

Locally-Rooted Youth and Social Movements in the Southern Mediterranean

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The social uprisings across the Arab region were to be anticipated, according to Aissa Khadri. Driven by youth, they emerged as a natural result of the state of the economy and labour market, which could not accommodate the large groups of highly qualified graduates with insufficient work opportunities and new needs of social emancipation. What characterises many of these movements, the author argues, is the way they are rooted locally, less ideological in their nature, and directed to the solution of specific issues.

Social movements that affected the southern countries of the Mediterranean did not appear as a thunderbolt in a serene sky. They are part of a long-term perspective with new social categories at the forefront of the scene which were ignored because of the failures of nationalist developmentalism. These social movements are driven by youth, who are the central part of these societies and have benefited since the independence from the growth, consolidation and diversification of the educational system, but who have not harvested fruit because of the weakness of their insertion in the labour market with certifications of no value. These movements reveal new modes of action, new practices and new representations that these social groups have developed in relation to their societies, authorities, to others and generally to the work, to the body and to the future. These new practices and representations based, for the majority of these young people, on feelings of exclusion, injustice, lack of recognition manifested in a more or less assertive and violent way in a context of inequality emphasised by the effect of structural economic crises and unstable adaptation of national economies to unequal globalisation.

Diversity in education and social media patterns

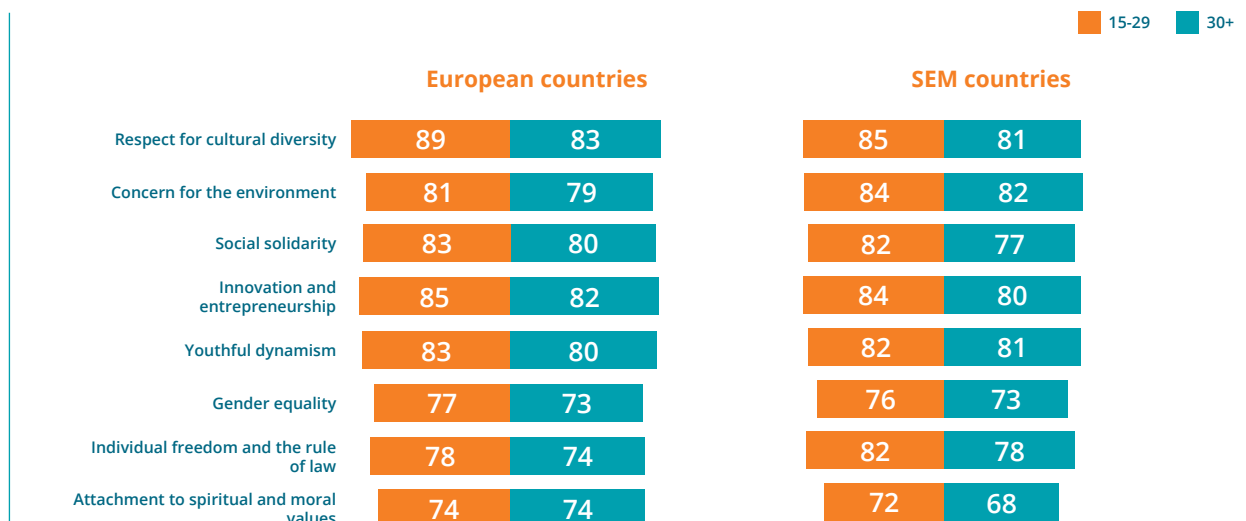
The expansion of schooling is to be credited to the public policies of post-colonial states but it has also led to non mastered effects. These include the massification of education taking place in a context where social hierarchy impacts on recruitment and teaching processes, the ideologisation of content and methods of education, and the unstable economic and social systems themselves, with low productivity. In the public sphere, this contributed to the emergence of an increasing number of cohorts of unemployed graduates and people with low qualifications and widely indoctrinated. If these features can be, in a parallel development perspective identified for all southern countries of the Mediterranean, it is nevertheless important to note that this trend has grown asynchronously and its rhythms as well as its forms have varied from one country to another, which explains

the different modes of entry of these social categories into the protests and the social movements.

