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Youth in- and Out-of-Work in Arab Mediterranean Countries *

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Abstracts

This paper presents evidence from quantitative surveys in 2015-16, using a fully structured and standardized questionnaire, among nationally representative samples of 15-29 year olds in five Arab Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia). We also use complementary evidence from in-depth interviews with 29 individuals from three contrasting regions in each of the five countries. The analysis disaggregates unemployment, employment and young people. It inserts this evidence into a youth transitions paradigm, and thereby shows how and why the combination of governments' neo-liberal social and economic policies and the region's Arabic and Islamic culture have prevented the demographic surge (the expansion of youth cohorts in the early 21st century) creating crises in the lives of majorities of the region's young people, or a socio-economic disaster.

KeyWords: Arab Mediterranean countries, education, employment, labour markets, unemployment, youth, youth transitions.

Introduction

Aims

The aims of this paper are to define more accurately than hitherto the entry into employment problems currently encountered by young people in Arab Mediterranean countries, to specify which young people encounter which problems, and how these problems are experienced and addressed by those directly affected.

Arab Mediterranean Youth in the Labour Market

There is a persistent tone of impending disaster in the English language literature on youth throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Meanwhile, daily life goes on throughout the region, hardly perturbed long after the Arab Spring of 2011.Youth continue to be presented as angry, frustrated and suffering a sense of betrayal, requiring only another fuse to be lit before exploding into the international spotlight once more (see Backeberg and

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Tholen, 2017; Cole, 2014; Noueihed and Warren, 2013). Yet children continue to grow into adults who create new child-rearing households.

The sources of Arab Mediterranean youth's discontents alleged by Western authors are not confined to difficulties encountered on entering the labour market. These authors also draw attention to the region's democratic deficits, young people's limited opportunities to participatein politics, the quality of education in the region, and the price of housing which makes it impossible for young men to establish new family households and denies young women a pool of potential husbands (Dhillonet al, 2009; and see Enneli and Enneli, 2017 for comparable evidence from Turkey). However, it is the countries' economies and labour markets to which the sources of young people's grievances are invariably traced. Local and international researchers agree that there are not enough jobs, and too many of the jobs that young people can access are poor quality (seeAssad and Baroum, 2009; Boughzala, 2015; Chabaan, 2009; Hammounda, 2010; Honwana, 2013; Osman, 2012).

In the following passages we present evidence from surveys of nationally representative samples of young people (aged 15-29), complemented by qualitative fieldwork, in five Arab Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia). Libya and Syria would have been included in the research had not conditions at the time made systematic fieldwork impossible. We disaggregate youth, and we disaggregate places, and identify the specific labour market problems faced by different socio-demographic groups and, especially important, how these problems are experienced and responded to by the young people. The main difference between our own and earlier studies is that the age range that our evidence scans (15-29) enables our evidence to be inserted into a youth transitions paradigm. This allows us not only to identify the obstacles confronted by different groups of young people, but also how these obstacles are addressed, and the eventual outcomes. We can thereby show why widespread difficulties do not become long-term crises for either most young people and their families or their wider societies. We do not find young people's lives in crisis. For present purposes a crisis would be an intolerable situation from which the individuals could envisage no escape.

Our evidence also de-mystifies the Arab-Islamic region. We find no features of Arab Mediterranean youth labour markets that have not been encountered in Western countries. Links between family backgrounds, educational attainments and labour market outcomes are much the same as in the West. Moreover, established Western social science concepts and methods, which worked to explain changes in youth transitions in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 (Gebel and Noelke, 2011;Kovacheva, 2001; Kuhar and Reiter, 2012; Roberts and Fagan, 1999),prove fit for the purpose of investigating Arab Mediterranean young people's circumstances and their typical responses.

Methods

Our new evidence is from research in 2015-2016 which included surveys of nationally representative samples of approximately 2000 15-29 year olds in each of five Arab Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon and Tunisia). These surveys were overseen by local social science partners who contracted this work to survey organizations. Respondents were members of the target age group who were resident in representative samples of households. All respondents were interviewed at home, by same sex interviewers, using a standardized questionnaire which was available in English, French

and Arabic. In Lebanon, refugees from the war in neighboring Syria, who were mostly living in camps, estimated at around 1.25 million in 2015-16, approximately a fifth of the country's population, were not included in the survey.

