 minutes, while face-to-face were between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours, allowing me to engage in deeper conversations with respondents. I interviewed students and young political activists who participated in the 20 February movement and a conducted a survey with 289 questionnaires sent through social media to different youth and women's groups. I also conducted an online survey questionnaire containing a variety of political attitudes and behaviors on which the respondent should state his/her degree of agreement. I circulated the online survey through Google forms and sent it to youth forums, groups on social media, and blogs. It was also sent to students in six Moroccan universities via e-mail and Facebook: Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdullah universities of both Art and of science, Faculties of letters and human

sciences: Cadi Ayyad, Ain Chock, Mohamed the First, Moulay Ismail, Mohammed V Universities.

The majority of political party leaders and Parliamentarians are elderly with very few young party members. As a result, problems related to youth do not always receive the necessary attention from party leadership, parliament, government, and municipal councils. Although many people observe that the situation has been improved somewhat in recent years, the democratization of the political environment in the country has not been followed by legal and effective initiatives to support the participation of youth in politics.[3] Statutes and regulations of all political parties in Morocco include specific roles, duties, and responsibilities for their youth forums, even though some of these functions are limited or decided based on certain quotas and proportions.[4] The role and importance of youth political participation diminishes when it comes to assigning them to decision-making positions within a party, or at a local or national level, resulting in a low number of young people in the central and executive government. Furthermore, the rate of their inclusion in the decision-making process within political parties is similarly low, as most of the political parties have not fully endorsed or sanctioned the right of youth to representation. An patriarchal way of thinking continues to bar young Moroccans from the political arena.

In December 2010, the massive involvement of young people in the wave of protests across the region triggered renewed interest in youth politics. In Morocco, the dominant narrative in the media and academia had often portrayed youth as politically inactive. Most studies and research conducted on youth have further confirmed a consistent trend of weak political participation and limited membership in political parties and unions. Very often, low rates of voting and engagement through formal politics were referred to as evidence of youth political apathy. The 2011 uprisings put those assumptions to the test.

My research, however, suggests that some, but not all, young Moroccans are politically engaged and continue to be interested in and informed about politics. But they are less active in formal venues, such as political parties and trade unions, and, rather, show a preference for activism through informal means of participation (e.g. via protests and social media). More than half of the respondents are neither interested in politics nor engaged in any form of participation. The low level of youth engagement has more to do with distrust in political institutions than distrust in democratic institutions as a means of governance. While many youth believe in their agency, they are aware of the limits of their influence through formal politics in a regime characterized by the centrality of power and a controlled partisan scene. Moreover, their experiences of political exclusion and marginalization create barriers and disincentives to participation and political engagement.[5]

Political Attitudes and Participation

The first step in examining Moroccan youth political attitudes and participation is looking at the extent to which they vote in both local and national elections and participate in formal institutions such as the parliament and political parties. My study indicates a positive response from Moroccan youth when it comes to electoral participation in both local and national elections. Most male respondents (60-80 percent) agreed to being registered to vote and voting, especially in local elections, given the fact that they were not eligible to vote in the national election of 2011. They also showed a positive attitude towards voting as an important part of civic participation. Female respondents did not indicate a significant level of electoral participation, but they exhibited an intention not only to be registered to vote, but also vote in the next national elections.

These findings contest the idea that Moroccan youth have become more apathetic as far as voting in elections is concerned. Moroccan youth are interested in their right to vote and evaluate voting as an important activity for their participation in politics. The problems with youth involvement emerge when it comes to real participation and access to decision-making in political parties and the parliament. The rate of inclusion of the respondents in the decision-making process within political parties and

the parliament is very low (especially for young females), as most of the political parties have not fully endorsed or sanctioned the right of youth to representation.[6] Thus, they are excluded from having a pro-active role in politics and influencing policy and new programs, both at the local and national level.

Based on my interviews conducted with young activists from the February 20th movement with members of the party youth councils, university students, and political members and experts, the inclusion of youth and women in the decision-making process is often obstructed by an old-fashioned mind-set of traditional party members, who consider the youth as inexperienced. This leads to a discouragement of youth and women from being members in political institutions. There is widespread agreement that there is an association between the gender of the respondents and their level of interest in politics. Females show a lower level of interest than males in politics and government.

One of the key findings of this study is that young people are not apathetic or unwilling to participate, but rather feel that the political system is neither sufficiently listening nor sufficiently adapting to their hopes and needs. A majority of respondents said that it was important to them how the country is run by the government. However, youth think that politicians are not interested in their opinions and that most of the political parties are corrupt. Many young people express the view that the Moroccan governmental system itself does not work well enough at the moment and needs to be fixed. They argue that democracy should not work better for some than for others, as it currently does, and point out that too many categories of people are being excluded or left out.

From Youth Apathy to Youth Activism:

In 2011, a movement which was called 'The February 20 movement' was born as a result of interactions between technophile Moroccan youth and street activists inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings that had started shortly before. Many of the group's leaders were young people who had, for the most part, prior experience as activists.[7] As in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, Moroccan protesters were seeking the establishment of laws, mechanisms, and institutions that guarantee individuals' social, economic, and political rights, based on dignity, freedom, equality, and social justice.[8]

As protests grew in Tunisia and Egypt, young Moroccans started to express their support for the protests on Facebook, but carried the conversation further by discussing political reforms in their own country. Dissatisfied young Moroccans were the main force behind this so-called 'February 20 Movement'. Demonstrators in Morocco, unlike their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt, did not call for radical regime change. As in Jordan, most Moroccan youth called for an evolution rather than a revolution. Protesters' main demands focused on ending corruption, reforming the judicial system, improving access to education, and creating a better health care system.[9] Essentially, young people wanted a better functioning state, which to them did not necessarily entail a complete overhaul of the regime.

One Facebook page, "Freedom and Democracy Now" became the basis of future mobilization; it was the platform where young Moroccans debated how they would create their own protest movement and where they set the demands that eventually became the basis of the movement's founding document. The protesters' demands were numerous.[10] Just days before the 20 February protests from which the movement gained its name, the group released its founding document on Facebook, demanding the creation of a totally democratic constitutional reform representing the will of the people, the dissolution of parliament, reduced corruption and trial for corrupt officials, and the release of political prisoners.[11] It also called for the recognition of the Amazigh language as an official language, in addition to a slew of labor and social goals such as transparency in hiring practices, opportunities for unemployed graduates, a guaranteed minimum wage, access to public services for the poor and reduced living costs. In addition, they demanded health reform and education reform.

The *Hirak* movement offers important evidence that youth activism in Morocco is not over yet, despite the fading momentum of the February 20th movement. The recent protests in the Rif region in Morocco were ignited in October 2016, after the gruesome death of a fishmonger named Mouhcine Fikri. The event very much resembled the death of fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, which triggered the Tunisian uprisings leading to the Arab Spring in 2011.[12] The Al Hoceima region has been at the center of Morocco's unrest since the October 28 death of Mohcen Fikri, the young fish market vendor was crushed to death in a trash truck while trying to salvage what he could after police threw out his market goods. But since Fikri's 2016 death, a new set of protests have started to take place in Morocco's Rif region. The shocking photos of Fikri being crushed to death in the rubbish truck after he jumped to protest against the authorities' confiscation of swordfish caught out of season were widely circulated in social media and caused public outrage. Anthropologist Miryam Aouragh has described the Al Hoceima uprising as the "unfinished business" of Moroccan the "Arab Spring" activists, and some on social media have been calling the latest wave of widespread demonstrations the "new February 20".[13]

Conclusion

Young Moroccans have become increasingly alienated from parties and politicians, but are active in politics in a broader sense. The evidence uncovered through this study indicates that young people (both males and females) in Morocco show interest in political affairs, dispelling the stereotype that their apparent disconnection from formal politics is as a consequence of their general apathy. Despite very negative perceptions of politics, respondents assert they are interested in political matters and a range of political issues.

They are also interested in a new style of politics. While they may eschew much of what could be characterized as formal or conventional party politics, there is evidence of great support for a different type of politics that is more participative and direct. Moroccan youth have their own views and engage in democracy in a wide variety of ways. Indeed, it is young people themselves who are diversifying political engagement: from the streets to the Internet; from political parties to social movements, issue groups, and social networks.[14] In Morocco, young people are now more likely than the country's population as a whole to participate in demonstrations and express their political views in online forums. Moreover, recent years have also confirmed that they are more likely than previous generations to get involved in protest politics.[15]

Young Moroccans are also still committed to the idea of elections and the democratic process; they strongly believe that the future of Morocco can improve with economic, political, and social changes. They believe it is their responsibility and burden to carry out these changes, as they consider that those charged with conducting politics on their behalf – the political parties and professional politicians – are self-serving, unrepresentative, and unresponsive to their demands as well as indifferent to the country's development.[16] Thus, it can be said that there is a civic orientation amongst the young to the democratic process, and democratizing the country is generally seen to be an urgent need. Taken together, these findings serve to call into question the assumption that youth are politically apathetic, as their lack of participation is based ultimately on barriers they face. At the heart of declining youth election turnout is a strong sense of political alienation rather than political apathy. As the political system in Morocco fails to provide the stimuli necessary to encourage young people and women to take a greater role in political life, it faces a crisis of democratic legitimacy.

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Revolutionary Youth Politics: From Seizing to Sharing Power

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The uprisings in the Middle East and Africa since late 2010/early 2011 featured remarkably horizontal mobilization strategies, contesting centralized forms of organization by separating the idea of mass mobilization from being led by one leading figure or one ideology. Their leaderless (or, perhaps more accurately, *leaderful)* and cross-ideological character opened questions about youth politics, social movements, and transformation processes. Researchers have typically approached these social movements through the literature on contentious politics,[1] or in some case have examined the meaning of those revolts for a new conception of politics.[2] Very few have attempted to analyze the horizontal movements in light of generation and youth studies, situating the young in their time and space for an understating of what constitutes youth politics today. Understanding youth politics through their horizontal mobilization strategies helps us to go beyond theories of contentious politics and repertoires of action. Instead, it allows scholars to address questions of time and temporality[3] particularly among this generation of youth in an aim to understand what constitutes youth politics today.

This paper draws on my current book project, which is based on intensive research done with Egyptian youth in a range of contexts: participant observation in the Egyptian uprisings in 2011; ethnographic fieldwork with the leftist, youth-led Bread and Freedom party, in 2015;[4] and interviews with political activists in diaspora in Berlin in 2018. This research shows that youth politics today is constituted on a conception of *sharing* power instead of *seizing* it. Such a conception requires a new type of thinking and practicing of revolutionary politics. Situating youth in their historical context, paying attention to their particular 'experiences of time' and 'horizons of expectations',[5] it becomes clear that the horizontal character of revolt suggests the rise of a new youth politics that is more inclusionary and revolves around the question of how to share political power.[6]

Demonstrators in Cairo, taken on 26 December 2013 by Hossam el-Hamalawy.[7]

The conceptual question of sharing power plays out in complex ways. This generation of youth, shaped by neoliberalism and the political form of electoral democracy, which in the context of the MENA region foremost served autocratic governments to assume legitimacy from 'the West' to stay in power, can be best understood as a disruptive generation in transition that is struggling between old ideas and practices of politics and new horizontal mobilization strategies. Striving for new political ideals and possibilities of engaging with a diverse mass, this generation of political youth are caught between traditional political ideas and practices (such as forming a political party) and new ideals of inclusion that transcends a particular ideology and one leading figure. While skeptical of heroism and grand narratives, the subjects of these uprisings are in search of a new politics of inclusion and new ways of organizing the masses in an age of technology and globalization.

The Leadership Question

While the Egyptian uprising is often described as leaderless, it would be more accurate to call it "leaderful" – a movement of many leaders, working together towards common goals. Hossam el Hamalawy, member of the leftist Revolutionary Socialists, notes that "the 2011 revolution had leaders. Indeed, there was no revolutionary leadership council, but there were parties, organizations, and movements who have leaders that sat together and decided collectively on what to do next."[8] Such a mobilization form, as a radically different way of practicing politics today, has been critiqued by many scholars and activists, who have pointed out the inability of the leaderful movement to bring about changes in state structures and were excluded from playing a role in governing the society after toppling dictators.[9]

Egyptian revolutionary activists have been ambivalent about coining the revolution a leaderless revolution, terming it a counter revolutionary narrative. Alaa Abdel Fatah, Egyptian activist and blogger, exemplifies this ambivalence over the leadership question.[10]

Features Alaa Abdel Fatah (in the middle) when he was arrested in 2011. Taken on 18 November 2011 by Hossam el-Hamalawy.[11]

The idea that the 2011 revolutionary movement was leaderless was part of the counter revolution, he argues. At the same time, he makes the point that this narrative could flourish because it also reflected something about the revolutionary movement.

> The idea that the revolution did not have a leader did not come from us. It was a tool of containing (the Revolution). There were internal and external challenges which would allow for the appearance of leaders that can later negotiate and so on. So, this term was part of the discourse of the counter-revolution.

He goes on to suggest, "however, as it captured some of the truth, that we were networks and did not have a centralized leadership, this confused us. Yes, we don't want something like Khomeini, or the vanguard party, so we did not know how to deal with this."

This discontent with how the leadership question has been theorized points to the contradiction between revolutionary thought and a reformist leadership embedded in liberal-democratic thought. The importance of reformists might have been invisible to some extent during the revolution, but they played an important role in organizing the square and shaping strategic decisions such as when to leave the occupation of the square. According to Hamalawy, "the 2011 revolution had leaders, most of them were reformists, which is exactly why the revolution took that turn." [12] After Mubarak was toppled and workers took to the streets and to the squares, "this troubled many liberals. It gave uncertainty to liberals, uncertainty to the bourgeoisie that participated in the 18 days, uncertainty to Sawiris.[13] But for me this was the continuation of the revolution. That is what we should be doing (to support the workers' strikes) . "[14] The liberals among the leadership gave preference to stability and elections instead of engaging and organizing the marginalized, such as the workers.[15]

Though there were many leaders in the Egyptian uprising of 2011, the symbolic significance of a heroic figure that is leading the revolutionary movement and its political project was absent, changing the meaning and significance of the leader as a figure for driving change. This shift is not unique to Egypt and can be observed elsewhere. Makiko Nambu, in this volume for example, shows how heroism in the context of the Palestinian struggle has unfolded over generations, in which imprisonment and public beating of Palestinians by Israeli police forces used to function as a 'rite of passage' for young men to enter the phase of manhood. Today, imprisonment does not signal heroism in the traditional meaning while in doubt about the Palestinian project in light of the Oslo 1993 agreement, making heroism an ambiguous category. Similar to the Egyptian case, the lived experiences among Palestinian youth differ fundamentally from the previous generations and their conception of political struggle, heroism, and ideology exemplified through the shifting symbolism of the heroic figure to its political struggle.

One decisive difference changing the experiences and hence imaginary for change across this generation of youth and their parents is that of war and meaning deployed to those wars. In the last century, according to French Philosopher Alain Badiou, the idea of waging war was imagined as the last war, and to bring about peace through war was a common ideal and imaginary for change. He writes, "The fundamental concepts through which the century has come to think itself or its own creative energy have all been subordinated to the semantics of war. (…) the twentieth century's idea of war is that of the decisive war, the *last war.*"[16] Accordingly, strong ideologies were meaningfully connected with ideas of heroism, sacrifice, and drastic change in a conception of seizing state power. Today however in absence of the classical war situation in which war meant to wage the last war, revolutionary politics is instead fixated on a political conception of sharing power diminishing the importance of the heroic figure, ideology, and sacrifice for a new world to come.

From Seizing Power to Sharing Power

The essays in this volume raise important questions about the rise of a new political subjectivity among the youth cohorts. This subjectivity is marked by a tension between old political groups that are already formed and their

practice and imaginary of transformation and change. In Jordan, for instance, Ryan, Ababneh, and Doughan show the diverse ways in which the *Hirak* movement in Jordan exemplify a new politics on the rise which can be observed in the diversity of the members involved in protests.

One decisive difference in the political imaginary between the elder generations of the independence movements of the 1950s and youth of today is their conception and practice of revolution. While the elder generations imagined to bring about change through a leading figure and an ideology, particularly that of nationalism, Islamism, and Arabism, revolutionary youth of today do not imagine to bring about change through one leading figure and instead show preference for a cross-ideological mobilization that includes activists and leaders of different ideological orientations. Understanding generations as a 'social generation', which is constructed based on their distinct social processes and historical locations,[17] the 1950s constituted a time of wars and independence movements in which revolution meant to change the state from one form to another, that is to change the colonized state to an independent nation state.

Another decisive difference among this generation of youth is the experience of democracy, in which parliamentary democracy is imagined as the best if not only way of peaceful governance, giving preference to electoral democracy as a meaningful way of representing a nation's citizenry. Sara Ababneh makes the point that in the *Hirak* movement in Jordan, political reform was foremost understood as "electoral and party law reforms". Matt Gordner, analyzing youth who joined NGOs in light of the Tunisian revolution, argues, "This 'passive' or 'political' revolution stands as a testament to the endurance of the past." In Egypt, the political imaginary for change in light of the uprising was foremost fixated on a conception of sharing power through electoral democracy in which iconic figures such as Wael Ghonim and Mohamed El Baradei did not strive to become leaders in the classical sense of the hero but instead proposed a leadership model based on democratic ideals of a rotation of power.[18] Yet, this democratic ideal of competing in elections immediately after the fall of the dictator did not transform the state and make it more democratic. Instead, old political groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the military to compete over seizing state power sidelining revolutionary youth. The challenge for the political subjects of the Arab revolts is accordingly to find ways of organizing a leaderful movement while contesting electoral democracy to open the way for a new form of democracy putting forward new conditions for sharing power meaningfully.

Lessons from Egypt for Sudan

As opposed to the Egyptian and other uprisings in the region, in the process of struggling against the regime, in Sudan, the individuals that first took to the streets in response to rising food prices in December 2018 was quickly organized through the Sudanese Professional Association[19] (SPA), "a network of banned unions."[20] It became an anchoring point to rally and organize the masses while crystalizing the demands of each stage. To mobilize a strong revolutionary body, at a later stage, they organized a sit in of 'the leaders' in general (*I'tesam alqyadah ala'ama*) .[21] Embracing the leaderful character of the uprising, the Sudanese example suggests to find new ways of imagining how to organize and unify a diverse mass of people.

Instead of striving for unity in which differences are suppressed because of a particular ideology or a hero figure that can bring about change, they strove for unity in diversity, acknowledging and uniting the many leaders of the revolution. As opposed to the Egyptian uprising in which the democratic leaders, such as Wael Ghonim and Mohamed el-Baradei just thought of their role as proposing changes, strategies, and compete in elections[22], the Sudanese uprising attempted at organizing the leading figures into a larger collective body that resists the military regime and strove for changes collectively and not individually. Though the Sudanese uprising has reached its critical stage after toppling Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 and entering the negotiation stage with the military over the transition phase, after the brutal crackdown of

the military on protestors on 3 June 2019, in which those alternative forms of organizing the revolting masses might eventually fail to find expression, the Sudanese example suggests a more inclusive imaginary incorporating the leaderful mobilization.

Yet, with the challenge to contest the dominant military regime, the Sudanese uprising, just as other protest movements in the region, suggests a disruptive generation in transition towards a more inclusive conception of change defying heroism in its classical sense of the leader of the revolution or the movement and one ideology to follow while still in search for different forms of practicing and organizing ideals of sharing power.

The electoral model fell short in contesting the postcolonial regimes in the region and did not succeed in inscribing democratic governance. The people of the Sudanese uprising in 2018 have organized themselves differently in striving to form a meaningful democracy. Instead of elections, and forming political parties, the Sudanese Professional Association formed the focal point to organize collectively the revolting masses. After Omar al-Bashir was ousted in April 2019, they strove to form local assemblies that find democratic representations in the transition phase, particularly in formulating the constitution and being part of the transitional body. Though, since joining the negotiation table with the military, those inclusive possibilities and imaginaries will most likely not find expression in practice, it suggests a different imaginary of sharing power and of democracy that would allow inclusion not through elections in authoritarian contexts and a façade democracy, but instead through forming local assemblies and councils to collectively decide on the transition phase and what is to come next.

In an interview MadaMasr Alaa Abdelfatah proclaims, "I was surprised when the SPA announced the official delegation for negotiation. I thought what a strange idea (laughing). It is something that never crossed our minds to do that at any stage in Egypt." The leadership question is unfolding in the MENA uprisings as a major organizational challenge while it carries tremendous potential for a new conception of revolutionary politics based on ideas and ideals of sharing power. This generation of revolutionary youth, coming out of age at new times, can thus be best understood as a disruptive generation that is struggling between classical politics and related forms of organization – forming the political party, electoral democracy and so on - and yet in search for new inclusionary practices in a new horizontal character of revolt.

