

Panel 33: **Young People in North Africa and Middle East: Explorations within a Social and Moral Experience**

Friday 18, 14.45-17.15, Coro di notte

Convenors: **Jose Sanchez Garcia** (University of Lleida), **Francesco Vacchiano** (University of Lisbon)

Although the condition of the young people in North Africa and Middle East has been explored in various works throughout the last two decades, the recent events have contributed to generate a growing interest for the topic, which seem to be at the core of many processes concerning the region in the recent times. From the massive investment in international migration to the engaged activism during the uprisings of 2011 until the latest appeal of armed jihadism, young people have been considered the most active actors of the (mainly frustrated) attempts of social change. Despite their manifest difference, behind these strategies lies the common expectation of subverting the many inequalities which affect the possibilities of personal development and recognition. It is not irrelevant, however, to acknowledge that the category of “Arab youth” is also the product of specific practices, to which neither global values and marketing nor the same social sciences are extraneous. Moreover, as some critics have pointed out, discourses and policies regarding “the youth” may also be used to treat the political demands of social equity as mere problems of “young participation”. As a matter of fact, the research among different social groups allows to show that, alongside commonalities, many differences can still be traced across classes, genders, ethnicities and even age cohorts. This panel welcomes contributions that explore the notion of youth in North Africa and Middle East, whether by discussing the category or describing its characteristics in different places. The aim is to investigate the moral and social condition of the young people of the area – focussing in particular on their expectations, desires, frustrations, and imaginaries (also the migratory ones) – but also to observe how the same notion of youth is used, manipulated, constructed or contested by different actors.

Paper givers:

- 1) **Francesco Vacchiano** (University of Lisbon), **Jose Sanchez Garcia** (University of Lleida), *Young people as a unit of analysis in the Arab societies: an introduction to the panel*

Although youth has been for a long time a key variable in the analyses of education, employment, politics, gender, policies and mobility in Arab Majority-Societies (El Messini, 1974; Rough, 1987; Singerman, 1994; Early, 1997; Bayat, and Denis, 2000; Hirschkind, 2001; Haenni, 2005; Jacob, 2007; Scheele, 2007; Newcomb, 2009), relatively few works had been produced about youth as explicit research category until recently. The so-called “Arab Spring”, however, has not only generated a boom of research on social and political dynamics in the region, but has also facilitated the (sometimes problematic) identification of ‘young people’ as a category potentially object of inquiry. We wish to introduce the panel by discussing the shortcomings and/or possibilities related to considering ‘young people’ as a unit of analysis for approaching the experience of ‘being young’ in the Arab societies today.

- 2) **Ilenya Camozzi** (Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca), **Daniela Cherubini** (Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca), **Carmen Leccardi** (Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca), **Paola Rivetti** (Dublin City University), *Young women and young men of Arab Mediterranean origins in Italy: transnational views on the uprisings and their aftermaths*

The paper will present the first results of a qualitative research on young people of Arab Mediterranean origins living in Milan, Italy. The research explores the views of these young people on the Arab uprisings and their aftermaths, their transnational practices of participation to these key events and their views on the current affairs unfolding in Arab Mediterranean countries. It aims at analyzing the different ways through which these young women and young men take part in the social, cultural and political change of their contexts of origins, through a gendered perspective. The paper will discuss the impact of the Arab uprisings on the biographical constructions of these subjects, on their political and cultural values and orientations, as well as on their identity and sense of belonging. At the same time, particular attention will be paid to the ways in which these young men and women take part (or do not) in the construction of a collective memory around the uprisings and their aftermaths. The case study involves interviews to young men and young women and it is part of the FP7 research project “Empowering the new generation: towards a new social contract in South and East Mediterranean countries (SAHWA)”.

- 3) **Ann-Christin Wagner** (University of Edinburgh), *‘Waiting’ and displacement among a population of Syrian refugees in Mafraq*

My PhD research investigates the relationship between ‘waiting’ and displacement among a population of Syrian refugees in Mafraq, a site of urban displacement in Jordan. It coincides with the protraction of the Syrian civil war, a change of international development paradigms and local security discourses and increased legal limbo and precarity for Syrian refugees in Jordan. This presents anthropologists with a unique opportunity to examine a refugee population-in-wait at a moment of shifting temporalities as well as new ways of relating to places. ‘Waiting’ is understood as a complex of strategies of survival and resistance. Its study provides a diagnostic of how Syrian refugees’ spatial and social mobilities are intertwined, i.e. how they deal with interrupted migration journeys and disrupted lives, and how specific immobilities are produced in their interactions with the international humanitarian regime. As an access point to an understudied refugee population, I suggest one year of volunteering with local organizations in Mafraq, starting in January 2016.