We observe that the Algerian and even more the Libyan youth, in contrast to those of Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, are more fragmented and less made aware during their academic path. Thus it is noted that contrary to countries such as Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt who knew pretty early the development of a high level private or semi-public education system open internationally which offered to middle class and upper working-class children an alternative to both public mass and asphyxiated education and to studying abroad which was becoming more and more inaccessible. Algeria came late, and with timid and indecisive attempts to deinstitutionalise universities in which student bodies are framed by clientelist unions. This did not allow the affirmation of young elites establishing new ways of social and political participation. At the same time, Libya remained closed to any interrelation with universities in the North Mediterranean.

Similarly, access to modern means of exchange and dissemination marks a difference between these countries. Algeria and Libya are more lagging behind in terms of access. Although the penetration of Facebook in Algeria has increased in recent years, it remains far behind that of its neighbors, Morocco and Tunisia. The dynamism of the '20 February movement' in Morocco is explained largely by the youth-led development of the Facebook network. This movement managed to mobilise on the same day across thirty cities in Morocco thousands of protesters through social media. Similarly in Egypt are the middle-class children educated in private universities and abroad who are leading the social movements. Certainly in Egypt, modern means of communication have played an important role in the mobilisation process. Bloggers like Tamer Mabrouk, Wael Abbas 'Affendi' social networks like 'We are all Khaled Said' have anticipated, raised awareness, participated and fed the protest movements. At the same time, Egyptian 'breaks' had their basis in the contradictions at the core

Chart 7.1
What society can gain from the UfM by age group



Survey Question: Your country, with other European countries and the countries on the southern and eastern shore of the Mediterranean, has decided to establish closer political, economic and cultural exchanges, within a project called 'Union for the Mediterranean'. Which of these aspects do you think your society can gain from such a shared project? **Base:** % of all respondents of the sum of 'Definitely' and 'Maybe'; by age group (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

of Egyptian society which allowed the emergence of new actors, gathering through these new structures and responding to the contemporary logic of the new social dynamics.

Breaking with the 'classic' modes of protest and political action, through movements such as 'Kifaya' or the one of the Moroccan and Tunisian bloggers in the earlier days, these young people mobilised through modern means of communication, are largely disconnected from political affiliations and more pragmatic. They follow a variety of new opposition modalities closer to underlying social demands, focus more on the local, regional and national level and appear further and less interested in the global geopolitical and ideologically-driven issues which led the protests of their elders. This raises the question of articulation of these youth protests with the categories that may support and give them meaning to pass to a more qualitative level. The translation of the local into the national occurs in Tunisia and Egypt through the backing of the intelligentsia and those left out by the State. In Algeria and Libya these intelligentsias remain largely stapled to the State, and the social movements have moved from the national to the local. As a matter of fact, the riots and social movements anticipatory of the 2011 winter events were mainly locally rooted and directed by more politicised vanguard as ATTAC Morocco in Sidi Ifni and a working-class lead at Rdeyef in Tunisia. Thus in Tunisia protests developed in connection to a labour movement locally rooted and not entirely delegitimised, and, in Morocco, the emergence of labour unions, influenced by migrants-related associative life,

has allowed the sustainability of the grass-root opposition of parts of the working class and intellectual intelligentsia. In Algeria, where the combined effect of the royalties, subservient unions, the weakness of associations, fractures between the social basis and a manipulated and partly appointed intelligentsia are sharper. Protests thus appear unbridled and since '88, they take the form of riot, reactive demonstrations, not articulated in meaningful groups. This demonstrates a double blockage: blockage in the assertion in the political arena of a less 'ideological' and more 'pragmatic' youth, and blockage on the other hand in the process of individuation, where individuals are deprived of opportunities to give meaning to their social life, to build, to feel, to assert themselves, to be recognized as such.

Youth new practices, new representations, new commitments.

Actually, protests could take a qualitative leap only through the support of categories with high socio-cultural capital. If we put in perspective the importance of social networks, we can ultimately identify the causes and reasons for civic engagement in the modes of socialisation and the inclinations of the actors rather than in their often very publicised technical tools. It is thus important to return to the cultural matrix which plays a determining role in the social use of new media and communication technologies, and thereby relativise the role of the latter in the process of social change in the long-term. In this way, without getting carried away by what is falsely identified as a 'democratic spring',

we can observe the low weight of these small active minorities, these swallows, and the small signs of hope that these elites send.