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Young Women, Sexual Violence, and the Pursuit of Justice Amid Weakening State Institutions:
The Case of Turkey's Campus Witches

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> ***"Every day at least five women are killed by men. Law enforcement does not provide protection, and murderers get reduced sentences. #GoVoteEndIt #WomenVoteToLive #WomensVote."***
> -Kampüs Cadıları's Instagram[1]

In Turkey, 86 percent of women experience gender-based violence over the course of their life.[2] And every year, 11 percent of Turkish women report experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence.[3] Perhaps, then, the fact that the number of women who are murdered by a relative or partner has increased dramatically in recent years is not surprising. In 2018, the Istanbul-based We Will Stop Femicide Platform recorded 395 women murdered in such circumstances; in 2009, the number was 121.[4] These statistics from the platform are some of the most reliable available.[5] The government ceased releasing an official count of the number of murdered women in 2010.[6] This is likely because, according the government's own statistics, between 2002 (when the ruling party came to power) and 2009 (the last year for which government statistics are available), the number of women murdered by men increased 1400 percent.[7]

In 2014, in the midst of this increase in violence, a group of young female college students formed the *Kampüs Cadıları* (Campus Witches). The group's members often dress as witches, wearing hats and capes, and sometimes attacking men accused of perpetrating sexual assault. Their actions are an adamant call for change due to the severity of women's situation. The Witches explain:

> We deliberately decided to call ourselves witches because, in the Middle Ages, women who fought the patriarchy and its scientific discourse that rejected the legitimacy of nature were treated as witches…[t]oday's patriarchal mentality, which denies the value of women and relegates them to the background, is not fundamentally different from the mentality of the Middle Ages, when women rebelled against the patriarchy and were burned alive for their trouble. We are continuing in this resistance, like the great-great-great-great-granddaughters of the witches they failed to weed out back in the day.[8]

The Witches and others term the dramatic increase in the murders of women a "femicide."[9] The increase has coincided with Turkey's weakening democratic institutions. Kirisçi and Sloat synthesize the myriad of ways democratic institutions have been dismantled under the ruling political party, the AKP, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the party's leader: increased presidential power, divisions among the opposition, increased lack of confidence in the integrity of elections—in the rules that govern campaigning and in ballot box integrity, through declining rule of law, and in the desire for "big men" political leaders, all of which have occurred amidst difficult conditions for democracy, including renewed conflict in the Middle East, stalled European Union accession, and the 2016 failed coup attempt.[10] Academics and think tanks have profiled the decline.[11]

Zaki and Alhamid explain how weakened states can lead to gender violence.[12] They argue that "the domestication of the public sphere, " which occurs as the norms that govern the public sphere break result in private sphere norms extending into the public sphere.[13] Zaki and Alhamid argue this is what caused the increase in sexual violence in Egypt during and after the 2011 Tahrir Square protests.[14] Looking at Turkey, Temelkuran discusses how, as part of a democratic decline, state leaders can both allow the erosion of institutions and focus on remaking what

constitutes the ideal woman by overriding the previous regime's ideal.[15] This is not to say that prior to the AKP, Turkish men and women were similarly positioned. Republican politicians wanted women who appreciated the political enfranchisement the state had granted women while being subservient to men at home. Turkey proves a worthwhile case study for the claims concerning women, sexual violence, and weakening democratic institutions.

Scholars note that the rhetoric of the ruling party's elites' does not support women's rights.[16] Erdoğan does not emphasize the importance of political rights or political participation for women. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of motherhood, calling on Turkish women to have at least three children.[17] He has also called to limit abortion access, declared birth control "treason", and proposed legalizing child brides.[18] Bülent Arınç, an AKP member who served as Deputy Prime Minister under Erdoğan, stated that women should not laugh in public.[19] Such statements clearly strive to establish a new model for women in public: quiet, docile mothers.

As the AKP has undertaken trying to reshape women in the public sphere, it has also weakened women's position in the private sphere. Turkish law provides for the protection of women under threat of violence and the prosecution of individuals that perpetuate violence. But state institutions fail to carry out these laws. Police and prosecutors often ignore women's complaints of assault, instruct women to return to abusive husbands, or reveal the whereabouts of women who have gone to shelters.[20] And when perpetrators are prosecuted for violence against women, there is a "culture of impunity and leniency," especially for husbands who claim their wives "provoked" them.[21]

It is these dangers that women face in the private sphere that resulted in the Witches' actions in public. The ineffectiveness of politicians, bureaucrats, and the criminal justice system in holding the perpetrators of sexual violence against women accountable left women with few options. In addition to the attacks on men, the Witches put on self-defense seminars, participate in demonstrations for women's rights, and write and publish the magazine *Feminerva.*

In five years, the group, which has a centralized leadership, has grown to have chapters on over 30 university campuses across the country. The Witches have diverse ethnic origins—Turkish, Kurdish, Azeri, etc—and are from different economic strata. Some wear the headscarf, and many do not. Ten years ago, ethnic identities and religious differences kept most women's groups from working together, but today, the mobilization of people from different backgrounds to bring an end to around violence against women is possible. In their cross-ideological mobilization, the Witches show similarities to the groups profiled by El-Sharnouby and others in this volume.[22]

The Witches' work also includes protests to put pressure on the government to act in specific cases of violence against women. For example, posts highlight the case of Şule Çet, a young female college student whose fall off a building in Ankara was originally labelled a suicide, but after pressure from the public, the government began investigating it as a murder. The Witches want to make sure the case continues to be investigated as a murder, and put out the following message on Instagram before a key hearing in the case in May 2019:

> *"' True justice, not men's justice—We will be at the courthouse in Ankara on May 15th--#justiceforsulecet'* ***Justice for Şule Çet! We will be at the courthouse in Ankara on Wednesday, May 15th! Şule's killers will not remain unpunished, we will get true justice, not men's justice!"***[23]

The idea that the murders of women are not just a criminal justice issue, but also a political issue, is another prominent theme of the group's posts. For example, another reads:

> ***"***Çankaya *University Law faculty member Ceren Damar* Şenel *was a murdered by a student named Hasan İsmail H. shooting her.'*
>
> ***How do you get guns into a university where private security is everywhere? The murders of women are political!"***[24]

The Witches make it clear that this femicide's causes are not part of private sexual acts or the mental health issues of "insane" men. Rather, the Witches problematize that these incidents are interconnected and stem from government institutions' lack of action to ensure laws are carried out. In an effort to remedy such government failures, the Witches campaigned for women to vote "No" in the April 16, 2017 Presidential System Referendum, which enhanced Erdoğan and the AKP's power. When the referendum passed amid allegations of vote manipulation, the Witches encouraged people to protests.[25]

The Witches' messages were also explicitly political during June 2018 Parliamentary and Presidential elections. For example, the day before the elections, the group posted a clip from a news program during which a woman explained:

> *"'They kicked us off the bus because we were wearing shorts. They said that I did not have the right to wear shorts' –Woman*
>
> ***Don't forget we got kicked for wearing shorts #Give(Your)VoteGive(theAKP)itsEnd"***[26]

These posts remind women that the physical restrictions in the private and the public that are placed on their bodies result from government's inaction, and that women, consequently, should not vote for the ruling party. The posts neither state nor insinuate which of the opposition parties women should vote for—each just points out that the problems women experience in their private lives are, in part, due to the ruling party.

As Uzun discusses, the government has been largely successful in fostering political disengagement among many youth whose views do not align with the AKP's.[27] The government has also been very successful in recasting the ideal woman to be quiet and apolitical. The Witches challenge this model, often by being visible and loud in public demonstrations. When the Witches protest—online or in person—they call out the government for its responsibility for both the murders of women and for the Turkish state's inability to stop these murders. In doing so, the Witches rally against a system where the state's failure means women do not have access to recourse for problems they experience in private while also being marginalized in public.

The head of the Federation of Women's Associations of Turkey, Canan Güllü, states, "The reason for the violence increasing is that the judiciary and security forces are not using the available mechanisms [to prevent and punish violence against women]."[28] It is possible that by highlighting the failure of state institutions, young women can apply pressure to the government to enforce the laws that penalize perpetrators—and perhaps also cool the climate that perpetuates this violence. However, to do means highlighting the weakness of the state's institutions—and means they risk the state trying to silence them. Perhaps one way the Witches can mitigate this is to partner with other young people's movements across Turkey, further bridging the ideological divides among young Turks. If the Witches can gain additional strength through even greater numbers of male and female supporters of diverse identities and ideological backgrounds, they can end violence against women.

Endnotes

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'Waging a war not only on coal but much more':[1]
Types of Youth Activism among Egyptians against the Coal Movement

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Abstract

The insurrectionary wave that started in Tunis in December 2010 and then unfolded across the Maghreb and Middle East has raised important questions about the role of youth in contemporary political mobilizations. While there is a plethora of studies that address the role of youth in political movements and collective actions in the MENA region during the Arab Spring, the role of youth in civic engagement in environmental causes is significantly under-researched. Interestingly in the wake of the Arab Spring, environmental issues have come to the forefront of the public sphere and a number of environmental movements erupted in the MENA regions. One example of these environmental movements is 'Egyptians against Coal' which formed after the government's decision to reintroduce coal as an energy source in Egypt. Within this movement, young people expressed a strong resistance to their government's economic, social, and environmental policies that advocate economic growth at the expense of their health and environmental rights. However, surprisingly little attention has been given to analyzing expressions of resistance among youth and their impacts on politics and state-society relations. By focusing on the 'Egyptians against Coal' movement, I address different ways through which youth are challenging power relationships that are used as a means to constitute, legitimate, and normalize business-as usual and fossil-fuel based economic growth in Egypt. The study draws on analyses of interviews with young activists who engaged in this movement and literature review of social movement theory and green politics in the Middle East.

Arab Spring and the Green Awakening

The insurrectionary wave that started in Tunis in December 2010 and then unfolded across the Maghreb and Middle East has brought not only political issues to the forefront of the public sphere but environmental issues as well (Loschi, 2019). For example, in Lebanon in 2015, thousands of Lebanese protested Beirut's months-long garbage crisis that was created after Beirut's main landfill reached capacity and was shut down (Hancey, 2017). Frustration with the crisis spawned a movement dubbed You Stink that was led by young activists who display the usual social media savvy and creative protest tactics that echo activism in the Arab Uprisings (Kraidy, 2016). With the persistence of the garbage crisis, coupled with the violent reaction of the government towards the protests and the involved activists, the movement framed the garbage crisis as political crisis that shows the corruption of the political elites in Lebanon and the incompetency of the government to provide the very basics of public services (Chaaban, 2016). In Tunis, an NGO called SOS BIAA ('biaa' means 'environment' in Arabic) was created by a young engineer named Morched Garbouj in late 2011. The NGO mobilized a movement to improve the waste management measures in Tunis. One of the most important areas of mobilization was the Borj Chekir landfill, which is the largest dump site in Tunis and is a source of hazardous environmental and health risks (Chaabane & Bellamine, 2015). The movement was successful in many ways as it attracted sympathizers from different stakeholders' groups, including scientists, local people, and other NGOs; raised public awareness about the pollution; and pressured legislative, institutional, and administrative reforms as indispensable for a more accountable and effective waste management system in Tunis (Loschi, 2019).

In Ain Salah, in the heart of the Algerian Sahara, another movement erupted in order to protest against the shale gas exploration by a French oil company in 2013 (Petitjean and Chapelle, 2016). The campaign claimed that Algerian citizens were confronting not only the environmental and health hazards of fracking, but also a form of

neocolonialism. Two years later, the campaign has fostered a formal coalition representing local councils, the energy minister was forced to resign, and fracking operations remain stalled (Kinninburgh, 2015).

The above-mentioned environmental movements attracted youth not only to express their environmental concerns but to articulate discontent with the established political order and denounce social injustices (Onodera et al., 2018). For young people in societies engulfed in an institutional crisis and characterized by varying levels of repression and barriers to political participation, it is not an easy task to openly challenge those in power (Scott, 2005). In this way, groups of environmental activists have introduced new and creative practices of mediation and alternative modes of actions to express their dissent, but without direct or open confrontation with power (Onodera et al., 2018). Examples of these actions include new genres of music and 'street art'- graffiti, and performances that can't be addressed in the same way as organized forms of political protest, such as strikes, sits-in, or institutional lobbying (Marche, 2012a). However, they are considered forms of resistance that convey oppositional meanings and contribute to public life with added criticism and acts of citizenship (Marche, 2012b).

These environmental movements have not received sufficient scholarly attention, with few studies focusing on mobilization strategies and networks formation in Tunis (i.e. Loschi, 2019); motivations for environmental movement in Algeria (i.e. Hamouchene, 2015); and the framing of environmental movements in Lebanon and ways of transforming them into formal political activity (i.e. Nasrallahm, 2017 and Nieuwburg, 2018). There is insufficient literature that explicitly focuses on different ways of expressing environmental activism, particularly in Egypt which is characterized by a paucity of environmental movements.

In this study, I focus on the 'Egyptians against Coal' movement in order to explore the different ways through which youth oppose and challenge established policy and institutional arrangements that sustain unsustainable economic practices. The study's outcomes will shed a light on Egyptian youth's visions and priorities for change in Egypt, particularly in relation to an environmental policy profile and orientation.

Egyptians against Coal Movement: A Short Overview

Egypt's political economy, and the types of environmental threats imposed by its development path, means that many Egyptians face significant exposure to numerous pollutants (Sowers, 2013). These kinds of environmental threats, combined with other factors such as population growth, rapid urbanization, water stresses, and climate change have given rise to environmental activism (Sowers, 2017). During the Mubarak era, environmental activists typically mobilized around issues affecting public health and livelihoods. Activists - who shared common value orientation – came together through a collective undertaking, namely the conduct of a campaign to publicize specific environmental controversies, mobilize local communities, and influence decision-making (Sowers, 2013). Activist campaigns became more effective in influencing policy making during the late 1990s and 2000s with the introduction of independent media, the strategic use of existing formal political institutions (such as the parliament and the judiciary system), and the increased willingness of lay citizens to engage in direct action (Moustafa, 2007). After the Egyptian revolution, environmental issues became more salient and environmental movements intensified (Sowers, 2017). One example, of these environmental movements is "the Egyptians against coal" movement. This movement happened in the wake of the chronic shortage of domestic supplies of oil and gas, which negatively influenced the electricity consumption of industry and households (Egypt Network for Integrated Development, 2015).

Out of concern about public discontent over blackouts and the possible destabilizing political ramifications of household energy rationing, the government opted to reduce gas supplies to energy-intensive industries. As a result of energy shortages, production at cement plants decreased by 11 percent in 2013, and, thus, industry

representatives argued that a decline in cement production could deliver a disastrous blow to the Egyptian economy by depressing housing and infrastructure development (Zayed & Sowers, 2014).

As a result of a dramatic decrease in natural gas supplies that has caused industrial production to drop, a rigorous lobby led by cement companies and businessmen has formed to pressure the Egyptian government to compensate the shortage in natural gas by coal imports. This pressure has been reinforced in the Egyptian Cabinet by the ministries of industry and electricity (Mada Masr, 2014). Meanwhile, numerous human rights organizations, environmental activities, and several established conservation organizations formed the coalition "Egyptians against Coal" over shared concerns about the environmental costs of creating a coal infrastructure, given Egypt's ineffective regulation of industrial pollution. The coalition began publicizing energy and governance and taking these concerns about importing coal to the public, arguing that the costs associated with coal use would overshadow any benefits that might be attained by allowing the cheap but dirty fuel into the country (Mada Masr, 2015). Also, Environment Minister Laila Iskandar had a strong anti-coal stance and was a prominent antagonist of coal, joined by the Ministry of Tourism, who was trying to defend Egypt's natural environment as a major tourism attraction. In this regard, Iskandar criticized and opposed the government's plans to import coal, arguing that coal can be replaced with renewables whose environmental impacts are incomparable to the adverse impacts that coal burning causes (Esterman, 2014). In this regard, Environment Minister Laila Iskandar issued statements calling for the adoption of an alternate "energy mix" to power the cement industry, including the use of garbage, rubber tires, and sludge along with renewable energy sources (Sarant, 2017).

Despite the opposing opinions in the government and the visible discontent with the decision of importing coal, the Cabinet voted in 2014 to allow coal imports for industrial use. The law was amended again in 2015 to allow coal-fired power plants provided that compliance with environmental regulations is assured, and required environmental impact assessments for the coal supply chain are put in place to mitigate emissions (Mada Masr, 2017; Sarant, 2017).

Throughout this period, discourse among coal protagonists and antagonists has been imbued with various perspectives and imbedded meanings. Some tout coal as the only viable solution to stabilize the economy and prevent further deterioration in the energy supply. Opponents maintain that the only beneficiaries of the decision to import coal are the owners of major industrial factories—the same people who benefited from subsidized energy in the past and are now endorsing a cheap alternative, subsidized by the health of Egyptians and their rights in a healthy environment (Zayed & Sowers, 2014).

What is particularly significant in this movement are: First, the movement unfolded around a common objective (stopping coal imports) and was a seamless and spontaneous collective action supported by the Internet and wireless communication (Facebook and Twitter) (Castells, 2001). Second, the consistent pressure of this movement challenged the discourse of the state and its apparatuses whereby the economic growth was conceptualized as a priority. Third, this emphasis on youth engagement in the anti-coal movement becomes significant to learn how youth -through advocating for an environmental cause – are challenging established policies, critiquing power and express their critique through different forms of activism (O'Brian, 2018).

In this study, I present a typology that captures the diverse ways that Egyptian youth are expressing opposition to using coal as an energy source in Egypt. The typology draws on both semi-structured interviews with 30 youth activists (16 males and 14 females) in the anti-coal movement and an extensive review of the literature on youth environmental activism. The activists' ages range from 21 to 36 years old. Most of them live in Cairo and are university graduates. Out of 30, 20 interviewees belong to an environmental NGO. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. I coded the interviewees' responses

based on O'Brian's et al. (2018) typology of youth civic engagement: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous activism. This typology recognizes that each form of activism has its own orientation to power. Based on this analysis, I expected that certain types of argumentations would be dominant in the interviewees' discourse. However, it is important to stress that the three types of activism are not mutually exclusive and that some youth may perform more than one type of activism or all types at a time (O'Brian et al., 2018). In this regard, all interviewees' statements were closely read and transcribed, and all of the arguments were coded in light of the predefined typology of activism.

Types of Youth Environmental Activism within the Egyptians against Coal Movement

The three distinguished types of youth activism within the anti-coal movement in Egypt are as follows:

Dutiful activism works through existing political and economic institutions in ways that sustain their legitimacy, but they can also draw on existing social norms and rules to challenge unfair or unjust institutionalized practices (O'Brien et al., 2018). In this regard, the detrimental environmental impacts and health risks of coal are dominant concerns of the dutiful activists in the anti-coal movement. Under this premise, requests to regulate and monitor Environmental Impacts Assessments (EIAs) of heavy industries such as the cement industry were stressed. Also, legislation and policy reforms were highlighted as a way to obligate cement companies to respect the environmental guidelines and to be accountable in case of any environmental violation. In this regard, one of the respondents said:

> The Egyptian Environmental Law 4/1994 obligates any investment project to conduct EIA as a perquisite to get a license for its activity. Although the EIA must be shared with the public and be approved by the civic society, the cement companies (Lafarge and Suez company in particular) do not share their EIAs with the public and they do not give any explanation for potential environmental harms of using coal and possible ways to mitigate these impacts.

Another participant explained:

> The Environmental Law was amended by a presidential decree that was issued on 19/05/2015. The presidential decree added article 40 which implicates that it is forbidden to import and use coal without the approval of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA). However, cement companies are not committed to this mandate and continue using coal without sharing their EIAs with the public. This is not a mere environmental violation, rather it is a violation of Egyptians' rights in public participation and getting information about public matters.

Through dutiful activism, youth activists in the anti-coal movement expressed their discontent with business as usual and consider efficient law enforcement and transparent decision making as possible solutions for the coal crisis. For example, one of the participants said that:

> The Law of Environment 4/1994 should be enforced on the ground and this means that EIAs of cement companies must be announced to the public. This can be done through numerous channels, for example, through the Website of the EEAA. Also, the public should be an active partner in the decision-making process and not mere consultees.

