

Youth, Revolt, Recognition

The Young Generation during and after the “Arab Spring”

Edited by Isabel Schäfer



Introduction

by Isabel Schäfer

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Introduction

Despite the decisive role and active participation of the young generation in the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, and in particular in those countries, where the old regimes were overthrown (Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya), it remains underrepresented in the new political (dis)orders, political institutions, political parties and decision-making processes of these countries. In other countries in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (e.g. in Morocco, Algeria and Jordan) young people do not feel sufficiently represented or recognised either and opportunities for political participation often remain limited. At the same time, the future and the perspectives of this young generation will be decisive for the future of the on-going transition processes in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. Youth unemployment in the MENA countries oscillates between 20% and 35%, in some regions it has reached 40% - and the labour markets are unable to absorb the high numbers of young job seekers. Although this is a highly skilled generation, with many possessing an academic education and university degrees, their qualifications are often not adapted to the needs and challenges of the rapidly changing labour markets and globalized economies (e.g. in terms of technology and innovation), be it in the public or in the private sector. In addition to the political and demographic challenges, and the difficulties in integrating into the labour markets, this young generation faces numerous further obstacles within society.

The objective of this edited volume is to analyse - from a political science, interdisciplinary and comparative perspective - old and new forms of political participation, mobilization and protest, as well as the challenges currently facing young people in the political and social systems in different Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Case studies from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Turkey will present the regional and transnational character of these protest movements. Many of the young “revolutionaries” have since retreated from politics, dissatisfied at the developments that followed the “revolutions” of 2011. But this does not mean that they are apolitical or disinterested in politics and society. They are looking for other places, other forms and means to express their displeasure over inequality, injustice, the lack of professional opportunities and the resulting lack of prospects in their private lives (*waithood*): Be it in social movements, civil society organisations and initiatives, in street art and culture, or on the internet. Be it in personal retreat, drug consumption, increasing religious fervour, quietist (moderate) Salafism, or, in extreme cases, radical Salafism (e.g. jihadi fighter in Syria). Others in turn, who do not see a future for themselves in their own countries, are waiting, bored, for a better life elsewhere and are literally leaning against the walls (*hittistes*), or they decide to emigrate (*harraga*). Limited mobility and restrictive migration policies rather increase the desire for freedom and mobility. Here, the frustration of an entire generation at the unattainability of alternative paths of life, or the freedom to move to other places becomes visible – including the related dreams, projections, imaginations and physical dangers of migration.

The “Arab Spring” of 2011 raised many hopes for a generational change, a replacement of old entrenched power structures, for a fundamental transformation and change of political structures, and even for a social revolution, opening up new opportunities and alternatives for the young generation. Since the Arab Spring, pessimists and neoconservatives have been trying to minimise or

negate the strong potential of the 2011 revolts. The political situation in the different Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries has developed very differently since then: in Libya and Syria civil wars have broken out, in Egypt an authoritarian backlash has taken place, in Tunisia, a more or less peaceful and democratic transition process brought 88-year-old president Beji Caid Essebsi to power. However, the frustration and protest potential of the young generation continues to exist. However, within the societies of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region, the ruptures, frictions and conflicts between generations are very diverse and multifaceted. This publication approaches the youth and revolt phenomenon in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean area from different angles and looks for answers to the overarching questions: Where have the young “revolutionaries” of 2011 gone? Were all their hopes for change, justice, social equality and freedom deceived or has something changed for the positive after all? Does the great international visibility in 2011 of young people in the streets, on social media and in the civil society sector contrast with little political participation and representation? Which ways out and what kind of means of expression do young people look for, in order to vent their anger and displeasure? The different contributions provide some insights into the current situation of the young generation in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries during and after “the Arab Spring”, by approaching these issues from different thematic perspectives, including qualitative case studies, partially based on field research on the ground.