Undoubtedly youth is not a homogeneous category and differences within it should be made: rural youth, those excluded from the education system, youth of the middle classes, young women and young men, unemployed youth, young students, young people who are active in the informal sector and those who create their own business all these groups relate to different social environment. Yet they have a common generational mark, participating in the same generational moment and revealing something common in their relationship to the world and the future. They are part of the same generational time that breaks with the past, which is here defined as nationalism in its various forms, including national-developmental, Arab nationalism, Arab-Islamic, and Islamic nationalism. They carry and express new ways of relating to politics, to the increased impoverishment of large segments of societies, to criminality, and to the excesses of the financialisation of the world today, and they present other methods for citizen participation that are at odds with the 'traditional' ways of doing politics and of existing, which have availed so far.

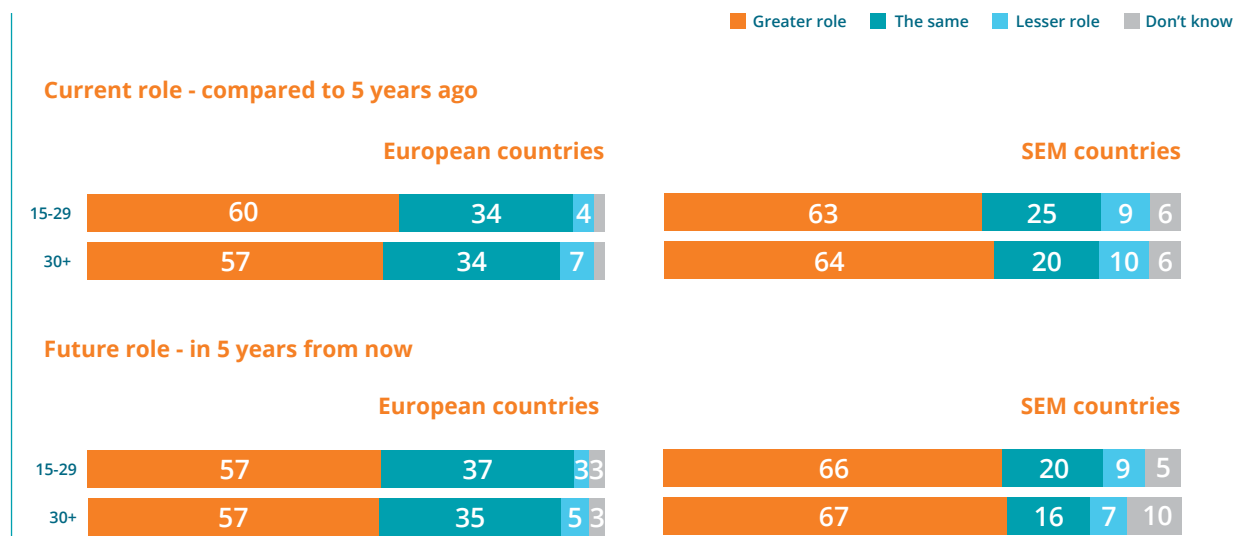
Here we can state, without forcing history, that the death of Bouazizi was the founding event which translated the refusal and was the breaking point of a young generation, which, supported by modern communication and media means and through new practices codes and new rites, is marching towards its emancipation from national affiliations, and finding a place in the world or for certain

categories, in another space, the Edenic city to find here and now.

We are not talking anymore of students whose demonstrations developed on a political basis all throughout the decades of the sixties and the eighties. The youth of today are more pragmatic, less ideological, and more utilitarian. The Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll shows that young people interviewed put forward the economic dimension as the most important dimension in Euro-Mediterranean relations, as well as innovation and entrepreneurship as activities and important aspects to develop internally and in the dealings with other countries (reference to Chart 7.1).