So, it could be said that although this type of activism represents resistance to the status quo, it still sustains the prevailing hegemonic powers and economic system.

Disruptive activism usually takes place when people defy the rules and institutional routines that organize their life (O'Brien et al., 2018). In this sense, disruptive activists vigorously critique the institutional order rather than working dutifully within it (Piven & Cloward, 1976). One of the main critiques within the anti-coal movement is the inability of the market-based economy dominated by large corporations (i.e cement companies) to address deep wealth and income inequalities. In this context, one

of the respondents said, "The cement industry achieves tremendous profits as it makes use of the cheap labor in Egypt. A closer look at the international rates of wages of labor at cement factories, can give us a strong indication of the economic injustice inherent in capitalism." She added, "While the wage for a factory worker in South Korea is $25 per hour and in Turkey is $13 per hour, it is estimated to be only $3 per hour for the Egyptian worker."

In the same context, another participant said, "While the electricity prices are highly subsidized for industrial purposes; the electricity prices are more costly for residential purposes. While the residential tariff is 67 piasters for 1KW/h, the government charges only 33 piasters for 1KW/h for the factories." He added, "It is very disappointing that the negative impacts of coal cannot be reversed. Meanwhile, fueling the cement industry with coal will increase its consumption of subsidized electricity."

Another critique that predominately featured in the interviewees' responses is the failure of large industries to show concern for climate change. By pointing the finger publicly at cement factories and other heavy industries as the main culprits of climate change and describing them as 'greedy', 'irresponsible', and 'profit-seekers', the anti-coal managed to stigmatize the heavy industries and to strip them of their social license (Conner and Rosen, 2016). These youth activists engaged with disruptive activism are thus mobilizing against the systems and institutions they perceive as sustaining unsustainable and unjust policies and practices. Through critique and action, disruptive activism can help the emergence of alternative visions and interest groups and unravel the underlying power dynamics behind what might seem as unquestionable or common-sense arrangements and policies (O'Brien & Selboe 2015).

Dangerous activism is quite similar to disruptive activism in the sense that it does not recognize existing institutions and power relationships as fixed or given. What makes this type of activism dangerous is that it does not only redefine environmental problems, but it offers solutions that are disruptive of established power relations and existing economic and social institutional arrangements (Torgerson, 1999). The "danger" also lies in the way that youth are sending a moral message about their personal assertiveness and political agency, or simply by questioning the status quo and provoking concerns about the root cause of environmental degradation, such as fossil- fuel (Cheon & Urpelainen, 2018).

In this regard, within the anti-coal movement, coal controversy is not only connected with adverse environmental and health impacts or entrenched socioeconomic injustices, but is viewed as a battle to be waged against unsustainable energy sources. In this regard, arguments to diversify the energy mix in Egypt accentuated that meeting the energy demands from local resources would serve as a market corrective, reducing the economic burden of importing coal and also results in avoiding the harmful environmental impact of coal. Efforts to present alternative energy as a way for achieving self-sufficiency in energy sources and political autonomy by reducing the reliance on fossil fuel imports triggers the notion of localism that is characteristic in economic discourse, "eat local food" (Wright & Reid, 2011). This desire to increase renewable energy production resonates precisely because of the increasing global trend of greening energy as a way toward the revival of human scale development, local self-determination, and a commitment to ecological balance (Byrne & Glover, 2006). Among supporters are also those who believe that greening the energy system embodies universal social ideals or aspirations that go beyond the mere generation of electricity or heat from renewable sources. These aspirations are embedded in an organizational structure that emphasize a genuine form of community empowerment and equitable distribution of benefits and, as a result, can overcome current conflicts between energy "haves" and "havenots" (Byrne & Glover, 2006). Therefore, this kind of activism can be described as dangerous because it seeks to undermine the established economic system and transforms social norms that are complicit in maintaining current systems of production reliant on accelerating the extraction of natural resources, increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions, and deep social injustice.

Conclusion

Although the study revealed that there are different types of youth activism within the anti-coal movement, all of them implied a combined effort to interlink coal - by varying degrees – to a broader social, economic, and political context. In this context, the different types of youth activism highlight different definitions of the coal dilemma and different approaches to established power relations that are sustaining the fuel-based economic system in Egypt. It can be concluded that the definition of the coal controversy and possible solutions from the perspective of dutiful activists involves 'softness' in a particular sense of flexibility and willingness to collaborate with established policy and legal frameworks. This contrasts with the 'hardness' of the disruptive activists that expand the definition of the coal problem to the wider ecosystem and socioeconomic interlinks. The dangerous activism underpins broader thinking about the relationship between the state and national and transnational corporations within a market-based economy. The danger lies in reinforcing radical transformative relations between the state and the market and pressing for a low carbon economy. The above-mentioned types of activism are not either exclusive, nor static categories. Rather, they are fluid, dynamic, and could be intertwined at certain point (O'Brian et al., 2018). These categories rather reflect two main characteristics: First, the youth's increasing awareness of environmental problems in Egypt. Second, the youth's agency and willing to enforce urgent and ambitious action as a way to address not only the localized coal problem, but to contribute to a global dynamic movement against the fossil fuel industry and unsustainable capitalist system. This conclusion contrasts the stereotypical image of youth activists in Egypt as being apathetic to environmental concerns, and adopting reasonable positions and predictable behaviors in relation to activism's expected outcomes (Rice, 2006). However, more empirical research is needed in order to explore the different types of youth environmental activism and how they unfold and evolve over time, particularly in less democratic regimes where environmental causes are usually lagging behind economic concerns. Key to understanding youth advocacy for environmental issues is to examine different identities, actions, organization, and discursive frames over time.

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Youth, Activism, and Protest:
Jordan's Movement Against Israeli Gas

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When the 'Arab Spring' emerged in Tunisia in December 2010 and later in Egypt in January 2011, Jordanians were already protesting and demonstrating for changes in government and policy.[1] The Jordanian version of the 'Arab Spring' was unique. It didn't take a turn toward revolution, a coup d'état, or civil war. But Jordanians were not by any means quiet or quiescent, and found many novel ways to press new political demands.[2]

Protest politics in the Hashemite Kingdom has ranged from labor activism[3], to activism by largely youth-led 'Hirak' movements,[4] military veterans' organizations,[5] as well as both traditional (e.g. parties and professional associations) and newer forms of activism.[6] (On activism in Jordan, see also the essays by Ababneh and Doughan in this volume). Jordan has over the years seen frequent surges of activism and protest.[7] Recently, unemployed individuals marched to the capital in a protest over unemployment and economic hardship, with more and more joining as the march went on. This walking protest followed massive demonstrations from the preceding summer when, in June 2018, thousands protested night after night during Ramadan against tax laws, economic austerity, corruption, and more.[8] Even more recently, protests were organized against the visit to the kingdom of Trump presidential advisor Jared Kushner and his attempt to sell an alleged 'Deal of the Century' to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[9] Protests, in short, are not in any way new in Jordan, but topics, themes, strategies, and tactics have changed over time.

This paper examines the role of youth in a particular Jordanian activist campaign: the protest movement against Jordan purchasing Israeli gas. I previously wrote about the emergence of this movement and its specific tactics and strategies.[10] This paper examines more specifically the youth role and contribution to the emergence, development, and ultimate outcomes of the movement against Israeli gas. The movement has been (so far) unsuccessful at changing state policy. But it was very successful in terms of mobilization and creating a broad, diverse, and inclusive coalition that truly looked like Jordan. The movement was also innovative in its strategies for activism and what some activists referred to as their 'protest repertoires'. Many activists in the movement, in fact, credit youth participation for these innovations.[11]

Protesting the Jordanian Gas Deal with Israel

In 2014, Jordan's National Electric Power Company (NEPCO) signed a Letter of Intent to begin importing most of Jordan's natural gas from the Leviathan oil field – an oil field controlled by Israel, but considered by many Jordanians to be rightfully Palestinian. The deal agreement led to the birth of a new protest movement, reinvigorating street activism across the kingdom. Protests during the Arab Spring era (roughly 2011 to 2013) had been waning for years, but this deal seemed to rejuvenate a host of grassroots organizations, united in their opposition to the gas deal with Israel. The movement's slogan – "the gas of the enemy is occupation" – summarized the main objections. Jordan, many argued, would almost be subsidizing Israeli occupation by paying Israel for what many considered to be Palestinian gas. The slogan is meant to have a dual meaning, however, and also suggests that the deal "signifies an extension of Israeli occupation into Jordan by giving Israel the upper hand in Jordan's energy needs and electricity production."[12]

The movement was particularly striking for three reasons: the diversity of its membership, its commitment to inclusive organization, and the innovative nature of its methods. In terms of composition, the movement turned into one of the broadest and most eclectic movements in Jordanian history. It included activists from many of the largely youth-based Hirak movements, but also comprised

a host of other movements, associations, and parties. These included leftist and Pan-Arab nationalist parties, Islamist activists from the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front, members of Jordan's labor and trade unions, the retired military officer's organization, women's rights organizations, and Jordan's local BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) movement. The one weak link, perhaps, may have been between the movement and Jordan's very politically active professional associations. Some activists, at least, complained that their efforts to lobby the professional associations to join the cause were limited in success because, as one activist put it, the associations "were more interested in 'acquiring' the campaign rather than supporting it or supporting its cause."[13]

The protest movement was also very well organized, including committees and subcommittees for various tasks, from research and analysis to campaign strategies and tactics. The many groups, parties, and organizations that made up the movement sent representatives to committee meetings that emphasized inclusion and democratic voting processes. So the movement overall was broad and diverse, but not unwieldy. To the contrary, its sheer level of organization was a prominent feature of the protest movement.

There is a long history of Palestinian and pro-Palestine activism in Jordan, in part because this coincides with Jordanian public opinion, but also because it has often been read by the government as a (sometimes) kind of permissible activism that usually does not directly challenge the regime itself. Even the anti-normalization campaign that started in the 1990s opposed the 1994 peace treaty with Israel and tried to prevent normalization of relations across the two societies (by opposing professional and academic exchanges, for example), but it didn't challenge the Hashemite state. This newer movement, however, was unique in other ways. It was a kind of pro-Palestine and pro-Palestinian activism, to be sure, but it was also focused mainly *on Jordan* -- on its policies, its economy, its sovereignty, and its future.

Strategies, Tactics, and Protests

In terms of methods, the movement did indeed hold traditional demonstrations, with signs, marches, and chants, attempting to sway the government away from the deal with Israel. These took place in Amman but also in Irbid, Zarqa, and other cities, since the movement was determined not to be unique to Amman alone. In this regard, activists were quite cognizant of the common complaint in Jordan that many protest movements born in the capital stay there, rather than becoming truly national. Some activists in other parts of the country, and perhaps especially in the south of Jordan, complain of liberal activism as specifically a West Amman phenomenon. This is in contrast to movements that self-consciously started in areas that might be regarded as economically peripheral, like the many innovations created by Jordan's day wage labor movement, as shown in the work by Sara Ababneh.[14]

In addition to its commitment to social and geographic diversity and representation, the movement against Israeli gas was also quite innovative in its approaches to tactics and strategies. These included staging a public mock trial over the controversial policy, wearing and distributing T-shirts (with the campaign's slogans) at the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup (held in Jordan in 2016), and collective actions that mobilized people far beyond the movement itself, like periodic and coordinated "blackouts" when citizens would simultaneously turn out their lights for one hour each week.

The movement also succeeded in bringing the gas deal issue to the floor of parliament. In December 2014, after a lengthy discussion, Jordanian MPs voted overwhelmingly (107-13) to reject the agreement and urged the government to cancel it. But Jordan's parliament is not particularly strong and this remained a non-binding resolution. Still, activists saw it as a major victory, and certainly something to build on. Some of the MPs most active in this process, however, such as Hind al-Fayez and Rula Hroub, lost their parliamentary seats in the elections that followed (in 2016), in circumstances still regarded as suspect by some activists.[15] That same year, the government signed an official deal to purchase gas from Israel after all.

The issue continually returns to Jordan's parliament, however, as many MPs are still opposed to the deal and want the government to change course. In March 2019, the movement scored another major victory in parliament, when Jordan's House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly against the deal. Jordan's speaker of the house, Atef Tarawneh, stated flatly to the government's representative that "the deal is completely rejected and we demand it gets cancelled at any cost."[16] Youth played a key role here as well, in orchestrating a "phone call storm" to every MP just before the parliamentary session, lobbying them to reject the deal.[17]

Most recently, in July 2019, the protest movement added another tactic to its repertoire: having hundreds of individual citizens file lawsuits against the government, attempting to nullify the gas deal. Lawyers supportive of the movement filed these citizen lawsuits for free, in courts ranging from Amman to Irbid, Karak, Madaba, and Zarqa.[18] Since 2014, activists have argued that the agreement is bad for Jordan's economy and sovereignty and that it is politically immoral. But they also frequently emphasize their view that Jordan was and is being pressured by the United States to pursue the deal against Jordan's own interests.[19] "The Americans pushed for the gas deal and other strategic projects to prevent war and to make Israel a de facto partner (of Jordan)," noted one former member of parliament, "It is part of the plan to normalize Israel through economic ties."[20] Many activists see the recent Trump/Kushner economic initiatives toward the region as still more of this process.

Many people in the movement specifically credit youth participants as the sources of many of the movement's more innovative protests. Some also cite youth activists as the driving force behind the emphasis on research in this movement. Activists were determined to research the details and policy alternatives so that they would not only make clear what they were against, but also that the government actually had alternative policies that it could pursue. Some referred to this as "evidence-based advocacy" and saw it as a departure from "the usual" forms of protest.[21]

Others in the movement used the term "scientific" to explain their approach to research and to disseminating their findings. They would arm not just themselves, but also fellow citizens, with the facts they needed to eventually effect a policy change. Activists emphasized the importance of linking the gas deal to other concerns already prominent in Jordanian public discourse – concerns like unemployment, economic development, inequality, state sovereignty, and public sector corruption. The ambition here was larger than the gas policy itself and aimed at nothing less than recrafting the relationship between citizens and the state, emphasizing the roles of tax payers and authorities.[22]

The movement was large and diverse, and it was also very well organized. Groups, organizations, associations, and parties delegated representatives to meet as a broader coalition to map out goals, tactics, and strategies. The movement's members were also highly educated and interested in bringing a new style of protest to Jordanian public life. In this regard in particular, youth played key roles in devising new protest methods, which were embraced by the many other elements of the coalition. These older and more established elements of the opposition – like parties and associations – brought experience to the table and often also extensive connections to Jordanian media outlets. They were also instrumental in turning out their members to events like protests and demonstrations. Youth activists, in turn, played the key roles in connecting the campaign to the Hirak movements and to universities, especially the University of Jordan and the Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), each of which had an active student-led and campus-based component to the campaign.[23]

Youth activists often led the way in terms of brainstorming new methods of protests and then using newer media to garner attention and social influence. Perhaps not surprisingly, in this movement as in many other settings, youth were often expected to take the lead on social media, whether creating and disseminating videos on Facebook or organizing Tweetstorm campaigns on Twitter or other

social media platforms. It is worth noting here that many activists emphasized the lack of a generational gap in their organization, deliberations, and in the overall campaign. Instead, the gap was more often tactical and strategic – between activists that wanted to take more radical or more moderate approaches or between those who wanted to take a more or less confrontational approach.[24] But this was a difference in approach and temperament that could be found across every age group, not between generations.

Conclusions

For all their efforts, the Jordanian state has thus far persisted in its plans to purchase Israeli gas, and it remained under considerable pressure from both the United States and Israel to do so, as part of a broader plan for 'normalization' of relations across the region, even as the region seemed to be ablaze in civil wars, insurgencies, and struggles against occupation. The emergence of the Trump administration in the U.S. has in many ways made this structural and regional set of factors still more constraining on the kingdom's policy options.

But international pressures and power politics aside, Jordan's domestic politics continues to see no shortage of protests, demonstrations, and activism, not only by youth but across Jordan's generations. Within the context of Jordanian protest politics, the movement against Israeli gas was – and is -- one of the broadest and most inclusive coalitions in the history of Jordanian activism. It is broad in terms of organizational membership, to be sure, but also diverse in terms of age, class, ethnicity, religion, sex, and gender. It is, in a sense, a pluralist and intersectional movement that was dedicated to democratic participation and grassroots activism.

That approach and commitment is perhaps especially important today, as the kingdom comes under pressure from within and without – over a Trump peace deal, internationally, but also internally in terms of economic austerity, social inequality, and widespread concerns with corruption. Meanwhile activism in Jordan features particularly large roles for young Jordanians looking for a very different future, and therefore applying political pressure for greater inclusion as well as meaningful reform and change. Between this movement and other single-issue campaigns -- as well as the continued efforts of local Hirak movements and nation-wide protests over austerity and other issues -- protest and activism in Jordan will continue, with millennial Jordanians playing key roles on every front.[25]

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The Struggle to Re-Politicize the Political:
The Discourse on Economic Rights in the Jordanian Popular Movement 2011-2012

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This paper examines how the discourse advanced by some youth activists in the Hirak on economic rights challenges hegemonic understandings of what constitutes ideal political reform in Jordan. Since 1989 oppositional work in Jordan has mainly focused on reforming electoral and political party laws. Many of the Hiraki youth activists, by contrast, insisted that real reform was not the reform of a Lower House which has little power. Instead they called for economic reform which they maintained was at the heart of political decision-making and sovereignty.

Before examining the demands of the activists, let me first define the Jordanian Popular Movement (*al Hirak al Sha'bi al Urduni*, Hirak in short). The Hirak is constituted of various actors and groups which emerged in Jordan alongside the Arab uprisings (2011-2012). Broadly speaking the Hirak was comprised of political parties, nascent groups which emerged during the Hirak, such as youth groups and governorate groups, and worker's groups (also known as single issue groups) which protested alongside the Hirak. Some of these worked together, others did not. They sometimes had overlapping agendas and often their agendas differed. What enables us to describe them all as part of the Hirak (as part of one broader phenomenon) is that they organized and protested during 2011-2012. In this paper, I draw on interviews conducted with youth activists from various nascent groups such as the governorate groups of al Tafileh, Hay al Tafaileh, and the youth groups al Hirak al Shababi, Amman, Jayeen, and the Change and Liberation Current.[1]

A Hierarchy of Demands

Since Jordan's so-called democratization in 1989, oppositional work has focused on the underrepresentation of Palestinian-Jordanians in the Jordanian Lower House as a result of Jordan's one person, one vote electoral law and on increasing freedom for political parties. The Islamic Action Front as well as leftist political parties' key demand focused on changing electoral and political party laws to achieve more equal representation and allow more freedom of political organization.[2] The prioritization of these demands continues in much of the literature on the Hirak.[3] Discussing the Jordanian Hirak, Hassan al Barari argues that changing the electoral law and the gerrymandered Jordanian parliament [4] are the most pressing issues facing Jordan.[5] Sean Yom and Hisham al Bustani, too, maintain that the main demands the Hirak focused on were political change and calls for constitutional monarchy.[6]

When workers' movements, or single issues movements as they were sometimes called, emerged in 2006, they were dubbed Hirak *matlabi.*[7] At the time many political analysts considered these movements politically naive. It was argued that by focusing on individual issues, participants of these movements had not reached the political awareness necessary to be true political actors and affect real political change.[8] Many of the youth activists who had previously been part of political parties such as the Communist Party, the National Unitary Party, or the Islamic Action Front agreed with this conception of the hierarchy of demands, regarding economic demands as unsophisticated and true political demands as those demands which addressed parliamentary, legislative, or constitutional reform.

However, after participating in the Hirak, some of the activists began to think differently. Kamel,[9] an activist who was in his early twenties when he was in *al Hirak al Shababi Amman,* reflects on how the words of a relative changed his notion of what the required political reforms should be:

> [My relative] said to me 'I used to fill up the car for JD 40 [$56]. Now I have to pay JD 100 [$140].' To be honest we need to take responsibility for *tatfish*

(pushing away) this group of people, when we started writing down political slogans which had no relation to people's life, like demanding an elected government, to dissolve the Upper House, [or] to restrict the power of the king. Demonstrators did not take to the streets because of these matters! A placard that captured what they went to the streets for was one which had a picture of a loaf of bread with the caption "Where are you my dear?"[10]

(Photo taken from Ammannet, 2012)[11]

During this early period of the Hirak, which lasted from mid-January to 24 March 2011, Amman-based political parties dictated many of the slogans raised in protests. However, after the crackdown on 24 March in Amman, [12] the Hirak mostly moved to the governorates, and most political parties' impact became marginal. During what I elsewhere refer to as the second and third phases of the Hirak, so-called political demands receded into the background.