- 4) **Hanan Benadi** (University of Manchester), *Moral Politics after the Egyptian Revolution*

On my May 14, 2014 Egypt held its first presidential elections after the July 3th, 2013 military coup. Just hours after the polls opened, photos of long queues of elderly men and women sitting on chairs outside of the polling stations waiting to cast their vote and decide the future of Egypt’s youth circulated around facebook. They were often accompanied by very angry comments such as “you have destroyed your futures and want to destroy ours as

well”, “what gives you the right to decide on our futures”, and “you have come out of the grave to decide our future”. The elections surprised the majority of Egyptians, not only because of the very low turnout, but also because they brought to the foreground the deep divisions between an older generation that aims for stability and a younger generation that wants change through revolutionary means. Based on 14 months of fieldwork in Cairo, this paper aims to explore these divisions in order to discern how the revolution has effected a fundamental change in Egyptian youths' conceptions of authority, democracy, and the relationship between politics and morality.

5) **Daniele Cantini** (University of Halle/Wittenberg), *Youth in education – an ethnographic analysis of university students in Jordan*

This paper presents some of the results of my research among university students in Amman, Jordan, discussed at length in my book *Youth and Education in the Middle East: Shaping Identity and Politics in Jordan* (I.B. Tauris). Taking up the task of providing ethnographic insights on one of the main spaces youth inhabit, the educational sector (Adely 2009), the paper discusses the condition of being a university student in Jordan. Jordan has one of the best education systems in the region, particularly at the university level, and young people constitute a very high proportion of its population, at a time in which educated youth is positioned, both figuratively and literally, at the forefront of debates and protests throughout the region. The paper examines how Jordanian students wait out their university years, trying to find their ways in a political context that is heavily shaped by a number of crisis in almost all neighbouring countries, which have heavy consequences in Jordan. First aim of the paper is thus to present a discussion of the consequences of stuckedness in the political realm.

6) **Alice Elliot** (University College of London), *Youth and revolutionary permanence in a Tunis suburb*

How long does a revolutionary moment last, both within and beyond the subject? What kinds of youths does it contribute to produce, and what kinds of futures may (or may not) emerge through it? In this paper, I focus on the peculiar permanence of a specific temporal parenthesis in Tunisia's recent history – the days between the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, considered the beginning of the Tunisian revolution, and the ousting of Tunisia's president on 14 January 2011 and immediate aftermath. I draw on the experience of this period of young men from a working class suburb of Tunis who took to the streets during these days of revolution and participated – together with general contestations in the capital – in different acts of violent dissent in the suburbs, including riots against local police forces, resistance to counter-revolutionary currents, and collective neighbourhood vigilance. Critically addressing the link often drawn by commentators between the categories ‘Arab youth’ and ‘Arab Spring’, I focus on the ways in which the ‘days of revolution’ in Tunisia at once shape local conceptions of ‘youth’ and ‘being young’ and transcend generational temporalities by acquiring a peculiar kind of permanence within the subject.

7) **Christoph H. Schwarz** (Philipps-University Marburg), *Waithood or Precariousness? Biographical Trajectories of Unemployed Graduate Activists in Morocco*

An important motive for the uprisings that shook the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 was, according to many authors, a particular form of social exclusion of the young that has recently been discussed under the term waithood: due to a demographic ‘youth bulge’, in combination with the highest youth unemployment rates worldwide and a particular political economy of marriage (Singerman 2007), young adults are suffering the psycho-social consequences of a stalled transition to adulthood. Morocco, however, offers a particularly interesting case of how young adults who have actively been translating unemployment into political protest before and after 2011: after the country’s public sector job market was drastically rolled back in the early 1990s, young unemployed university graduates were the first worldwide to set up a syndicate of unemployed university graduates that would regularly protest in front of the parliament and demand public sector jobs. Within a couple of years, a certain political ritual evolved: when protests grew stronger, the government, drawing on repression as well as co-optation, would regularly negotiate with the protesters and directly employ some of them in the public sector. The movement’s coordinators would in turn monitor their members in order to make sure that only those were given a job who regularly and actively participated in the protests (Emperador 2007, 2012). This type of ‘unpolitical mobilization’ and its particular moral economy has hardly been taken into account in debates on social exclusion and citizenship of young adults in MENA societies. Based on life story interviews with diplômés chômeurs activists conducted in 2014 and 2015, this paper discusses in how far waithood is an adequate analytical concept to reconstruct the psycho-social suffering that results from unemployment in the Moroccan context, and which aspects can be better analyzed as precariousness – and even concomitant social acceleration.