The economy and business appear to be the main themes that stimulate their interest and characterise their exchange. Pragmatic, they do not deny that conflicts are an important issue to consider but they are optimistic and think that the Euro-Mediterranean relations have somewhat improved. Open to the world and the others they give more prominence to women and they envisage a greater for them in the participation of the life of the city. We should consider that we are referring to categories and largely feminised movements in which young women assert themselves as actors in their own right (Chart 7.2). Young people are probably the most radical in their engagement in the public sphere and social networks since they put forward, as primary requirements, freedom of speech, the expression and realisation of elections free. Distant from the political parties, they prefer individual action as a guarantor of political commitment. Thus young people appear in collision with state nationalism.

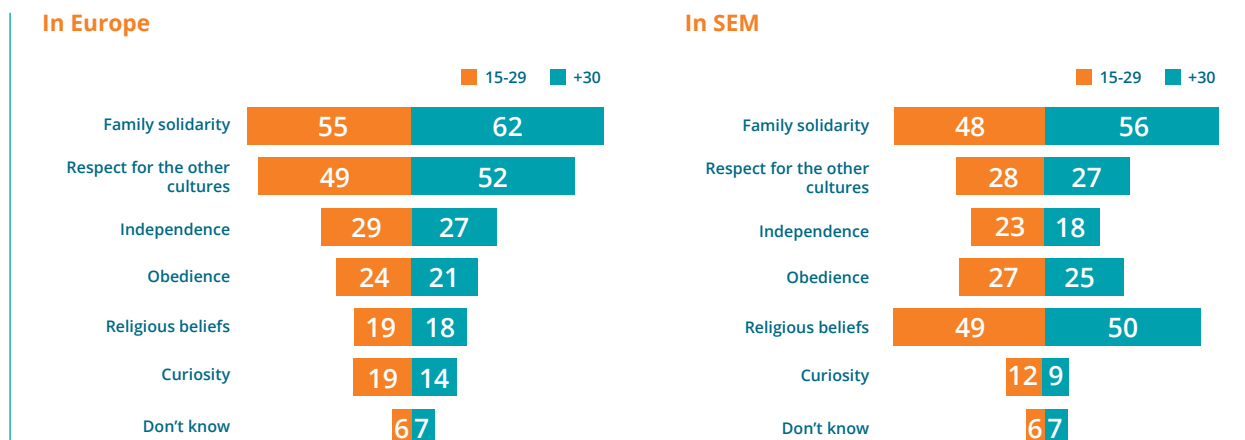
Chart 7.2
Women's role in society by age group



Survey Question: Do you think that women in your society today play a greater role, the same, or lesser role than they did 5 years ago? **Base:** % of all respondents by socio-demographic; sby age group (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

Chart 7.3

Most important values to respondents when bringing up their children by age group



Survey Question: In bringing up their children, parents in different societies may place different emphasis on different values. Assuming that we limit ourselves to six values only, I'd like to know which one of these six would you say is most important when raising children? **Base:** % of all respondents, % of sum of 'Most important' and 'Second most important' by regions. (© ALF/Gallup Opinion Poll 2012).

Belonging to their time and society, their references are no longer exclusively national, they dream of another space, they are in search of dignity for themselves and others, of finding a meaning to their lives, of building, of gaining recognition of facing authoritarianism, as free individuals (Chart 7.3).

The public space and social networking offer ways for a large part of young people to affirm and express freedom of expression through a choice of styles, from subversive humour, to provocation, denunciation and self-reporting as new forms of expression, which are at odds with traditional communication. We find examples such as the 'Non-Fasters', 'Fataras' or 'Massayminch', which call for breaking the fast during the day in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, or the 'public kiss' as a reaction to the prohibitions and fatwas of traditionalists and fundamentalists, or the emergence of new issues related to the private sphere of sexuality (i.e. the facebook page 'ZAK' of the Algerian homosexual or virtual gay pride in the Maghreb, or the phenomenon of 'Harlem Sheke' in Egypt and Tunisia).

These are also ways that affirm the emergence of the individual hitherto standardised, excluded and grouped. These actions also mark the questioning of the relationship to authority as illustrated by the example of the young Amina in Tunisia. Under unstable circumstance, the 'civic pact' for the affirmation of youth and women as agents of change puts on top of the social struggles agenda those conditions that can give meaning to the requirements of freedom and participation: the status and role of the individual and his responsibility.

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