The distinctions among groups of the Hirak were not so clear cut, especially in the first phase, with debates happening among them. Looking at one example in Hay al Tafaileh, which Yazan Doughan examines in more depth in this collection, three groups were initially active. One group called for more services for the Hay exclusively, what is often referred to as *matlabi* (service-based) demands. The other two groups mostly worked on demanding structural changes. They had been formed almost simultaneously by different groups of acquaintances. Once these two groups found out about each other they merged since they mainly worked on the same issues – what they referred to as political reform. Upon closer inspection, however, what they called administrative and financial reform were mostly economic rights. Differentiating between these groups and the *matlabi* group, Walid, a youth activist from the Hay, told me that the *matlabi* group simply asked for certain privileges for the Hay (*muhasasa)*[13]. Later on, this group too joined the other two groups because its members came to the conclusion that the services they were asking for are economic rights to which all Jordanians are entitled.[14]

A Discourse of Economic Rights

Once the Hirak moved out of Amman, and nascent groups, especially governorate groups, which emerged during the Hirak took over, activists increasingly focused on economic demands. These demands can be categorized as spanning over three levels: the individual, the state and the international level.

The individual level

On the individual level activists argued that as Jordanians they have rights which guarantee them a dignified life. Activists understood economic rights as encompassing the constitutional right to work, the right to health care, and the right to free primary and secondary education. Activists' demands stemmed from their own experiences. For instance, *Al Hirak al Shabibi Amman* activist Ayyoub had been struggling to put himself through university:

> Why can't I get educated without my blood being sucked out of me? How can one [university] credit hour jump from JD 70-80 [$98 - $112] to JD 200 [$282] for a master's program? The state should be able to guarantee its citizens dignified work, not necessarily directly in the public sector. It could be in the private sector by protecting its citizens [through laws].[15]

Zakariyya, a member of the *Tafileh Hirak,* explained what social justice means in terms of education. He laments:

> When in 18 schools serving the Bedouins of the South and North only two students pass their [tawjihi] exams then this country has lost one of its main characteristics. …Now both education and health are no longer there in Jordan to be honest. If you have money you can get cured, if you don't you don't get cured. If you don't send your child to a private school, there is no hope.[16]

Hiraki demonstrations usually called for social justice, with the slogan "Bread, Freedom and Social Justice" among the chants mostly used. Hirak activists referred to the constitution and various laws to make the case that they had a right to social justice as Jordanian citizens. The social justice they envisioned entitled them to excellent schooling, health care, and social security among other rights.

The State Level

Activists connected the deterioration of their everyday living conditions to the macroeconomic policies pursued by the state. Furthermore, for them the inability of the state to guarantee its citizens these economic rights was linked to the state's (continuing) privatization of national industries and resources.[17]

In Tafileh three companies were privatized: phosphate, cement, and potash. Many of the activists had worked in these companies.[18] The cement factory in Rishdiyya was sold to the French company La Farge in 2001. Yehiya worked in the cement factory. He recalls that once the company was sold he and his colleagues were put under a lot of pressure to resign. The company started transferring employees to positions that had nothing to do with their expertise. Workers saw these policies as a direct form of pressuring them to leave the company. Yehiya recalls that when he left the cement factory around 1,200 workers worked there. At the time I interviewed him he told me only about 60 workers were left.[19]

Activists critiqued privatization on multiple levels. Firstly, they argued that privatization deprived Jordan of its natural resources and sources of income. Secondly, they argued that privatization was implemented in a corrupt fashion. National industries were thus sold off for prices far below their market value.[20] Thirdly, activists maintained that privatization did not protect the interest of Jordanian workers. Finally, many activists believed that since the people are the owners of Jordan's natural resources it was not the right of the government or regime to sell these resources. They believed that these decisions should be part of democratic decision making. Only the people could make such a decision. Many therefore concluded that privatization was unconstitutional.

Activists had a strong sense that public money truly belongs to the Jordanian people and that the Jordanian people should have a say as to how this money is spent. Moreover, justice required that the stolen money is returned to the people. This extended to returning the national companies that had been privatized. As one activist concluded, "Our goal was to demand that the Phosphate Company be returned to its true owner: the people (*al Sha'b*) ."[21]

The International Level

Fighting corruption was one of the main slogans raised during the Hirak. However, unlike liberal definitions which understand corruption to be the act of individuals, activists critiqued certain structures and policies as inherently corrupt. These were not just national structures and policies, but also international policies imposed from the outside. For many Hirakis privatization (*khaskhasa*) and investment (*istithmar*) were processes that are corrupt in their very essence, imposed by a corrupt international system. Hirakis conceptualized corruption not only as a national malaise but as a problem directly related to the international system and pressures inflicted on Jordan. Walid, an activist from Hay al Tafaileh who was in his early twenties at the time of the Hirak, saw investment as it is practiced as a corrupt structure:

> The corrupt who stole my country, and sold all its resources to foreign occupiers, under the guise of investment... As a result of this political decision making and national decisions became hostage to the IMF and the programs of the IMF.[22]

Walid criticizes the very nature of IMF programs as being corrupt, not just those individuals who implement these programs. Investment as practiced in Jordan, Walid maintained, does not benefit Jordanians.

> What types of agreements are these when the foreign investor is not forced to employ [Jordanians]? And is not forced to train the workforce? How are [foreign investors] allowed to buy more shares than those of the government? How can these agreements be renewed without the additional approval of future governments?[23]

Walid argued that the state has no real sovereignty when it comes to these decisions. He calls it colonization and not investment (*isti'mar mish istithmar*). These agreements, he added, "are gifts for investors"[24] to the determent of most Jordanians. Walid's notion of colonialism is strikingly similar to Nkruma's understanding of neo-colonialism:

> The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.[…] For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility, and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress.[25]

Activists critiqued the way powerful states and non-state actors interfered in Jordanian decision making, whether it was politically in terms of Palestine, or economically in terms of pushing for privatization, foreign investment, and austerity programs. They concluded that the interest of international actors and not citizens dictated what policies were pursued. The problem, as Hirakis pointed out, is not that they cannot freely elect the Lower House, Upper House, government or even the ruler. The problem is that despite not being under direct colonial rule, Jordan does not truly possess sovereignty, especially economic sovereignty. International institutions such as the IMF, were seen as acting in the interest of their own member states at the determent of Jordanians. The policies recommended by these institutions were seen as corrupt.

When speaking about the regime, it is therefore important to take the influence of international forces into account. The regime is "not merely an ensemble of "national" class and state forces, but … also [as] the playing field of regional, international, and transnational actors."[26] Or, in Adam Hanieh's words, "The nation-state cannot be understood as self-contained political economy separate from the ways it intertwines with other spatial scales, namely the regional and global."[27] By connecting the national to the international, activists highlight that no true solutions can be reached on the national level alone. Beyond that, more powerful states' interests have a more significant impact on what happens in Jordan. Powerful states such as the US and international organizations, in specific the IMF and World Bank, are main players whose interests not only directly contradict the interests of Jordanians but trump them when decisions are being made. Economic policies, such as promoting investment and privatization, play specific roles to ensure not the interests of Jordanians but that of the main member states of the IMF and big multi-national companies.28 Without using the term, protestors pointed to the fact that small countries like Jordan do not possess economic sovereignty, meaning that economic decisions were not made on the national level and that the interests pursued by these policies were not those of Jordanians. To a certain degree, the struggle of Hirakis was a fight for economic sovereignty.

The Economic is Political

Whether it is international donors who work on democratization, Jordanian political parties (leftist, liberal or Islamist), or so called civil society organizations, there seems to be a consensus that political reform understood

mainly as electoral and political party law reform is what Jordan requires on its road to democratization. Hirakis departed from the language of political reform. Instead they called for economic rights and social justice. They foregrounded the economic on every level, showing that in fact a notion of politics that does not include economics is depoliticized. Furthermore, they pointed out that addressing rights on the national level alone is insufficient to guaranteeing these rights.

Rather than being politically naïve and unsophisticated, Hirakis redefined the political, insisting on placing the economic at its heart. Like their revolutionary counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia, Jordanian protestors struggled to maintain a dignified life in a global context in which most decisions are not taken on the national level. Activists protested that policies and recommendations of international agencies such as the IMF dictate Jordanian policy. In order to address the grievances of Hirakis Jordan would need to have economic sovereignty. Political changes which cannot influence economic decision making would be futile in bringing about the required change. As a result efforts to democratize (politically), divorcing this from democratic mechanisms to reach economic decision making, the state cannot address the grievances against which protestors are fighting.[29] In addition to pointing to a crisis in democracy,[30] protestors' discussion of economic rights and economic decision making can also be understood as fighting against 'neo-colonialism' as conceptualized by Nkrumah.

Demands for political reform which do not address the connections between national and international decision making can do very little to truly address the causes of the grievances most citizens face on the individual level. Jordanian Hirakis, like protest movements around the globe, started from their own predicaments to think about what true democracy might look like, democracy in which citizens do not just have the ability to affect politics but also economic decisions. More importantly, Hirakis were holding on to a version of rights in which citizens are guaranteed dignity and social justice regardless of the political process of decision making. The structure of a system which is able to produce such social justice is at the heart of their struggle, in 2011 as much as today.

Endnotes

1 Most of the people I interviewed for this paper can be considered youth (between 18 and 35), though others were older. While most of the quotes I draw stem from youth, I did not notice any difference in attitude according to the age of the study's participants overall.

2 Myriam Ababsa, "Citizenship and Urban Issues in Jordan." In *Cities, Urban Practices and Nation Building in Jordan. Villes, pratiques urbaines et construction national en Jordanie*, ed. Myriam Ababsa and Rami Daher (Presse de l'Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2011), 40.

3 Exceptions to this portrayal are the works of Fida Adely, Malika Bouziane and Katharina Lenner, and Curtis Ryan. Fida Adely. "The Emergence of a New Labor Movement in Jordan." Middle East Research and Information (2012), http://www.merip.org/mer/mer264/emergence-new-labor-movement-jordan (accessed on 26 May 2014). Malika Bouziane and Katharina Lenner, "Protests in Jordan: Rumblings in the Kingdom of Dialogue," Working Paper, *Protests, revolutions and transformations - the Arab World in a Period of Upheaval* (Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics, Freie Universität Berlin, 2011). http://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/international/vorderer-orient/publikation/WP_serie/WP1_All_FINAL_web.pdf (accessed 17 June 2014). Curtis Ryan. 2018. Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics Beyond the State. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018)

4 The 1993 electoral law institutionalized a single non-transferable vote. This undermined political parties, especially the Islamic Action Front, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, rural areas (with exception of the Badia) inhabited mostly by Eastbank Jordanians have received more seats per votes than urban areas in which most Palestinian-Jordanians live. As a result Palestinian Jordanians have been underrepresented in the parliament.

5 Hassan Barari, "The Limits of Political Reform in Jordan," 2013. 3, 6. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/10455-20140108.pdf

6 Hisham Bustani, "The Alternative Opposition in Jordan and the Failure to Understand Lessons of Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions," accessed: January 15, 2015, *Jadaliyya* (2011): 1, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/23816/The-Alternative-Opposition-in-Jordan-and-the-Failure-to-Understand-Lessons-of-Tunisian-and-Egyptian-Revolutions Karmel, "How Revolutionary was Jordan's Hirak?" 2. Sean L. Yom, "Tribal Politics in Contemporary Jordan: The Case of the Hirak Movement," *Middle East Journal* 68.2 (2014): 229.

7 *Matlabi* literally translates into demands-based (adjective). However, it is often translated into service Hirak because this type of Hirak is seen as

making certain demands for a small group of people rather than asking for legal reform for all citizens. I have shown elsewhere that this reading of Hirak *Matlabi* is inaccurate. The Day Wage Labor Movement for example, while making specific demands for the day wage workers as a group, in fact made legal demands (adherence to labor law) which would benefit all workers in Jordan. Thus by focusing on their own predicament, these workers sought to change law which effected all of Jordan. The difference between Hirak *Matlabi* and some political parties is not that one is apolitical and the other is political. Rather it is that rather than starting from abstract political principals, *Matlabi* groups start from a problem and focus on this problem. For further discussion see Sara Ababneh, "Troubling the Political: Women in the Jordanian Day-Wage Labor Movement," (2016), International Journal of Middle East Studies, (vol 48, issue 1), http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=10117205

[8] Former MP's view Bassam Hadadin in the article below is only one example of this type of thinking Muhammad Al-Najar,'Hal tantaqel al moa'arda lela'sha'er a'l ordunya?' (does the opposition transfer to the Jordanian tribes) 2010, Aljazeera.https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2010/8/15/هل-انتقلت-المعارضة-للشارع-الأردني ,
Accessed 8 September 2019
Al Hourani, " 'awdat al-harakat al ejtimaeeya' (The Return of the Social Movements), *Alghad*, 25 July 2011, /moc.dahgla//:sptth/عودة-الحركات-الاجتماعية (accessed 8 September 2019)

[9] Most of the activists I interviewed insisted to be cited under their real names in my research. However, since the political climate has changed substantially since the protests I have decided to use pseudonyms in this paper.

[10] Kamel, interview with the author. 16 August 2016, Kamel's home.

[11] Ammannet. "After a Year of the Hirak, al Husseini Demonstration: The Will of the People "Where are you my Dear"? 4 January 2012, http://ar.ammannet.net/news/139797, accessed 29 May 2019.

[12] A group of youth activists from different ideological backgrounds organized the protest on Friday, 24 March 2011 as an attempt to establish a permanent protest ground in Jordan akin to Midan al Tahrir in Egypt. The protestors were forcefully dispersed by the riot police on the night/morning of 25 March 2011, however. Activists accused the state of using divide-and-rule tactics in the subsequent smear campaign against the protest and its organizers.

[13] *Muhasasa translates into dividing shares. It refers to the notion that there are different identity groups which feel entitled to a number of shares. To give an example of this, in government people from city X or region X are entitled to a certain number of ministerial seats.*

[14] Walid, interview with the author, 21 Dec 2015, Hay al Tafaileh.

[15] Ayyoub. Interview with the author and Omar al Omari. 18 May 2016, home of the author

[16] Zakariya. Interviewed by the author, Tafileh, 16 February 2016.

[17] The analysis on which activists drew closely resembled that of the economic paper of the Military Veterans. However, when I asked them about the paper, only very few had read it. Rather than being influenced by reading, the discourse of activists mostly emerged from their own experiences.

[18] Ma'abreah, Mohammad. Interview with the author, 15 February 2015.

[19] Yehiya, interview with the author, 15 February 2015.

[20] See Economic Paper of Military Veteran, 2010, https://www.facebook.com/notes/شاعر-الأردن-مصطفى-وهبي-التل-عرار-/نص-بيان-المتقاعدين-العسكريين-الورقة-الاقتصادية-فضايح-الحرامية/184952521544274

[21] Yunes. Interviewed by the author, 14 February 2016, al Tafieleh.

[22] Walid. Interview with the author. 21 December 2015, Hay al Tafaileh.

[23] Walid. Interview with the author. 21 December 2015, Hay al Tafaileh.

[24] Walid. Interview with the author. 21 December 2015, Hay al Tafaileh.

[25] He is referring to Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neo-colonialism: The last stage of imperialism*. Vol. 140. London: Nelson, 1965.

[26] Brecht De Smet. "Review Article: Revolutionary Desire and the Limits of Democratic Transition in Egypt," *Workers of the World*, Vol. 1, No. 7, November 2015, 74.

[27] Adam Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt. Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East,* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), p.10

[28] Adam Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt. Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East,* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013)

[29] Hanieh, Adam. *Lineages of Revolt. Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), p. 5.

[30] Held, David. "The Overlapping Crises of Democracy, Globalization and Global Governance." Social Europe (blog), 2018. https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-overlapping-crises-of-democracy-globalization-and-global-governance. Held, David. *Models of Democracy*, (Standford; Standford University Press, 2006) Held, David; Goldblatt, David; McGrew, Athony; Perraton, Jonathon. *Global transformations: politics, economics and culture.* (Standford; Standford University Press, 1999)

The Reckoning of History:
Young Activists, Tribal Elders, and the Uses of the Past in Jordan

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Between March 2011 and December 2012, political activists from an insular and obscure tribal neighborhood in central Amman suddenly rose to national fame. For almost two years, during the wave of Arab uprisings, *Hirāk 'Ahrār Hay al-Tafāyleh* (the Free Hay al-Tafāyleh Movement) assumed the leading role in protests against wide-spread corruption in Jordan. By the end of 2012, however, the movement was in disarray. It disintegrated shortly after, crippled by disagreements among its members and within the neighborhood writ-large. Despite the movement's demise, and the retrenchment of the Jordanian Hirāk in general, some of its politics reflected larger national trends that promise a more enduring significance. Contrasting historiographic trends in the early 1990s with current ones shows how young activists seek to construct a revolutionary past which could authorize acts of rebellion in the present, and to imagine alternative national futures. This paper discusses how these historiographic trends constitute "the youth" not only as an age group, but as a generational category of Jordanians who seek to construct a different relation to their elders and to the state by claiming a new historical past. In doing so, they constitute themselves as autonomous political actors unencumbered by the narratives of their elders' generation and the latter's relation to the monarchy.

Abandoned Children of the State

Partly a squatter settlement straddling the two hills of Jabal al-Tāj and Jabal al-Jōfeh in central Amman, Hay al-Tafāyleh is not a neighborhood in the administrative sense. Rather, the label marks a fuzzy territory home to decedents of six tribal groups that hail from a village in the south of Jordan near the town of Tafīleh. Despite its exceptional composition as a dense tribal neighborhood in the middle of the city, Hay al-Tafāyleh nonetheless exemplifies a pattern of rural-to-urban migration in Jordan that went hand in hand with state building and the incorporation of large segments of the population into the state bureaucracy, particularly since the 70s. As the Tafāyleh migrated to the city to take on low-level positions in the state bureaucracy and the security apparatus, they increasingly relied on the state for their livelihood. By now, their original village is almost completely depopulated.[1]

Like other Transjordanian groups incorporated into state structures following the 1970 Black September clashes between the Jordanian Army and the PLO, the inclusion of the Tafāyleh was part of a state project to construct a nativist Jordanian national identity defined in contradistinction to a Palestinian one, and understood along lines of descent. Through this double process of social incorporation and construction of a national identity, the state practically appropriated the bonds and relations of kinship that bound Transjordanians for its own legitimacy. Tranjordanian officials became paternal figures vis-à-vis their communities, while the state stood as an abstract patriarch binding all Jordanians together with a promise of care, with the King as its embodiment.[2]

This history underlies the political subjectivity of Transjordanians, like the Tafāyleh, who now understood themselves both as the "children of the state" (*'abnā' al-dawleh*), and as the "indigenous Jordanians" (*'ahl al-balad*). This particular grammar of Jordanian indigeneity congealed around two historical moments. The first was in the early years after the founding of the state when educated natives demanded employment in the state bureaucracy populated at the time by Hijazi, Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese functionaries. The second moment was the Black September of 1970. However, the narrative that emerged from the clashes, which had the PLO Fidayeen attempting to overthrow the Jordanian monarchy, resulted in a reconfiguration of ethnic identities in relation to two competing state projects: Jordanian and Palestinian. From then onward, 'ahl *al-balad* looked at the PLO project

in Jordan as a threat to their own identity which was now closely bound to the Hashemite monarchy.

After the economic crisis of the mid 1980's, neoliberal restructuring programs limited the expansion of the state bureaucracy, and reduced welfare protections for most Jordanians, who were also suffering from high inflation rates. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the state apparatus was increasingly dominated by new bureaucratic and business elites whose world was not that of tribal politics, but of finance, investment, and international development. The Tafāyleh often complained that they now themselves felt like strangers (*'aghrāb*) in their own country. They blamed the new class of elites around the King both for corruption and for their sense of estrangement. For the Younger Tafāyleh, the state which was a parent for their parents, and won the latter's loyalty, was no longer theirs.