In Part I, *Valeska Henze* provides a theoretical overview of the notion of youth (in general) - a contested analytical category in social sciences. The contribution gives indications which are also valuable for the analysis of youth in a North African or Middle Eastern context, for instance with regard to the mechanisms of normative expectations of society on youth, the attribution of the “hero” role, youth as a necessary component in the social system, and the structural and institutional restrictions in the integration process of youth into adult society. In this publication “youth” is, of course, not understood as a monolithic bloc or homogenous unit, but rather as a process, as a phase of transition between childhood and adulthood, as many forms of youth with many faces and facets. This is within the context of Asaf Bayat’s concept of “youthfulness”, which means a disposition of attitudes, behaviour and knowledge that are associated with “being young”. Each article in this publication approaches “youth” and its meaning from a different theoretical angle, but they all share the common objective to explore „what it means to be young“ in different societal contexts today around the Mediterranean sea, in particular in the context of the uprisings of 2011 and after.

Part II focuses on the political dimension. *Carolina Silveira* considers youth in its role as political actor in Tunisia, analyses questions of political participation in the Tunisian transition process, and the underrepresentation of “young revolutionaries” in the newly founded political parties and in the wider political landscape. *Anna Lührmann* looks at the situation of the young generation in the upheavals in Libya, under the aspects of youth political participation, forms of mobilization, self organisation and continued exclusion from the newly established political structures, which were already dissolved again in 2014. *Charlotte Biegler-König* asks whether or why political Islam represents an alternative political society and way of life for young people in search for their identities. By analysing examples from the Egyptian and Tunisian transition processes, her contribution examines the causes of the new wave of religiosity among young people, and the

attractiveness of Islamist parties or Salafist groupings for young people. *Daniel Farrell* explores the role of art in the protest movements in the context of the Egyptian revolution. Hereby he looks in particular at street art, artistic protest actions, and the use of artistic creativity for political activism as well as the emergence of new forms of expression. *Gözde Böcu* considers the protest movement in Turkey and the role of the “Gezi-Generation”. Situated in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey is directly concerned by the developments in the neighbouring Arab states, as the current Syria-Iraq-IS conflict shows. The political constellation in Turkey differs from the situations in the neighbouring states, marked by uprisings, civil wars or failing state structures. But the forms and objectives of the protests, or the slogans and means of the young generation render visible certain parallels. The protests of the Gezi Generation were part of a larger transnational protest dynamic, which started in Tunisia in 2011, and flamed up later on in different places around the Mediterranean Sea.

In Part III, which focuses on the socio-economic dimension, in terms of migration and unemployment, *Inken Bartels* analyses changes in the migration politics of Tunisia after the Tunisian revolution. Emigration is a sort of outlet for many young people who see few prospects in their own countries and who dream of a better life in Europe. In parallel to the increasing emigration from the country itself, Tunisia faces increasing immigration pressures, especially from Libya since 2011, but also by continued transit migration from Sub-Saharan Africa. Outside of the governmental migration policies, civil society organisations and actors are increasingly committed in this sector - some of these organisations or initiatives have been founded by young activists. *Bachir Hamdouch* explores recent changes in the situation of migration in Morocco, and observes three major tendencies: a decrease in Moroccan emigration towards Europe, increasing return migration towards Morocco (especially by highly skilled young graduates), and increasing immigration to Morocco from Sub-Saharan Africa. These developments have also had an impact on the changing profiles of Moroccan emigrants, including an increasing proportion of (young) female migrants and higher education levels. Emigration remains an important economic and social alternative option for young people in Morocco; Moroccan migration policies are currently being redefined. *Wai Mun Hong* addresses the difficulties faced by young people in accessing and integrating into the MENA labour markets. Her statistical analysis of youth unemployment, youth labour force, demography, human development and educational systems problematizes the current challenges and obstacles of the young generation, in particular of young educated graduates.

The different contributions to this publication that all express the personal opinions of the authors show how relevant the issue of youth in the Mediterranean area remains. Discontent and protest potential still exists in many countries in North Africa and in the Middle East. How this protest potential will develop is open, and will depend on different social, economic and political factors, as well as on the upcoming decisions made by the old and new political classes. The causes for the perceived and real inequality, injustice and exclusion of youth in the MENA region are multiple and diverse and need further social science analysis.

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