The youth could no longer rely on public sector jobs for employment, or find alternative avenues in the private sector. Gradually, they underwent a process of pauperization, whereby they became dependent on public charity programs from the Ministry of Social Affairs, or increasingly since the 2000s, from the Royal Court, which is incidentally located across the valley from the neighborhood. By 2010, when the protests started, the Tafāyleh had an acute sense of status loss from the bearers of national identity to the abandoned "children of the state," or beggars who relied on state charity and poverty alleviation programs. Their access to this charity, and to the limited employment possibilities in the bureaucracy, was usually channeled through networks of patronage often mobilized through elected officials, or the intelligence department. Against this backdrop, the Tafāyleh, like other Transjordanian activists, sought to "reclaim the state" in the sense of "reclaiming political authority and public resources" ("*istirdād al-dawlah, sulTa-tan wa mawārid*").

Tribal Elders, Incredulous Youth, and the Desire for a Revolutionary History

In my early research in the Hay al-Tafāyeh, I was interested to see how the Tafāyleh narrated themselves as an indigenous population. I expected to find an active movement of tribal historiography similar to the one described by Andrew Shryock (1997) among the Balga tribes in the late 80s and early 90s. After all, that historiographical movement emerged precisely at the time when the country was in the middle of an economic crisis and when that generation of elders who lived part of their life prior to the establishment of the modern state was quickly disappearing. The Balga tribal historians sought to document traditional tribal life, to write down the words and deeds of their tribal elders, as a claim to rootedness in the face of the modernizing nation-state. Twenty years later, however, that historiographical movement was dead. It was nowhere to be found among the Tafāyleh or any other tribal group in Jordan.

Unlike Shryock's Balga elders, the Tafāyleh's elders had no heroic stories to tell of their past, nor did their youth have any heroic stories to tell of their ancestors. In the youth's narratives, their ancestors often featured, if at all, not as exemplary heroes to be emulated, but as thieves and country bumpkins driven by petty interests, unable to understand the larger historical significance of the events they lived. For example, one activist explained to me how his grandfather, who fought battles with the Jordanian Army around Jerusalem in 1948, never really understood the significance of that war. What kept the grandfather bitter "until the day he died, was not losing the war as much as losing his rifle when he was discharged [from the army]!"

When I was looking for elders to interview for oral histories of the neighborhood, my young interlocutors often blanked out on suitable names to suggest asked for more time to look for candidates. Whenever someone suggested a specific name, the others would dismiss it as "senile," "lunatic," or an "imbecile." When they did introduce me to an elder, eventually, his account was fully folded into official state historiography—highlighting the Tafāyleh's participation in a battle of the Arab Revolt, and how they protected the Royal Palaces from shelling by the Fidayeen in 1970.

However, for young activists, this narrative was felt to be incredible. Parallel to it one could detect another historiographical current. It came in the form of gossip, snippets of oral history and anecdotal evidence that falsified the standard narrative binding the Tafāyleh to the ruling dynasty. For example, one could hear that their ancestors were in fact duped or coerced to join the Arab Revolt; that they did not intend to protect the Palace in 1970, but rather to protect themselves; that someone had seen documents in the British archives that proved that the current King's maternal grandfather was in fact Jewish and thus refuted the King's claim to be a rightful descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. In Hay al-Tafāyleh today, it is common to hear men in their 20s, 30s, or 40s lament their inability to narrate themselves as Jordanians from outside the discursive space authorized by official state historiography. "Our history is all lies!" was a refrain I heard often.

At the end of one protest, I sat next AHmad, a school teacher in his late 30s. Unhappy with the turnout, AHmad solicited my opinion as to what the movement should do to attract more people. I suggested that the activists should perhaps focus less on public protests and engage in face-to-face conversations with their kin in the neighborhood. The suggestion sounded impracticable to him because, he explained, "Jordan had no revolutionary heritage," and that the only revolt Jordanians knew of was the Arab Revolt which the Hashemites led. AHmad's response came as a surprise. Indeed, some of my interlocutors among the activists were engaged in discussing the history of Jordan and actively searched for books to read on the topic. During the many conversations I had with them, I have heard some mention the Karak rebellion against the expansion of Ottoman administration into the town in 1910. Activists on social media networks frequently mentioned the rebellions of Mājed al-ʻAdwān, Kleib al-Shrayydeh and Rāshed al-Khuzaʻi al-FreiHāt in the early years of the colonial state in Jordan. The conversations were never precise and often mixed up the historical details. Nonetheless, there was always a sense that another history, one that constructed a Jordanian nationalist movement independent of the Hashemite dynasty, was waiting to be systematically researched and uncovered.

One could simply read AHmad's comments as a realization that certain historical facts have been obliterated by official historiography, but such a reading would miss what is truly at stake. Read with an attention to the practical function of such historiography, AHmad's comments are better seen as expressing a desire, felt by many young activists, for a history of past uprisings of which an uprising in the present would be a continuation. Such a desire can be detected in the activists' tendency to name episodes of large protests as "habbeh" (rising), harking back to the April Rising (*Habbet Nīsān*) of 1989.[3] Hence, the protests of November 2012 against fuel price hikes were called *Habbet Tishrīn* (the November Rising), and the protests of June 2018—which resulted in the ousting of Prime Minister Hanī al-Mulqī—were referred to as *Habbet Huzayrān* (the June Rising).

But apart from these vernacular histories, the wave of protests in Jordan since 2010 has occasioned a new wave of activist academic historiography. Two examples of this historiography stand as particularly illustrative. The first is the work of ʻIsām al-Saʻdī, a historian whose book on the Jordanian National Movement in the first half of the 20th century (al-Saʻdī 2011) was eagerly read by many of the activists I have worked with.[4] Encouraged by the relative success of his first book, al-Saʻdī went on to write a second one (2014) that covered a later period. Another example is ʻAbdullāh al-ʻAssāf's (2015) on the rebellion of Mājid al-ʻAdwān of 1923. Al-ʻAssāf's book seeks to present the contemporary readers with a historical possibility that he claims was aborted, or rather pre-empted due to colonial intervention, namely a Jordanian state lead by a native Jordanian: Mājed al-ʻAdwān. Politically, presenting that episode as a past possibility seeks to invite the reader to imagining a different present that could be actualized in the future.

While the ability of activist historiography to conjure wide publics remains limited, it is not without significance. In parallel to activist historiography, a new semi-official historiographic movement has also emerged seeking to weave a rebellious tribal historiography into the official state narrative. Jordan Heritage, a non-profit company,

for example, employs amateur researchers to document "all that is valuable in Jordan's past" including the lives of Jordanian tribal leaders who led rebellions against Ottoman rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like the activist historians, the researchers of Jordan Heritage have little interest in tribal politics. Rather, their research on the lives of tribal leaders emplots them within a narrative of Jordanians anti-colonial struggle against what is now construed as Ottoman occupation and British colonialism. Their individual narratives weave into the founding myth of the modern state and the Hashemite revolt against the Ottomans.[5]

Conclusion

Revisionist histories by Jordanian activists—whether vernacular or professional—and by semi-official historians may have little by way of agreement on what happened in the past, or what the significance of past events was. But this apparent disagreement conceals an agreement over the primacy of historical consciousness, and of historical time with the nation as its main protagonist. Despite their discrepant commitments, young tribal Jordanians feel that to better know how to act in the present, and what sort of future to anticipate, they must unearth new evidences and historical knowledge about their past. Focusing on the content of this new historiography alone would be to miss a political act of much larger significance. The case of Hay al-Tafāyleh youth illustrates how, under the spell of history, the deeds of ancestors are increasingly construed not as customs or tribal tradition, but as the choices of free individuals which must be assessed within a nationalist narrative. In doing so, young activists position themselves as "the youth" vis-à-vis their elders in order to construe a different relation to the state and the monarchy. Here, "the youth" emerge as historical subjects, who may well be inspired by their tribal past, but never encumbered by it.

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Endnotes

1 Many claim that the Governorate of Tafīleh, the administrative district in which the village is located, is by now 80% depopulated. However, I have not managed to find reliable sources for this claim.

2 The appropriation and incorporation of sheikhs or tribal judges into the security apparatus is a case in point. The Ministry of Interiors relies heavily on tribal notables in preempting tensions and violence, particularly between the youth, which is often dealt with outside the courts.

3 Incidentally, many of my interlocutors among the Tafāyleh activists were quick to note that their neighborhood was the only part of Amman that participated in the 1989 April Rising.

4 It took al-Sa'dī almost 20 years to publish his book, which was a translation of the PhD. dissertation he had written at the Lebanese University in Beirut in 1992. In the introduction to the book, al-Sa'dī outlines his reasons for writing it in the following way:

> *Since the history of the nation—any nation—is made by its people, with their struggles and sacrifices, the popular-patriotic role in building and shaping the historical experience/the state has been deliberately obliterated […] The national masses are most in need for highlighting their history made by their heroism and struggles and to rewrite it from their perspective. Getting to know the programs of civil society institutions during the Emirate period would inform the national masses of their nation's past so as to give form to its present and outline its future.* (12)

Leaving aside al-Sa'dī's invocation of the masses, which reflects his Marxist background, the idea of an obliterated past that needs to be uncovered for the nation to be able to be able to imagine its future is one that runs across many historical works published since.

5 Documentaries on the lives of Jordanian tribal leaders by the Jordan Heritage Company can be found at http://jordanheritage.jo/documentaries/

Informal Education and Youth Culturing in Post-Gülenist Turkey

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While Turkey has a long history of being notoriously polarized and of different groups fighting, occasionally through violent means, for control over state resources, the last decade saw an unlikely conflict between two conservative Sunni-Muslim groups: the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen Community[1], which used to be close allies throughout the 2000s. The AKP government under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan designated the Gülen Community as a terrorist organization following the failed coup attempt in July, 2016.[2] Thousands were put in jail and tens of thousands were dismissed from their government jobs due to alleged Gülenist connections. Among the institutions that were shut down and/or confiscated by the government are banks, TV stations and newspapers, labor unions as well as employers' organizations, and thousands of private schools.

Emerging from the peripheral movement of political Islam, the AKP came to power in 2002 promising to put an end to a period of political instability and economic crises.[3] After rising to power, its leadership faced the challenge of ruling a country whose extensive state bureaucracy and influential media were at best suspicious of its intentions due to its Islamist past.[4] The Gülen Community, a religio-social movement that adopted a gradualist approach to social and political change through its emphasis on education, had a sizable yet precarious presence within the state bureaucracy, and enthusiastically offered its help. Through this symbiotic relationship, Erdoğan's AKP gradually consolidated its power, whereas the Gülen Community quickly became a multibillion-dollar global network within a decade with unprecedented influence and control over Turkish politics, economy, education, and media.[5]

When the two allies turned into enemies in the early 2010s, the primary front that the AKP opened against the Gülenists was in the field of education as the government passed a measure to abolish the *dersane* (private prep schools for entrance tests) system altogether, which had historically formed the backbone of the Gülenist recruitment machine. Since its inception in the early 1970s, the Gülen Movement exploited the highly competitive and unequal organization of the formal education system by recruiting kids mainly from rural and lower-class families and providing them with good education as well as financial assistance in exchange for their loyalty. The Gülenists hoped that this "golden generation" would gradually play a politically and socially transformative role through their influence within the state bureaucracy as well as across the civil society and media.

While the Gülenist education network has now been completely dismantled, in what ways and by whom is the vacuum left by the Gülenists being filled? Part of a larger ethnographic project on the youth culturing campaign of the AKP government, this paper relies on data from

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[1] For a couple of studies that addressed the community from a critical distance, see Hendrick, J.D., (2013). *Gülen: the ambiguous politics of market Islam in Turkey and the world. NyU Press & Turam, B. (2007). Between Islam and the state: the politics of engagement. Stanford University Press.*

[2] For the coup attempt and its aftermath, see Yavuz, M. H., & Balci, B. (2018). *Turkey's July 15th Coup: What Happened and Why. University of Utah Press. For a detailed analysis of the coup attempt, as well as the new security paradigm that emerged in the post-coup era, see Şen, S. (forthcoming). Civil-Military Relations and the National Security State After the Failed July 15 Coup Attempt in Turkey.*

[3] The five-year period prior to the AKP's rise to power saw multiple corruption scandals, a military intervention in 1997, two major financial crises in 1999 and 2001, and a massive earthquake in 1999.

[4] For the widespread perception of threat posed by the rise of political Islam among secular Turks, see Özyürek, Esra. *Nostalgia for the modern: State secularism and everyday politics in Turkey. Duke University Press, 2006.*

[5] For a careful look at the depth of Gülenist presence across government sectors as well as geographical regions, see *Foreign Policy*, The Geography of Gülenism in Turkey, March 18, 2019. https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/18/the-geography-of-gulenism-in-turkey/

fieldwork conducted at a youth culture center run by the AKP-led municipality of Esenler, a lower-class district on the European part of Istanbul. Providing a brief overview of the history of conservative investment into informal education in Turkey, it argues that while the AKP largely retains the pedagogical approaches and practices of earlier Islamist and conservative groups, it increasingly faces the challenge of bringing them under state control. Thus, the main axis of tension that characterizes the ongoing formation of the AKP's agenda for youth governance is between *centralization*, which is driven by the pervasive anxiety over security, and *decentralization*, which is driven by the dominant principles of privatization and social segmentation.

From Peripheral Critique to State Project: The Conservative Challenge to Secular Pedagogy

Turkey has a long history of controversies over the form and content of national education. The modern Turkish state abolished the dual educational structure that consisted of religious and modern educational institutions during the late Ottoman period, seeing the latter as a crucial tool for the construction of the nation and the nation state. As part of the educational reforms during the early Republic period, the Latin alphabet replaced the Arabic alphabet, an ideology of Turkish nationalism replaced the religious discourse, a literacy campaign was launched, coeducation replaced single-sex education, and curricula and textbooks were introduced in line with the ideals of the Republic.[6]

These reforms, however, did not go unchallenged: Feeling estranged in the spaces of the secular nationalist education system, different religious groups in Turkey searched for ways of implementing their alternative pedagogical practices. After the 1980s, they became increasingly able to do so in informal educational settings such as houses, culture centers, private prep schools, camps, and dormitories. Social inequalities, along with the structural problems of the formal education system, contributed to the creation of this dual infrastructure of education in its contemporary form.

The AKP's success in the majoritarian electoral system came from its ability not only to mobilize these diverse Islamist and/or conservative groups under a single political agenda, but also to transform them in the process.[7] The most prominent example of such groups was the Gülen Movement, which until recently dominated the field of informal education in Turkey by recruiting youth mainly from lower class backgrounds. Offering them a chance of upward mobility through education in exchange for their loyalty, the movement created a massive army of devoted followers who provided the crucial human resource to its political ambitions.[8]

After 2011, however, growing disagreements between these two allies began to surface, followed by several alleged Gülenist attempts to overthrow Erdoğan, all of which eventually failed. An important front in this fight was the field of education: The first measure taken by the government against the Gülenists was to abolish the *dersane* (private prep schools for entrance tests) system altogether, which had until then formed the backbone of the Gülenist recruitment machine. Following the coup attempt of 2016, the Gülen network was designated as a terrorist organization, and its schools in Turkey and abroad have been taken over by pro-government organizations. Since then, the AKP has been investing heavily on informal education through foundations such as Turkey Youth Foundation (*Turkiye Gençlik Vakfı*/TUGVA)[9] as well as its municipal governments, which have their own youth branches and organize various youth-oriented activities,

[6] See Sam Kaplan, *The pedagogical state: education and the politics of national culture in post-1980 Turkey*. Stanford University Press (2006) & Ayça Erinç Yıldırım, *History and Education: Perceptions, Changes and Continuities During Early Turkish Republic*. Libra Press (2017).

[7] Cihan Tuğal, *Passive revolution: Absorbing the Islamic challenge to capitalism*. Stanford University Press (2009).

[8] Aydın Özipek, "Cultivating" A Generation Through Education: The Case of The Gülen Movement. Unpublished MA Thesis. Central European University (2009).

[9] See Ayça Alemdaroğlu, The AKP's Problem with Youth. *Middle East Report* 288 (Fall 2018).

including preparation courses for the highly competitive entrance exams. This paper asks why the AKP, despite now having full political control of the national education system,[10] still retains this dual educational structure.

The Esenler Youth Culture Center as an Alternative Pedagogical Space

The Esenler youth culture center is located at the center of the district, in a building that used to be a Gülenist prep school but had recently been confiscated by the government and allocated for the use of the youth center which is sponsored by the municipality. I chose Esenler as one of my sites for my fieldwork on the AKP's youth culturing campaign because it is one of Istanbul's largest lower-class districts where the AKP has consistently gained the electoral majority.[11] I learned that several teachers and administrative staff members had recently been fired due to Gülenist affiliations. While things were never settled at the center, reflecting the dizzying turbulence of Turkish politics in recent years, one of the constants at the culture center was Cemil Hoca, the director of the center who had formerly lived in Germany and had long-term experience in youth training. The most frequent of the extracurricular activities was the seminars, or *sohbets*, led most of the time by Cemil Hoca and occasionally by speakers coming from outside the center on religious or social issues, mostly consisting of inspirational advice, historical anecdotes, and sometimes political commentary catered for the young audience. Cemil Hoca was an inspirational speaker who most of the students thought understood the concerns of youth and occasionally gave them life advice that they appreciated. Several female students told me that even though they initially came to the youth center to get training for entrance exams, which are highly competitive and – as mentioned earlier – formed the niche that the Gülen Community built its extensive prep school network on, they learned about religious issues and started to veil thanks to his *sohbets.* For the students, it was a sign of his sincerity and his care for students, which they often complained about not seeing enough from their parents and public-school teachers.

A certain form of piety and religious discourse was taken for granted at the youth center and promoted by the administration as the proper form of training youth. Daily prayers are performed collectively, led by teachers or occasionally students; girls and boys, aged between 12 and 18, have separate days for coming to the center; religious music – most often rap songs by a handful of pious rappers – are played during breaks; and unlike other public spaces in Turkey the everyday discourse is heavily infused with words and expressions that index pious sociality.

The widespread sentiment at the center was that conservative Sunnis are still the disadvantaged group in Turkey, even though the AKP has been in power for almost the past two decades.[12] Several students told me in a group conversation that others, that is, seculars and Alevis, would not miss anything except for the religious *sohbets* by not being included in the spaces of the youth center, because they thought they were already better off financially and therefore would be able to afford training elsewhere.

Unlike in almost all other public educational spaces in Turkey, symbols and discourses of the Kemalist republic and its founder Ataturk were conspicuously absent. The collective national past was imagined with reference to pre-Republic times as, for example, the walls and desks were decorated with images of Ottoman sultans or inspirational quotes from major Sufi figures such as Rumi.

In all these respects, the Esenler youth culture center occupied a peculiar place in the segmented structure

[10] For the AKP-led changes in the formal education system, see Demet Lüküslü, "Creating a pious generation: youth and education policies of the AKP in Turkey," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16:4 (2016).

[11] For the relationship between the AKP's grassroots mobilization and urban poverty, see Kayhan Delibaş. *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey: Urban Poverty, Grass Roots Activism and Islamic Fundamentalism, London, Tauris (2016).*

[12] For the affective politics of the AKP and how it actively cultivates a sense of collective victimhood among its supporters, see Nagehan Tokdoğan*, Yeni Osmanlıcılık: Hınç, Nostalji, Narsisizm, İletişim (2018) (in Turkish).*

of education in Turkey. It was not part of the national education system; therefore, its curriculum or its material organization were not dictated by the Ministry of National Education. On the other hand, it was not run by a religious community or NGO; therefore, it was not totally independent from the government's educational and youth culturing agenda. It was formally defined as a public space since it was run by the local government, yet it was highly exclusive in terms of its overtly pro-AKP discourse and pious makeup. The youth culture center, thus, embodied the contradictions and tensions inherent to the rule of the AKP; it was simultaneously a space of critical alternative pedagogy and a space that reproduced and was directly controlled by the political power.

Bringing Informal Education under State Control

On an afternoon towards the end of my fieldwork, Eren, one of the teachers at the center with minor administrative duties, took me out to a kebab place nearby, along with several other teachers. They were all in their late-twenties and mostly hung out together. Eren saw me as a reliable person who is also an outsider, so he always felt comfortable when he was with me complaining about the issues in his life including the youth center. I had sensed their discomfort earlier that day but did not find the opportunity to ask what was going on.

Shortly after, they opened up: There were rumors over the past couple of days that Turkey Youth Foundation (Turkiye Gençlik Vakfı/TUGVA) was seeking to incorporate the youth center into its centralized structure. TUGVA had been founded three years before with the explicit aim of offering an alternative to the Gülen network and bringing the field of informal education under government control. It was unofficially overseen by the President's son, Bilal Erdoğan, and had numerous AKP figures in its management including the mayor of Esenler as a higher advisory board member. Eren and his colleagues were not happy with the ambiguity, and concerned that even if they kept their jobs, they would now be part of a much deeper hierarchical structure which they thought would undermine their relative independence. Even though they acknowledged the fact that being part of TUGVA would enable them to have better access to some public schools as it was officially endorsed by the President's Office, they also expressed concern that Esenler had a particular makeup and local dynamics, which might get lost within the top-down structure of TUGVA.

This particular tension between keeping it local and making it part of a centralized structure was reflective of the AKP's predicament at the time. An important factor behind the AKP's continuing popularity among large segments of the population has been its emphasis on local governments, which facilitated the production of alternative publics at the local level, especially for the conservative Sunni population which constitutes the bulk of the AKP's electoral base. This has been in line with neoliberal political logics which encourage privatization, spatial segregation, and cultural segmentation. In the domain of education, the AKP has continuously incentivized private schools and encouraged pedagogical diversification at the local level. This is one of the primary reasons the youth culture center in Esenler was attractive to young people from traditionally conservative families.

There were also "pull factors" towards centralization, driven primarily by the logic of security. The Gülenist experience has produced a massive shock and distrust among the conservatives in Turkey. This was much more pronounced than that of the dissenting youth at Gezi Park, as the former is considered a blow from within. This resulted in a pervasive feeling of *paranoia* over the activities of religious groups, which serves as a pretext for furthering the state control over the spaces of informal education. TUGVA is one of the major pro-government youth organizations that were founded as part of the AKP's efforts to bring this domain under its political control.

Eren and his colleagues stressed the importance of grassroots mobilization and local-level policy-making, although at the same time they acknowledged the potential benefits of being part of a larger centralized structure. They hoped that the uncertainty would be resolved without losing their "local touch." As mentioned before, the

mayor of Esenler was sitting in the high advisory board of TUGVA, and thanks to his political influence, this tension was resolved by keeping them separate but increasing the level of coordination and collaboration between them. In the new arrangement, TUGVA would allow the youth center to occasionally use its resources as well as its brand, whereas the youth center would be able to keep its relative independence although it would be required from time to time to share its staff and facilities with TUGVA.

This new arrangement was incipient but working by the time I finished my fieldwork in Esenler. Regardless of its future success or failure, it pointed to the main axis of tension that largely shaped the ongoing formation of the AKP's agenda for youth governance. In other words, the effectiveness of the AKP's youth politics will ultimately lie in its capacity to manage the tension between the forces of centralization, which is driven by the pervasive anxiety over security, and of decentralization, which is driven by the neoliberal principles of privatization and social segmentation. Yet, it is still possible to draw conclusions from the particular dynamic that I described above: There exists a drive towards centralization in the field of informal education; however, this does not threaten the distinction between formal and informal education. In other words, whether controlled by TUGVA or the Esenler local government, informal educational spaces are central to the AKP's youth policy.

Conclusion

This paper explored why the AKP government in Turkey continues to invest heavily in informal education despite now having full political control over the Ministry of National Education. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted at a youth culture center in one of Istanbul's lower-class districts, it argued that while the AKP largely retains the pedagogical approaches and practices of earlier Islamist and conservative groups, it increasingly faces the challenge of bringing them under state control. This creates a significant dilemma: while the AKP's success in the electoral system has largely rested in its willingness and capacity to encourage alternative publics at the local level, especially for the conservative Sunni communities which constitute the bulk of its electoral base; the recent challenge posed by the Gülenist community that nearly toppled its rule heightened state security concerns and led to efforts to extend governmental control to the spaces of informal education. The case of the Esenler youth culture center was illustrative of this dilemma. While the informal organization of the center as well as its ability to incorporate Sunni Muslim symbols and practices into its makeup were what made it distinctive from the centrally-run formal education system – and thus a more effective space to recruit youth into the AKP's collective – the drive to bring such spaces under state control made its relative autonomy highly precarious after a giant pro-government organization wanted to incorporate it.

Heroism and Adulthood among Arrested Youth in East Jerusalem

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In April 2016, one month had passed since Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails started a collective hunger strike ("dignity strike"; *idrāb al-karāma*). Images of empty seats in the solidarity tents, where supporters gather to stage sit-ins, began to circulate on social media. Prisoners had been demanding, among other things, improved prison conditions and an end to the abusive policy of arrest without fair trials. Lamenting the lack of support and the exhaustion of the prisoners' families, with no concrete progress in negotiations with the Israeli prison authorities, these images reflected the recent struggles among the activists in seeking wider audiences on the street calling for the support of prisoners.

This paper examines the concept of heroism and adulthood held among Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem in relation to their experiences of arrest and detention in Israeli prison. The prisoners' issue in Palestine has long been an inseparable part of its resistance against the Israeli occupation and the national liberation movement.[1] Under such context, the experiences of arrest and detention were considered a rite of passage among young and especially male Palestinians.[2] Yet while youth today continue to face repetitive night raid, arrests, as well as rapid encroachment and Judization of the city, the title of heroism has become rather ambiguous.

The issues of heroism and adulthood were faced by all Palestinians, but Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem faced some distinct circumstances, especially following the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993. The paper will first lay out how the idea of heroism is construed in relation to imprisonment, then it will look at it in today's context. Based on the author's ethnographic work in East Jerusalem from 2015 through 2017, the rest of the paper illustrates the conditions of youth arrest in recent years and some emerging themes that highlights the intersection between imprisonment and heroism.

Heroism and Imprisonment

The Israeli practice of arrest and detention of Palestinians is widely entrenched with the notion that incarceration and prisoners have a vital presence in the Palestinian iconography and the history of resistance to the occupation. Male Palestinian youth are central to this as they are the main political actors on the street and hence the target of arrest which is often associated with heroic deeds. Prisoners (*asra*) are called with the title of "hero" (*batal*) and their posters and graffiti fill the walls on the street along with those of martyrs.

Previous studies have showed how public beatings and prison experiences during the first Intifada (1987-1993) served as rites of passage among young Palestinian males that demarcated their political maturity.[3] Inside prisons, detainees organized themselves to administer daily routines, coordinated hunger strikes across different political factions and prisons, and engaged in political discussion and education which were attended and passed on from senior political detainees to younger inmates.[4] The highly organized nature of prisoners' internal activities is known as the "prisoner's movement" and is the reason why some former detainees recall "prison as

[1] Maya Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).*

[2] Esmail Nashif, Palestinian Political Prisoners: Identity and Community (Abington: Routledge, 2008); Julie Peteet, "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian 'Intifada': A Cultural Politics of Violence," *American Ethnologist 21*, no. 1 (1994): 31-49.

[3] Peteet, "Male Gender and Rituals," 33.

[4] Rosenfeld, *Confronting Occupation*.

university."[5] Released prisoners are also received back to their community with celebration, often with respect and elevated social status.[6]

Yet, while arrest and detention is still a lived experience today, the status afterwards of those imprisoned is becoming more ambiguous. The Palestinian political scene in the post-Oslo era and particularly after the end of the second Intifada (2000-2005) has been characterized by a diminished and divided national liberation movement, overshadowed by political rivalry between Fatah and Hamas, as well as tightening internal repression by the Palestinian Authority (PA) with ongoing Israeli violence.

These developments have resulted in "detachment with politics" and "a desire for an ordinary life" among the general public, including youth who are fed up with local politics and view arrests by the PA now as a common occurrence.[7] The recently released documentary film *Ghost Hunting* (istiyād aŝbāh) is a reconstruction of the Israeli prison experience by former Palestinian inmates which exemplifies a recent shift in diversifying the images of prisoners as individuals who also go through the ordeal and trauma, cry and miss the absence of loved ones, expressions which are often overshadowed with heroism.[8] Some of my adult interviewees who spent time in Israeli prison have shared the sense of burden of being treated as a hero, while others have questioned whether going to prison today will result in meaningful political changes. How heroism is construed among the public and by detainees, as well as the role it plays in society and its shifts are thus highly interwoven with the current political dynamics and the historical Palestinian national discourse of resistance.

Youth Arrest and Detention in East Jerusalem

Palestinian youth in this paper are the generation who have grown up mostly in the time of the post-Oslo institutional changes with no direct memory and experience of the national liberation movement in the pre-Oslo era. During this time, the isolation of Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem from the rest of West Bank Palestinians has deepened due to systemic restrictions on the movement across the territories and banning of Palestinian Authority (PA) related activities to operate in East Jerusalem.[9] Meanwhile, Israel's attempt to consolidate the city's unification has resulted in an acute exclusion of East Jerusalem communities, through neglect of social services, house demolition and revocation of residency rights, making their already conditional status in Jerusalem more vulnerable.[10] This atmosphere is also tangible through day-to-day contacts with Israeli police and soldiers conducting ID and body search on the streets under constant surveillances. For Jerusalemite Palestinians, simply keeping their existence in the city has thus became a crucial matter.

East Jerusalem communities have been facing a volatile phase in recent years, particularly following the outset of

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[5] Rebecca Granato, "Writing Palestinian Politics in Israel's Prisons before Oslo," *Middle East Report*, no. 275 (2015): 20. The "biographical significance" (Allen, 1991, p.97) of arrest and interrogation and the process by which prison experience ultimately become "a badge of honor" (Hale, 2013, pp.139-140) are also noted in ethnographic studies conducted elsewhere. For instance see Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (the University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Sondra Hale, "The Memory Work of Anthropologists: Notes toward a Gendered Politics of Memory in Conflict Zones – Sudan and Eritrea" in Shrine Hafez and Susan Slyomovics, *Anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa: Into the New Millennium* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

[6] Rosenfeld, *Confronting Occupation*.

[7] Lotte Buch Segal, *No Place for Grief: Martyrs, Prisoners, and Mourning in Contemporary Palestine* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) and Noemi Casati, "Political Participation in a Palestinian University: Nablus Undergraduates' Political Subjectivities through Boredom, Fear and Consumption," *Ethnography 17, no. 4 (2016): 518-538.*

[8] *Ghost Hunting* (2017), directed by Raed Andoni.

[9] Michael Dumper, *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City* (Columbia University Press: 2014) p. 330.

[10] Palestinian residents of Jerusalem live in the city as "permanent residents", the same status given to foreign nationals in Israel and is not a full citizenship. At the same time, their social and legal status are different from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in the sense that they are part of the direct administration of the Israeli municipality rather than the PA. See Denielle C. Jefferis, "The 'Center of Life' Policy: Institutionalizing Statelessness in East Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly 50*, (2012): 94-103 and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) for a more comprehensive study of situations facing East Jerusalem.

a series of knife attacks carried out by Palestinian youth against Israeli soldiers and settlers in October 2015 which came to be known as "Jerusalem Intifada". These incidents were characterized not by a coordinated movement, but rather by a chain of individual acts and as expressions of ventilating daily suppression. Many of the youth and their families I have encountered during the field research were thus those arrested or detained during this turbulent period.

In Shufat refugee camp located northeast of the city, a permanent military checkpoint is installed to monitor the entry and exit of the residents in the camp. The street nearby this military checkpoint have become the site for youth gathering late in the night. Defending the military and soldiers from entering the camp by throwing stones have become their daily night routine. The recurrence of arrest as a result of clashing with the soldiers have solidified their social role of defending the camp. A mother of a 16-year-old youth from the camp, who at the moment of the interview had been in prison, described how her son is known among his peers as "the stubborn cub of the camp" due to his presence on the street. Already experiencing multiple arrests, his friends had commemorated him in his righteous absence by creating a video clip with other prisoners and martyrs from the camp.

Maturity, heroism, and life after prison

This coming-of-age in the context of political socialization and the experience of arrest and detention is also reflected in their narratives. One recurring site is "Room No. 4" (gurfet arb'a), the interrogation room in the Mascobiye detention center in West Jerusalem. This is the place where youth are first taken for questioning upon being arrested. The phrase "I was in room no. 4" served as a marker and inscription of their prison experience as well as their autobiographical episode. This was in contrast with their description of the time they spend inside the actual prison which was often recounted as "*'ādī*" ("nothing special").

For some, prison was an extension of their streets where they reunite with peers. It is regularly pointed out that, in recent years, not few number of Jerusalem youths who are placed under house arrest prefer to spend the rest of their term serving inside the prison than staying at home alone.[11] For an additional note, one of the youths I encountered corrected me and rephrased the words "*qism 'atfāl*" (children's section) to "*qism 'ašbāl*" (literary means little lion) when referring to the section inside the prison in which they were held.

The impact of arrest and detention extends beyond the period of one's incarceration. A common scenery in East Jerusalem villages is a banner of arrested youth, usually with the youth's photograph and a signature of a political party, announcing the date of his release from prison. Upon returning to the village, his peers march the streets, chanting and carrying the released youth on their shoulders. For the next few weeks, the family will receive neighbors who pay visits to welcome back the youth. Yet this uplifting will not continue for long as the youth gradually returns to the reality outside the prison. One released youth voiced that he is not allowed to go to school (although the school does not prohibit students from attending the classes) or that he prefers to do productive jobs anywhere including supermarkets in West Jerusalem. In another case, a mother of a detained youth was subtly advised by the teacher at a private school to change schools upon release.

On "non-questioning"

It is also worth mentioning the tendency of mothers of the detainee youth not to question what had actually happened at the time of their son's arrest. Contrary to the presumption that parents would seek the "truth", the common response was non-questioning. In the words of a clinical psychologist who offered an explanation, it did not really matter to the mothers what the cause of the arrest was since there were so many cases where kids are

[11] Richard Falk, "Forward" in Norma Hashim (Ed.) translated by Yousef M. Aljamal, *Dreaming of Freedom: Palestinian child Prisoners Speak* (Saba Islamic Media: 2016), pp.17-18.

taken by the police for no reason other than simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.[12] Concerns are also raised by legal professionals in recent years of the growing tendency among defendants to reach a plea bargain by confessing their charges in the hopes of bringing the youths out of detention as soon as possible.[13] The reasons of their arrest thus become irrelevant under this context.

The tendency of non-questioning is also related to the idea of confession and recruitment. During the interrogation, youth are frequently asked to speak not only about themselves but to share the names of their friends from the village. Confessing about others and being confessed to by others leaves enormous doubt on the concept of trust. Remaining silent is tied to morality and is one reason why the interrogation phase was considered to be the "real trial" for the detainees.[14] At the entrance to the village of al-Issawiyye, graffiti on the wall, perhaps written by a youth from the village, read "dear friends…when I die, write on my grave that he did not confess."

Conclusion

In December 2015, two community activists from East Jerusalem began a sit-in protest in the compound of the Red Cross headquarters office to resist the temporary expulsion order from the city.[15] The tents they installed became a site of social gathering for a brief moment until they were taken to prison a few weeks later. The main slogan of their protest campaign was "I am not leaving" (miš tāli').

For some youth, the need to act is felt strongly given the urgency of encroachment and exclusion faced by the East Jerusalem community. Because keeping and confirming their existence in the city is critical, however, the community also stands in between taking a direct stance on resistance and the non-political option to secure their residential status. It is now commonly understood that more Jerusalemites are applying for Israeli citizenship and learning Hebrew for their survival.[16] While imprisonment and heroism served as confirmation of resistance in the pre-Oslo era, such ambiguity in resistance and heroism may be what represents East Jerusalem today.

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[12] A personal interview conducted on December 6, 2016.

[13] Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Shahrazad Odeh, "Arrested Childhood in Spaces of Indifference: The Criminalized Children of Occupied East Jerusalem." *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law 30* no. 3 (2018): 413.

[14] Lisa Hajjar, *Courting Conflict: The Israeli Military Court System in the West Bank and Gaza* (University of California Press: 2005), p.109.

[15] Nir Hasson, "Two Palestinian Social Activists Arrested after Barricading Themselves in Red Cross Building" *Haaretz. Published January 6, 2016, retrieved June 2, 2019.*

[16] Nir Hasson, "All the Ways East Jerusalem Palestinians Get Rejected in Bid to Become Israelis" *Haaretz*, Published January 15, 2019, retrieved June 2, 2019. Similarly, Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Odeh also point out that Palestinian families in East Jerusalem are pushed to show their assimilation with Israeli citizens and rejection to acts of resistance in order to be perceived as "normative family" and not as nationalists in the court. See Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Shahrazad Odeh, "Arrested Childhood in Spaces of Indifference: The Criminalized Children of Occupied East Jerusalem." *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law 30* no. 3 (2018): 415.

The New Lost Boys of Sudan

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Currently, around seven million people are affected by migration and displacement to, from, and through Sudan. Nearly one million people are seeking refuge inside Sudan's borders from neighboring and regional countries in conflict, both inside the 14 refugee camps and in numerous urban areas and rural settlements. Another two million Sudanese have been displaced within the country as IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) due to the genocide in Darfur and independence of South Sudan.

Over 1.7 million Sudanese have sought protection outside the country's borders, including the 20,000 well-known "Lost Boys of Sudan" of the 1980s and 1990s. The term, the "Lost Boys of Sudan" was famously coined after the more than 20,000 Nuer and Dinka Sudanese orphans and youth trekked by foot to refugee camps of Ethiopia during the second Sudanese civil war of the late 1980s and 1990s. The United States resettled approximately 4,000 of these refugees, who have been featured in a number of prominent films and television shows.

It may be surprising to discover that among the refugees living in Sudan are an estimated 250,000 Syrians, primarily in the Khartoum area. Up to 90 percent of them are believed to be young men between ages 20 and 30. They live and work all over in the city of Khartoum, and have congregated north of the downtown area in a suburb called Bahri Kfouri and east in an area called Riyadh. As Syria is now entering its eighth year of conflict, the questions and concerns about Syrian refugees and displacement endure.

Why Sudan?

Sudan has a long history of welcoming refugees. For over 30 years, Sudan has hosted refugees from Uganda, Chad, Ethiopia, Congo, and Eritrea with a "generous" refugee policy that aims to be peaceful and humanitarian, abides by *non-refoulment*, and pushes the goal of self-sustaining livelihoods for the refugees. In addition, porous borders have made more intensive governance regimes for refugees difficult, if not impossible.

Sudan has also been extremely welcoming of Syrians: university and education at all levels are available to Syrians for the same fees as locals. Syrians are able to work, start businesses, and access health care in all the same ways as the Sudanese. Costs to open and operate new businesses are relatively low, and access to new markets is relatively open. Syrian airlines still run nearly daily flights to Khartoum from Damascus. Syrians can apply for Sudanese passports after six months in-country and typically receive one within a few months. This is especially astounding considering the hefty obstacles they have encountered in most other countries, including Lebanon and Egypt. Syrians I interviewed reported feeling relatively well-treated in Khartoum and reported frequently occupying higher socio-economic levels in society.

There are other pragmatic issues at play that make Sudan appealing for Syrians: in 2013, Egypt imposed visa restrictions on Syrians, then Jordan and Lebanon in 2014, and one year later Turkey. Sudan is currently the only country in the world that allows Syrians to enter without a visa; Syrians now joke that the only place they can enter with their passports is heaven.

That does not mean it is easy for Syrians in Khartoum. Similar to life for Sudanese, the economy is poor, inflation is on the rise, rents and costs for basic items are high relative to salaries, and jobs can be scarce, even for those with a university education. However, some challenges are specific for Syrians: the weather is much, much hotter than in Syria; they miss a robust middle class and cosmopolitan life of Syria; the Arabic can contain African dialects and words making it different enough that some can struggle to communicate, and most Syrians that I spoke with found Sudanese national understandings of Islam to be quite narrow and the population to be – as those I interviewed

often said – "closed-minded." Expectations for gendered spaces are higher in Khartoum than in much of pre-war urban Syria, alcohol is illegal, and the religious diversity of Syria is one for which Syrians I interviewed spoke nostalgically. As one said, "This is Africa, not the Middle East."

Furthermore, as the majority of Syrians in Sudan do not register with UNHCR, they are not fully understood as "refugees," instead occupying an ambiguous space as "guests" or "visitors." While Syrians in Sudan do have the option to register with UNHCR and become registered refugees and recipients of aid, to do so requires that they first register as such with the Sudanese government. One UNHCR official in Khartoum reported that, as of July 2018, there were only 12,433 registered Syrian refugees in Sudan, of whom 10% were single men. Conscientious objectors do not qualify for asylum. Furthermore, as one UNHCR official I interviewed reported, once registered with the UN Syrians lose much of their mobility and freedoms in Sudan as their asylum claims are processed. Thus, most of the Syrians I spoke with preferred not to register and instead maintain their freedoms of movement, despite the fact that there is then no monthly support for them.

Who are these Syrian refugee men?

Some of the Syrians from wealthier backgrounds and means have come to Sudan with the aims of entrepreneurialism. Business owners and others with some capital for investment have come to Sudan opening restaurants and bakeries and to work in specialized craft and trade industries. Other Syrians – and the majority of those that I spoke with – were young, educated, and inexperienced, but generally with enough financial means to leave Syria (rather than move to an IDP or refugee camp) although not enough to open new businesses. They were distinctly middle-class young men. Primarily, they had come to Sudan because they were subject to conscription in Assad's army because they came of age at exactly the wrong time.

I interviewed a young man named Mohammed who typified the kind of trajectory experienced by many – if not most – of these young Syrian refugees in Sudan. Born in 1994, Mohammed was 16 when the crisis started in Syria in 2011. He finished high school and then attended university, deferring his conscripted military service as long as he was enrolled. Mohammed followed his parents' advice and pursued mechanical and electrical engineering.

Mohammed detailed the first time that he became embroiled in the war. As he was walking to university just outside Damascus, he and his friends were kidnapped by a military officer and taken to be tortured in a nearby village. The kidnapper, he said, had a son being held by opposition forces. The kidnapper used Mohammed and several of his friends as ransom. Twenty days and an unknown number and types of unspeakable acts later, Mohammed and his friends were released. The kidnapper got the money, and then used it to pay for the ransom for his own son. "They're in Turkey now. The kidnapper got to Turkey. His son got out," he explained.

As he retold the event, Mohammed's demeanor changed. He spoke more softly; he glossed the hardest events. The series of scars on his arms told the story of nearly three weeks of torture and burns, and he self-consciously scratched his collar bone under his polo shirt with each mention of his time detained.

I couldn't go back after that. I couldn't go back to university. I mean, I did. I sat in class. I wrote the papers. But I just got by for two or three years so that I didn't have to join the army. I actually became interested in studying psychology instead. But, I only had a year of university left. By then it was too late.

And it was too late in other ways. Through circumstances of time and global politics, the ability to go to or through a neighboring Middle Eastern country that was once possible in 2013 or 2014 was no more. The ability to try one's luck across the Mediterranean via Turkey of 2015 was no more. By 2017, the Jordanian border was closed. The Lebanese border was closed. Mohammed was denied

a visa to Turkey, and later denied one to the United Arab Emirates. Mohammed had three options: 1) find and pay a smuggler for a forged document and pathway out of the country; 2) stay and be conscripted by Assad's army; or 3) pay the $250 for a one-way ticket to Sudan. He opted for Sudan.

By coming of age at this time, Mohammed, along with the hundreds of thousands of other Syrians who were too late to take advantage of prior options, now lives in a state of limbo: trying to find work in a poor economy; unable to find a Syrian wife; and struggling with the physical and psychological scars of teenage years and a young adulthood spent in a warzone. Because every other country in the world has closed off possibilities of his entry without a visa, there is simply nowhere else for him to legally go. He said, "I feel like my life is completely on hold."

Mohammed has avoided getting involved in Sudanese politics and actively avoids the protests. "It's like bad luck follows me everywhere. All of us," his arm sweeps across a street lined with Syrian shops with natal place-names like *Aleppo Halawayat* or *Dukaan Homs*, "have had this bad luck follow us. Why can't we get away from it?"

Political Disengagement and the "Deserving Refugee"

Within the context of a highly politically-engaged Middle East, it may be surprising that Syrian men in Sudan are not more active in local politics and the Sudanese protests; they would readily benefit from an improved economy and relaxation of political oppression just as their Sudanese neighbors. Rather, the Syrians are largely letting more traditional forms of political engagement in this authoritarian context pass them by. The lack of political engagement for Syrians in Sudan is part of a larger trajectory – they avoided being pulled into the Syrian war by completing their education and avoided conscription by moving to Sudan. Still, the lack of engagement in Sudanese politics by Syrians raises an interesting question as to who "gets" to be political and who does not in conditions of displacement.

For Syrians in Sudan, the pressures to engage politically are great. Not only are they experiencing a wider context that is protesting daily, they are subject to international demands for Syrians – and especially young male Syrians – to reflect a specific kind of political subjectivity on the global scale, to "perform" their refugeedom and demonstrate again and again their vulnerability and needs for protection. International agencies and governments look to political agency as a particular marker of refugee "deservedness" and "worthiness".

The challenges experienced by outsiders assessing the "deservedness" of these Syrians in Sudan was explained in an interview I conducted of Embassy officials from a Western European country in Khartoum. One described his frustration saying,

We process resettlement requests from amongst the Syrians here in Khartoum. We see a number of different cases, and vulnerable Syrians are referred to us for resettlement, but many are young men who just don't want to go back to Syria; they don't want to fight for their country. We now also have the ability to process 'family reunification' applications in the Embassy here. So the Syrian man in Khartoum who has been granted asylum to [European country] will meet his wife and children who fly in from Damascus. They submit their application together, then the wife and children return to Syria, and the man stays here in Khartoum until their case is settled. I don't understand it – he doesn't want to go back [to Syria] and he doesn't want to go on [to European country]? Isn't that the point? If Syria is a war zone and we are supposed to be taking them in for their protection, how can anyone say these people are "refugees"?

Citizenship Aims and the Long Term

Syrians in Sudan thus live in a paradox of political (dis) engagement. While experiencing pressures to engage politically as a marker of their deservedness, they also feel the distinct pressures of living under precarity in the midst of tremendous political upheaval once again. One way that some Syrians have tried to resolve this paradox

is by applying for Sudanese passports and citizenship. For Syrians, attaining a Sudanese passport is not about proving one's deservedness as a new citizen. Rather, obtaining a Sudanese passport is engagement in a technical-political process aimed at reclaiming one's mobility and safety in order to escape again – should the need arise.

Six months after arriving in Sudan, Syrians who have a residency permit are able to apply for a Sudanese passport. Syrians I spoke with said Sudanese passports could be in-hand as early as nine months after arrival in country. With a Sudanese passport, Syrians are able to live and work in the Gulf states that might otherwise reject Syrian passport holders (with the exception of Kuwait). They have easy access to other Arab countries that now demand that Syrians obtain visas to enter, including Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Syrians with Sudanese passports are able to apply for visas to Europe much more easily, and enhanced mobility means that these young Syrian men are able to visit family inside Syria for up to 90 days without risking military conscription.

It is believed that over 10,000 Syrians have obtained a Sudanese passport. The passports are legal documents, but the process by which one obtains one is highly corrupt. In short, for $10,000USD one can buy a Sudanese passport (more for a business or diplomatic passport) from a network of Al-Bashir's family members, with Omar's brother, Abdullah "The Shark", sitting at the top. For a bit more money, the passport can come with an EU visa already in it. Once in the EU, Syrians are able to apply for asylum using their Syrian documents.

With the recent political turmoil and removal of Omar Al-Bashir, the black-market passport industry is likely to end for Syrians. However, many are now attempting to capture the last moments and obtain one if possible. Mohammed has now applied for a Sudanese passport, in hopes that it will improve his prospects for mobility. "At least I could go to Egypt then. Just like the lost boys of Sudan did," he noted. Mohammed, along with several hundred thousand other young Syrian men, has become one of Sudan's "new lost boys," hoping for a chance to regain a life lost.

Moving Onward?

For many refugees in Sudan, including Syrians, the country is merely a transit point along a longer trajectory to hopefully resettle somewhere else – often Europe, but also North Africa. For others, Sudan is the new home. Many of those who have been able to secure economic opportunity and open successful business are less incentivized to move on. Some that I interviewed have viewed Sudan as a mid-range or even longer-term option as they contribute to the development of the country with their educational and managerial acumen. One Syrian I spoke with has started an NGO in Sudan to help raise the literacy level among Sudanese. He said, "I hope that I can do enough in Sudan so that one day I can go get my Master's degree in education somewhere in Europe. Maybe they'll accept that I contribute to the society I live in and that I can use it to rebuild Syria someday." Even in longer-term calculations, Syrians find the paradox of political engagement is nearly impossible to avoid.

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A Revolutionary Generation?

Assessing Standards of Political Efficacy among MENA Youth using Anchoring Vignettes

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What role do youth populations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) play in spurring progress toward more accountable and participatory governance? 10 years after the Arab Spring, MENA youth still are commonly portrayed as politically agitated and even revolutionary, motivated to undo the political corruption, submissiveness, and apathy of older generations through radical change.[1] But is it true that the youngest cohort of MENA adults possesses systematically higher standards for political accountability, participation, and efficacy than those who came before them?

Quantitative studies based on public opinion survey data collected prior to the uprisings have cast doubt on the conventional narrative that post-2011 protests were spurred by a youth generation possessing new ways of engaging with and thinking about their governments and about politics.[2] More generally, such empirical findings challenged the assumption that MENA youth differed from older citizens along important political, as opposed to social or economic, dimensions. But, nearly a decade later, does the same hold true? Or has the observed socioeconomic gap between younger and older Arab generations given way to a similar divergence in political attitudes and behavior?

This paper investigates these questions using a novel empirical approach that leverages an emerging tool of survey research: anchoring vignettes.[3] Anchoring vignettes allow direct estimation of the criteria individuals use to make complex subjective evaluations—such as in self-assessments of health, mobility, or job satisfaction—and are increasingly employed in political science to study a wide range of substantive topics. Notably, in the only previous application of anchoring vignettes in the MENA region, results of a survey in Qatar revealed that younger Qataris used lower standards than older citizens to judge what constitutes influence over government decision-making, contrary to expectations rooted in common narratives about post-Arab Spring youth empowerment.[4]

The present study extends previous work both geographically and theoretically. It is based on rare cross-national survey data collected in 2016-2017 from the least democratic subregion of the Middle East: the resource-rich Arab Gulf states. The survey of more than 4,000 respondents was conducted face-to-face in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, and asked men and women to rate the political efficacy of hypothetical individuals seeking to influence decision-makers through various means.[5] Survey responses are then used to estimate the thresholds separating response categories—i.e., no influence, low influence, medium influence, or high influence—that correspond to subjective assessments of political efficacy; and to observe how these category thresholds vary as a function of a respondent's age and other individual-level characteristics, as well as across the five countries included in the survey.

Analysis of the anchoring vignettes offers no evidence either that Arab Gulf youth enjoy an objectively greater political efficacy than older individuals, or that younger Gulf citizens conceive of political efficacy in more rigorous terms. Instead, results point, if anything, to the opposite conclusion in line with extant findings from Qatar: that it is older, rather than younger, Gulf citizens who possess more stringent criteria for evaluating one's influence over state decisions. These findings challenge or qualify assumptions about generational differences in orientations toward politics in the Middle East and North Africa.

The MENA Youth Revolution

Until now, the view of MENA youth as a revolutionary generation has been supported by observations of political

attitudes and behavior that would seem to indicate that young people in the Middle East are more interested in politics, more active in politics, and/or more inclined to seek fundamental rather than incremental reform of the prevailing political order. These observations are often qualitative, based on impressions that young people seem disproportionately to comprise protest movements, are more active in online spaces where critical opinions can be expressed, and so on.

Yet available quantitative data, such as the results of representative public opinion surveys conducted in MENA countries, have offered more dubious support for the notion of youth exceptionalism. Most notable in this regard is a 2012 study by Hoffman and Jamal, who analyze cohort differences along numerous economic, social, religious, and political indicators using pre-Arab Spring data from the cross-national Arab Barometer (AB) survey. They conclude that, while the data do evidence some differences between younger and older Arabs, these are mainly along demographic and religious variables. Meanwhile, their findings show that, prior to the Arab Spring, MENA youth were less politically engaged than older citizens and had no different conceptualization of democracy.

Analysis of the most recent wave of the Arab Barometer survey, conducted in 2014-2017, shows that these broad characterizations remain true across a wide range of attitudinal and behavioral indicators, encompassing both formal and informal modes of political involvement. According to the most recent AB data, respondents under the age of 30 continue to be *less* likely to have participated in the latest elections in each of the eight countries surveyed—and by substantial margins. As summarized in Table 1, the ratio of adult to youth voters ranges from around 1.6-1.7 in Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar, to a whopping 5.7 and 6.2 in Lebanon and Palestine, respectively. All differences based on age are associated with a very high level of statistical confidence.

Table 1. Electoral participation among MENA youth, 2014-2017

Country	*Youth Ages 18-29*	*Adults Ages 30+*	*Ratio Adults:Youth*
Algeria	15%	47%	3.1
Egypt	39%	61%	1.6
Jordan	39%	62%	1.6
Lebanon	12%	68%	5.7
Morocco	28%	66%	2.4
Palestine	11%	68%	6.2
Qatar	18%	31%	1.7
Tunisia	29%	57%	2.0

Notes: Data from Arab Barometer, Wave 4 (2016-2017)

Similarly, the newest AB data evidence lower levels of political interest in general among MENA youth as compared to among adults. As per Table 2, this result obtains in six of the eight countries surveyed in 2014-2017, while in the remaining two—Morocco and Qatar—there is no difference in political interest reported by younger versus older men and women. Once again, the survey data run counter to the notion of a youthful generation driving political activism and change in the Middle East and North Africa.

Table 2. Political interest among MENA youth, 2014-2017

Country	*Youth Ages 18-29*	*Adults Ages 30+*	*Ratio Adults:Youth*
Algeria	14%	25%	1.8
Egypt	22%	30%	1.4
Jordan	17%	28%	1.6
Lebanon	13%	30%	2.3
Morocco	21%	17%	-
Palestine	29%	42%	1.4
Qatar	41%	40%	-
Tunisia	23%	37%	1.6

Notes: Data from Arab Barometer, Wave 4 (2016-2017); proportion "very" or "somewhat" interested in politics

Of course, it is reasonable to hypothesize that MENA youth may eschew formal political participation via elections precisely because they reject the existing political system and seek to overturn it, and that their overall disinterest in politics stems from the same reason. Yet, empirical indicators of non-formal political involvement offer only marginally more convincing evidence that Arab youth are systematically more active in political life than are older citizens. Depicted in Table 3, for instance, is youth online political participation according to the Arab Barometer. In only three of the eight countries is there a statistically significant difference between the proportion of younger versus older citizens who report that they "use the Internet to express [their] views about politics," and in each case—Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine—it is those aged 30 and above, not youth, who tend to be more engaged.

Table 3. Online political engagement among MENA youth, 2014-2017

Country	*Youth Ages 18-29*	*Adults Ages 30+*	*Ratio Adults:Youth*
Algeria	10%	12%	-
Egypt	23%	29%	-
Jordan	12%	15%	-
Lebanon	10%	18%	1.8
Morocco	23%	31%	1.3*
Palestine	30%	39%	1.3
Qatar	16%	13%	-
Tunisia	28%	27%	-

Notes: Data from Arab Barometer, Wave 4 (2016-2017);
** significant only at p < 0.05 level*

Table 4. Participation in political demonstrations among MENA youth, 2014-2017

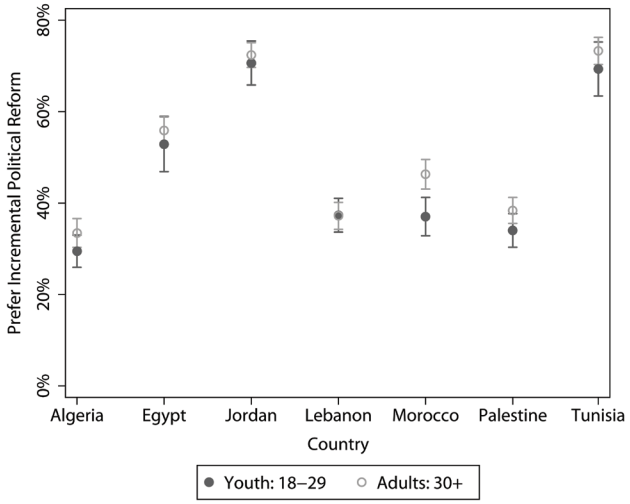
Country	*Youth Ages 18-29*	*Adults Ages 30+*	*Ratio Youth:Adults*
Algeria	7%	5%	-
Egypt	5%	2%	2.5*
Jordan	3%	3%	-
Lebanon	16%	16%	-
Morocco	28%	17%	1.6
Palestine	37%	31%	1.2*
Tunisia	26%	10%	2.6

Notes: Data from Arab Barometer, Wave 4 (2016-2017);
** significant only at p < 0.05 level*

Conversely, one domain in which MENA youth remain more active is participation in demonstrations and protests.[6] This is shown in Table 4. In more than half of surveyed countries—Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia—people under 30 were more likely to report having participated in at least one protest in the past year. However, in two of these instances the statistical association is relatively weak, and in three countries there is no difference at all based on age. It is also not possible to know the nature of the political demonstrations in which individuals have been involved, and the extent to which these intended to oppose, or instead support, a government, particular political faction, or issue.

Finally, when asked directly to state their preference between political reform that occurs incrementally ("little by little") versus radical change ("all at once"), MENA youth show no difference in opinion compared to their older compatriots. This AB result is illustrated in Figure 1. The figure shows substantial cross-country variation in preferences regarding the speed of reform, but almost no difference based on age.

Figure 1. Preference for incremental versus revolutionary reform among MENA youth



Thus, notwithstanding qualitative impressions about the role of youth in spurring political change within the region, available cross-national survey data collected both before and after the Arab Spring offer, at best, inconclusive support for the proposition that the youngest generation of MENA adults is or has been more politically interested, engaged, and revolutionary than their predecessors. True, in some countries youth are more likely to attend demonstrations, but they also are far less likely than men and women over 29 to take a general interest in politics or to participate in politics through the ballot box or even online, a space commonly associated with youth political activism. Young men and women also show no greater preference for immediate rather than gradual political change as compared to their parents and grandparents. As shown, these trends hold across a diverse set of MENA countries.

Assessing Standards of Political Efficacy among MENA Youth

Extant public opinion data are useful in helping to answer the basic empirical question surrounding youth politics in the MENA region, namely whether the youngest generation of adults exhibits attitudes and actions consistent with heightened expectations surrounding political empowerment and change. However, such data cannot directly probe the micro-level behavioral foundations that the theory of MENA youth empowerment implies: the idea that something has changed in the way that young people in the Middle East and North Africa *think* about politics and about their rightful role in society's governance; that the *standards* of political efficacy among youth have fundamentally shifted.

More than traditional survey questions, the emerging survey research tool of anchoring vignettes is well-suited to test this claim. The primary purpose of anchoring vignettes is to correct for differences in the way that individuals or groups make subjective self-assessments in surveys. The approach works by asking respondents to rate examples of hypothetical individuals using the same response scale that is used in self-assessment. Since vignettes are 'anchored' to objective cases, any variation in rating can be attributed to inter-personal differences in the way that respondents interpret the survey response scale itself—that is, differences in the conceptual thresholds separating, say, a "medium" level of efficacy from a "high" level. In the final step of the vignette analysis, differences in category thresholds are used to rescale respondents' original self-assessments, to produce 'corrected' responses that are comparable across all individuals.

Applied to the question of political efficacy, then, anchoring vignettes actually offer two separate sets of insights. A first is whether it is indeed true that MENA youth enjoy a higher objective level of political efficacy compared to older citizens. This question is answered by analyzing vignette-corrected self-assessments. But the mechanics of the vignette correction also offers a window into the micro-foundations of political efficacy in the MENA region, by showing differences in how people *interpret* what it means to be politically efficacious. Do men, for instance, employ higher standards than women in judging citizen influence over state decision-making? Or more educated individuals? Or, more to the point, MENA youth compared to previous generations?

Table 5 summarizes the results of this analysis. The first four columns report the estimated effect of youth

(i.e., being younger than 30 years of age) on the response category thresholds used to measure political efficacy in the survey. The survey asked, "How much influence do you have in getting the state to address concerns that are important to you?" Responses were: "none," "a little," "some," "a lot," and "unlimited." As shown in Table 5, in most cases, age category had no impact on the conceptual distinctions used to delineate response categories. In the two instances in which it did, the results show that it is older, rather than younger, Gulf citizens who employ more stringent criteria for judging their own political efficacy.

Likewise, when the vignettes are used to correct for inter-personal differences in response scale usage in order to produce a reliable estimate of objective political efficacy, here again the idea of MENA youth political empowerment is contradicted by the findings. This is shown in the final column of Table 5. In one case, Oman, younger citizens are associated with objectively lower levels of political efficacy, while in Qatar and Bahrain the estimated coefficient is also negative although not statistically significant. In the remaining two countries, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the estimated effect is approximately zero.

This evidence of youth *un*empowerment in the Arab Gulf states, while perhaps running counter to conventional narratives, does admit of potential explanations rooted in the prevailing framework for understanding Gulf politics: rentier state theory.[7] First, Gulf citizens are widely theorized to be linked to the state and to each other through secondary and tertiary networks of rent distribution, and these economic patronage networks serve as primary channels for informal influence (*wasta*).[8] It takes time for a person to develop the social connections needed to navigate state bureaucracies, solve personal problems, and gain entrée with decision-makers, and so it stands to reason that older individuals, on average, may wield greater political influence as a result.

Table 5. Political efficacy among GCC youth, 2017-2018

Country	**Response Category Thresholds**				**Actual Efficacy**
	None -Low	*Low -Moderate*	*Moderate - High*	*High - Unlimited*	
Bahrain	–	–	–	–	–0.0710 (0.543)
Kuwait	–	–	–	–	0.0365 (0.667)
Oman	–	–	**– 0.0880⁺ (0.070)**	–	**–0.166⁺ (0.058)**
Qatar	**–0.219** **(0.002)**	–	–	–	–0.158 (0.152)
Saudi Arabia	–	–	–	–	–0.0151 (0.850)

Notes: Data from SESRI GCC Identity Survey (2017-2018); data from UAE unavailable; p-values in parentheses; baseline Age category is 30+

A second way that the rentier system may have encouraged lower rather than higher levels of political efficacy among Arab Gulf youth relates to changes over time in the magnitude of resource revenues, and thus economic largesse, available to Gulf regimes. Compared to previous generations born during periods of sustained low oil prices, the youngest cohort of Gulf citizens came of age at a time when their governments enjoyed much higher levels of oil and gas rents with which to buy political loyalty—or at least attempt to do so. At the same time, resource rents fueled unprecedented economic development and modern accoutrements that further dampened interest in formal political involvement.[9]

Finally, lower youth expectations surrounding political influence in the Gulf likely reflect the reality of transformed state-society relations between the early versus later post-oil periods. Whereas older Gulf citizens may still remember when ruling sheikhs could be petitioned directly with individual requests and complaints, the unwieldy and inefficient bureaucratic structures erected in the intervening decades have largely supplanted such personal contact between citizens and decision-makers. The upshot is a system of political influence that is more diffuse, less transparent, and less likely to result in feelings that one's views made a difference or indeed were heard at all.

Conclusion

This essay has posed a basic question regarding MENA youth politics: is it indeed the case that the Middle East's youth generation is measurably different from previous cohorts in their political attitudes and behavior, and, if so, along which dimensions exactly? To help provide an answer, it first presented findings from the latest 2014-2017 wave of the cross-national Arab Barometer survey. These results serve as an update to previous work that was based on survey data collected prior to the 2011 Arab uprisings; yet they evidence the same substantive conclusion. Apart from participation in demonstrations, MENA youth tend to be less interested, less engaged, and less demanding in politics than older citizens, and this result obtains across a wide cross-section of the Arab world.

The analysis then proceeded to investigate whether Arab youth—in particular, those of the autocratic Gulf region—perhaps possess *understandings* of political efficacy that are more stringent than those of previous generations, even if they do not readily manifest in observable political attitudes and behaviors. The results of this inquiry likewise contradicted the idea of youth exceptionalism: in general, Gulf youth judge their political influence using the same criteria as do other citizens, and in the few cases where the data evidence a disparity based on age, they demonstrate that systematically *lower* criteria are employed by youth. This finding too is generalizable across the Gulf region.

In considering these results, one may object that opinion surveys necessarily capture only a number of the myriad ways that MENA youth or other citizens may involve themselves in political life, challenge authorities and the status quo, and ultimately effect change. But such an observation merely calls for better conceptualization and measurement of the expansive notion of 'youth politics.' The use of insights from anchoring vignettes and other emerging tools of survey research represents one possible path forward.

Endnotes

[1] E.g., Al-Momani, Mohammad. "The Arab "Youth Quake": Implications on Democratization and Stability." Middle East Law and Governance 3, no. 1-2 (2011): 159-170; LaGraffe, Dan. "The youth bulge in Egypt: An intersection of demographics, security, and the Arab Spring." Journal of Strategic Security 5, no. 2 (2012): 65-80; Thiel, Tobias. "After the Arab Spring: power shift in the Middle East?: Yemen's Arab Spring: from youth revolution to fragile political transition." (2012); Murphy, Emma C. "Problematizing Arab youth: Generational narratives of systemic failure." *Mediterranean Politics* 17(1) (2012): 5-22; Herrera, Linda, ed. Wired citizenship: Youth learning and activism in the Middle East. Routledge, 2014.

[2] Michael Hoffman and Amaney Jamal. "The youth and the Arab spring: cohort differences and similarities." Middle East Law and Governance 4, no. 1 (2012): 168-188.

[3] King, Gary, Christopher JL Murray, Joshua A. Salomon, and Ajay Tandon. "Enhancing the validity and cross-cultural comparability of measurement in survey research." *American Political Science Review* 98(1): (2004): 191-207.

[4] Justin Gengler and Jocelyn S. Mitchell, 2018, "A Hard Test of Individual Heterogeneity in Response Scale Usage: Evidence From Qatar," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 30(1): 102-124.

[5] More complete methodological details of the surveys are reported in Appendix A of Justin Gengler, 2017, "The Political Economy of Sectarianism: How Gulf Regimes Exploit Identity Politics as a Survival Strategy," in Frederic Wehrey, ed., *Beyond Sunni and Shia: The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 304-305.

[6] Cf. Hoffman and Jamal, 2012, pp. 180ff.

[7] Giacomo Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework," in Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *The Rentier State: Nation, State and Integration in the Arab World* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Hossein Mahdavy, "Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: the Case of Iran," in M. A. Cook, ed. *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East: From the Rise of Islam to the Present Day* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53(3): 325-361, 2001.

[8] Hertog, Steffan. The sociology of the Gulf rentier systems. *Comp Stud Soc Hist* 2010;52:282–318.

[9] Miriam Cooke, *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014); Pascal Menoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Beyond Mass Protests:
Rethinking What Constitutes Arab Youth Political Activism

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Since 2011, the prevailing image of Arab youth activism is that of the mass protest movement taking place in the streets and public squares. The wave of uprisings of the Arab Spring, along with the current mobilizations in Algeria and Sudan, have cemented this heuristic link between the Arab youth activist and the mass protest. Such activism is typically marked by direct claim-making on the state in the form of demands for freedom, social justice, and the ouster of long-sitting autocrats.

Yet this is only a partial image of the region's youth activism. As everywhere else in the world, youth across the Arab world are undertaking activism in a variety of sectors and activities, including service provision, community-development initiatives, social entrepreneurship, and the arts and culture. The population of youth activists involved in political protest movements and those involved in social and cultural activism are not different; many of the new activist initiatives that have arisen in the social and cultural sectors since 2011 were founded and are populated by the same youth from the mass protest movements.

The relationship to the political sphere of these youth activists, and their own self-view as political actors, is far from straightforward. They simultaneously proclaim themselves to have been part of the revolutionary vanguard, yet also declare that now their social and cultural activism is "apolitical" in nature. How do the youth themselves understand these moves from direct political contestation and overt political activism to self-described apoliticality in other forms of engagement? Does this imply that Arab youth political activism only takes the form of street protests, and that some sort of de-politicization occurs along with demobilization between protest cycles?

Drawing on over 100 semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and policy dialogues with youth activists from Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, [1] I argue that these different forms of social and cultural activism of the "2011 generation" are in fact alternative forms of political activism.

Departure and demobilization

Looking at the activist trajectories of Arab youth who participated in mass political protest movements in the earlier parts of this decade – whether the iconic uprisings of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria or the YouStink mobilization in Lebanon in 2015 or the lesser-known protests that took place in Algeria in 2011 – shows a variety of different pathways. While the outcomes of these mass protest movements vary across the region, there has nonetheless been a largely shared post-revolutionary backlash to the 2011 uprisings, whether in the form of state repression and violence or more general popular apathy. This has been accompanied by a waning of social movements and mass protests. This is not to say that displays of opposition have stopped entirely;[2] but there has been a visible wave of demobilization of youth political activists.

For some, this demobilization has been accompanied by departure from their country. Many Egyptian and Syrian youth activists, for example, face physical and psychological security threats and thus find themselves in exile in Gaziantep or Berlin where they live in a state of liminality. Likewise, many Tunisian youth have left, despite the gains to political reform achieved by the 2011 uprising, because of the lack of economic opportunity. Among those who stayed, many attribute demobilization to the simple fact of growing older, settling down into jobs and family life, and growing tired or disillusioned with the rhythm of political activism. In Algeria, for example, many women youth activists have demobilized as they have exited their university years, due to new constraints on their time and less opportunities for activity outside the home, while in Tunisia many have demobilized as a result of protest fatigue and general frustration with the lack of sufficient gains.

"Apolitical" activism. Departure and total demobilization do not reflect all possible trajectories of Arab youth political activists. On the contrary, in taking a comparative perspective, one trend that emerges is a shift in the sectors of activism. Some youth political activists of the 2011 generation re-focused their efforts on different forms of social and cultural activism, and in particular focusing on development-oriented and community-based actions in highly local contexts. This includes a variety of different organizational formats and specific areas of intervention: participation in Syrian local administrative councils for the purpose of coordinating humanitarian relief and basic services at the municipal level; volunteer-based neighborhood beautification projects in underprivileged zones in Lebanese cities; the establishment of Slow Food initiatives in rural and semi-urban Egypt; social entrepreneurship platforms promoting sustainable tourism in localities in Algeria. Common themes include a focus on poorer populations or those falling outside the regime's planning radar, an effort to stimulate collaborative work with members of the community, and an attempt to produce meaningful and tangible change in daily life without recourse to authorities or changes in the political system.

These new forms of engagement are constantly declared by the activists to be "apolitical" in nature, as they insist that their activities have nothing to do with "politics" and that they prefer to remain detached from the political sector. Yet at the same time, these activists see a degree of continuity between their so-called "apolitical" engagement and their previous political activism, and they also are ready to re-mobilize if and when a new wave of popular political contestation arises, as the current example of mass political protest in Algeria so vividly demonstrates. To understand how these shifts in sector are nonetheless perceived as a form of continuity, and why they declare their new forms of engagement to be "apolitical," requires unpackaging apoliticality and their collective understanding of what constitutes politics and the political.

The claim to "apoliticality" reveals a shared collective understanding among Arab youth of "politics" and the "political" that dichotomizes the work of traditional institutional politics and their own practices and forms of engagement. It can be read as a discursive device that is utilized both to distinguish themselves and to protect their work in the particularly repressive contexts of the post-2011 period. Despite their use of the term apolitical, though, these youth activist harbor an acute critique of the political order and a clear political vision that informs their social and cultural activism. Indeed, this critique of the political order – which includes criticism of the practices of power and regimes of inequality – informs the sectors where the activists work and their methods of work. In this sense, their social and cultural activism is prefiguring[3] the demands made in their political activism. As such, there is in fact an important degree of continuity in their various forms of engagement.

Their narrow definition of "politics" refers to formal, institutional, and procedural dimensions of governance. Among Egyptian youth activists, for example, politics is collectively understood as the institutionalized realm of political participation, including parties, elections, the parliament and the bureaucracy. Likewise, among Syrian youth activists, politics is associated with the high negotiations processes in Geneva and Astana, and with large-scale representative institutions. These collective understandings are also colored by their own negative associations and experiences. Among the Algerian activists, for example, the concept of politics remains associated with the civil war and the *décennie noire*. This delimitation of politics to the formal and institutionalized realm contributes to the perception of their activism as "apolitical," given that these new forms of engagement are most often taking place in organizational formats that are unregistered, informal, and self-generated.

Perhaps more importantly, the youth activists dichotomize their own work – be it political contestation in the form of street protest or "apolitical" activism in social and cultural sectors – with these shared definitions of "politics." Whereas they see politics as the maintenance of the status quo – the current structures of power, imbalances, injustices – they see their own work as striving precisely to break this, to change systems that are in place and to effect meaningful change on the ground. Thus, for example, Syrian youth active in the local councils perceive

their work as "apolitical" precisely because it aims at humanitarian relief and service provision that breaks with the patterns of distribution imposed by the state. Likewise, Lebanese youth activists see their forms of activism as "apolitical" because they seek to provide assistance or benefit to citizens outside of the logic of the sectarian system that "politics" upholds.

At the same time, the qualification of activist work as "apolitical" also reveals itself to be a strategic device. By qualifying their new forms of engagement as acts for the benefit of local communities outside the domain of politics, they are afforded more room for maneuver, and especially in highly repressive contexts such as Egypt. Likewise, Algerian activists attest that by avoiding the use of the term "political," they are able to gain more popular support among the community members with whom they seek to collaborate. Given this, the continuity the activists perceive between their previous participation in protest movements and their current forms of social and cultural engagement is based on the underlying opposition to "politics" that both imply. For these youth activists, both political protest and "apolitical" activism differ from "politics" because they are both striving to break with the systems of power and injustice that politics maintains, albeit by different means. Indeed, it is this same underlying critique of the political order that informs both their political activism as well as their new forms of engagement.

Political prefiguration in social and cultural activism

The critique of the political order that Arab youth activists put forth during moments of mass protest are straightforward to pinpoint and have been abundantly studied. These include the demands for freedom, social justice, dignity, an end to corruption and impunity, and a new social contract based on full and equal rights and a state in the service of the people. Importantly, though, these same critiques are also present in the social and cultural forms of engagement to which many of the youth activists have gravitated. Yet, whereas youth's political activism converted these critiques into direct claim-making on the state, their social and cultural work manifests these claims in the forms that the activism takes. More precisely, the activists' critique of the political order informs their social and cultural activism: where they intervene, with whom they work, and the organizational models and internal practices they adopt. In other words, this critique informs both what they are doing and the way they are doing it.

One of the recurring themes among the activist initiatives assessed here is the attempt to promote social justice, equality, and recognition through new acts of service provision and distribution. For example, a number of activists across the countries under investigation are working with local communities that reside in informal, poor, or very periphery areas and that are left off the state's planning schemes and distribution channels. This includes, for example, activist efforts for trash collection and land reclamation in poor neighborhoods in Beirut, or mapping and urbanization programs in slums in Algiers, as well as targeted cultural activities such as entertainment for hospitalized children, among numerous others. This selection of activities and local communities is not chosen at random; rather, for the youth activists, such activism is deliberately chosen in order to prefigure at least some of the goals that comprised their political demands. Thus though this new "apolitical" activism is not outwardly demanding regime ouster or radical change to the system, it is still striving for the values of social justice and equality that makes up an essential part of their political demands. Indeed, there is a very present discourse of promoting social justice, equal rights, and fairness that underpins this activism.

Moreover, these activist efforts are undertaken not on behalf of the target populations but rather with them: local communities are directly incorporated into the activist efforts, and their knowledge, skills, and ambitions are placed centrally. To this point, the manner in which these new forms of engagement operate organizationally is also informed by political demands and in particular the youth activists' critique of top-down and authoritarian practices of power. Indeed, these new forms of social and cultural activism are very deliberately attempting to manifest democratic ideals and new forms of participation. For example, the activists partaking in these new

initiatives repeatedly cite the practice of "horizontality" in their collaborative work. This includes consensus-based decision-making, shared leadership, and the encouragement of participation from all members of a group – including not only the activists themselves but also the beneficiaries of their efforts. There is a deliberate attempt to manifest practices of decision-making and promote a new manner of being together that is based on recognition and social mixing that break with the normal political order.

It is indeed this prefiguration of political claims through the operational and organizational dimensions of social and cultural activism that render these new forms of engagement of Arab youth a form of political activism, albeit alternative. While political protests make claims and challenge the state directly, this alternative form of political activism opposes the political order by prefiguring the desired outcomes. In other words, while the more traditional political activism of Arab youth directly challenges the state, this alternative form of political activism works around it, filling gaps where the state is absent. Yet, though these activist efforts are attempting to fill gaps with alternative practices of power, distribution, and recognition, the extent to which they actually challenge the state – or on the contrary buttress it – remains in question.

Does this challenge the state?

Many of these diverse activist efforts fill governance gaps in areas of limited statehood, where the state's ability to govern and enforce rules is either faltering or absent.[4] In providing services such as schooling and health in zones where the state has collapsed, or by undertaking urban planning and zoning enforcement in areas that are ignored by the central authority, these new efforts are in fact contributing to a process of "governance from below."[5] The youth activists are exercising a degree of political authority, including the promulgation of new policies and rules. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the case of the Syrian local councils, which act as de facto local authorities with their own governance practices. And because the youth activists are working precisely in the gaps where the state is absent, they are changing expectations and awareness of rights among their target populations and are putting forth new participatory practices. All of this creates an important potential for some form of political change, building off these new constituencies and practices.

However, fillings gaps where the state is absent and challenging the state are not the same thing, and many of the activists are aware of this. Indeed, many of the youth interviewed here express that their social and cultural activism are not seeking regime change or radical political change. In Algeria, for example, the activists acknowledge a certain willingness to work within the "red lines" of acceptability as drawn by the regime, which they view as pragmatic for the realization of their objectives. Likewise, in Lebanon, while all those interviewed agreed that social engagement is itself an act of political resistance to the sectarian system, many among them nonetheless perceive their activism as replacing or indeed supporting the role of the state – thereby reducing the urgency of profound political change. In this sense, filling gaps where the state is absent and promoting practices that prefigure desired political changes can be both a critique of the political order but also a means of reinforcing the state by relieving it of certain duties and responsibilities.

Perhaps, though, the most important role these alternative forms of political activism are filling is that of abeyance structure,[6] allowing the youth political activists to maintain their engagement and networks, and continue pursuing their political goals and values, despite the challenges of renewed authoritarianism, war, and/or protest fatigue that have led to demobilization. In this case, these new forms of social and cultural activism can actually contribute to new waves of political protest by allowing for a reactivation of currently dormant movements. While this remains to be proven in most countries, the current case of Algeria – where the youth activists interviewed here have not only joined the current mass protest movement but indeed see it as a continuation of their social and cultural activism – seems to indicate that these alternative forms of activism may indeed be maintaining the foundations for future political mobilization.

Endnotes

[1] The research for this paper was conducted between 2016-2018 under the project "Arab Youth as Political Actors," which involved research into new forms of youth engagement in Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Syria. This included over 100 semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and policy dialogues in the four target countries as well as France, Germany, and Turkey. The project was funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. Research on Egypt was conducted by the author through over 60 semi-structured interviews with activists in the period of 2012-2013 in Cairo, with follow-up interviews by phone in 2016.

[2] See for example the use of cause lawyering in Egypt as an alternative venue for political contestation. EZZAT, Ahmed. "Challenging the Legal Ideology of the State: Cause Lawyering and Social Movements in Egypt". *Arab Reform Initiative, 2019. (available at* https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/challenging-the-legal-ideology-of-the-state-cause-lawyering-and-social-movements-in-egypt/)

[3] Van de Sande defines prefiguration as, "political action, practice, movement, moment, or development in which certain political ideals are experimentally actualized in the 'here and now', rather than hoped to be realized in a distant future. Thus, in prefigurative practices, the means applied are deemed to embody or 'mirror' the ends one strives to realize." VAN DE SANDE, Mathijs. "The Prefigurative Politics of Tahrir Square – An Alternative Perspective on the 2011 Revolutions". *Res Publica 19(3), 2013, pp.223-239.*

[4] BÖRZEL, Tanja A., Thomas RISSE, and Anke DRAUDE. "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood: Conceptual Clarifications and Major Contributions of the Handbook." In: Tanja A. Börzel, Thomas Risse, and Anke Draude, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Limited Statehood.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

[5] EL-MEEHY, Asya. "Governance from Below: Comparing Local Experiments in Egypt and Syria after the Uprisings". *The Century Foundation, 2017.*

[6] Abeyance structures refer to latent processes of movement maintenance, despite periods of demobilization and disengagement from direct challenge to the state. See SAWYERS, Traci M. and David S. MEYER. "Missed Opportunities: Social Movement Abeyance and Public Policy." *Social Problems 46(2), 1999, pp.187-206.*

The Project on Middle East Political Science

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Henry Luce Foundation. For more information, see http://www.pomeps.org.

COVER PHOTO: Protesters gather in front of Isteqama Mosque in Giza Square in Egypt.
Photo taken on 25 January 2012 by Hossam el-Hamalawy. https://bit.ly/2CwmW3x