The interviews included questions about each respondent's family background (parents' education and occupations),and the respondents' own education, and labour market careers if they had completed their education. Whether respondents were married, 'in a relationship' or single, and whether they were living with their parents or elsewhere, were also recorded. There were further questions about uses of free time, and religious and political opinions and activities. However, in the following passages we focus on respondents' experiences during their transitions from education into their countries' labour markets. Employers, the self-employed, employees, apprentices and family workers were asked about their monthly incomes. Answers in the local currencies were subsequently converted into € at purchasing power parity (ppp). Individuals without earned incomes were asked about their sources of money for personal spending.

The quantitative surveys were accompanied by qualitative fieldwork, organized by the local research partners, in three contrasting regions in each of the five countries. There were individual depth interviews in which fieldworkers gathered life stories and narratives which described respondents' everyday lives and views on selected issues, and also focus groups and focused ethnographies, but here we draw solely from the 29 individual interviews that were conducted. Unlike in the quantitative surveys, the interviewees cannot be treated as representative of any wider populations. In order to become involved in the qualitative fieldwork young people had to be involved in some out-of-home activity. Married individuals were under-represented, and higher education students and graduates were over-represented. However, our quantitative evidence enables us to set the individual stories of all respondents in their national, regional and socio-demographic contexts, and to illustrate the young lives that are more crudely signaled in the quantitative evidence.

Findings

We proceed below by presenting our evidence on movements with age out of education into different types of earning, unemployment and inactivity (in the labour market). We focus first on unemployment rates, then the quality of the jobs held at the time of the survey, and the relationships between the samples' education and their labour market biographies. We disaggregate jobs, young people and places, and specify which groups of young people are most likely to experience impediments during their education-to-work transitions, how they respond, and we discuss the likely long-term implications, specifically whether conditions in the countries' youth labour markets justify proclamations of crisis.

Unemployment

Unemployment is a risk faced by labour market entrants throughout most of the present-day world. Our surveys show that rates of youth unemployment varied between the Arab Mediterranean countries, then differed by gender and educational attainments. However, the overall unemployment rates were not particularly high by current global and European standards.

Table1: Positions vis-a-vis the labour market in age groups (all countries) a.Males

	15-19 %	20-24 %	25-29 %
Education	69	35	7
Employer	<1	2	5
Self-employed	2	7	14
Employee	13	27	47
Apprentice	2	1	2
Family worker	3	3	3
Unemployed	4	11	14
Inactive	8	15	9
N =	1826	1884	1566

a. Females

	15-19 %	20-24 %	25-29 %
Education	74	33	5
Employer	<1	<1	1
Self-employed	1	2	4
Employee	3	10	22
Apprentice	<1	1	1
Family worker	1	1	2
Unemployed	2	9	10
Inactive	18	43	55
N =	1526	1541	1517

Table1 portrays males' and females' movements with age out of education, into employment (employers, self-employed, employees, apprentices and family workers), and into unemployment and economic inactivity. The unemployment figures use the International Labour Office definition. Those concerned had not worked during the last seven days and were prepared to start work more-or-less immediately if offered suitable employment.On this definition, in the 25-29 age group, by when most of the respondents had completed their education, 14 percent of all males and 10 percent of all females were unemployed. The Arab-Mediterranean region is distinctive in world terms not in its high rates of youth unemployment but in its low rates of employment, which are due to low rates of labour force participation, specifically by women (see also Roudi, 2011). Among women in Arab-Islamic countries, inactivity rates are inflated by cultural reservations or outright resistance to women's employment outside the family (CAWTAR, 2017). Rather than the countries' demographic surge (the expansion of youth age groups in the early 21st century) becoming a labour force disaster (see Population Council, 1998, 2011), our inference is that Arab–Islamic culture (which keeps many young women inactive)and the weak (if any) regulation of labour markets (see below)have enabled the countries to cap their youth unemployment rates at moderate or low levels. Some Western countries' labour markets have converged with those in the Arab Mediterranean region when a preferred solution to the spread of unemployment has been to deregulate labour markets and allow the creation of swaths of poor quality jobs. 'Precarious' has become a preferred, though somewhat misleading,

umbrella term for such jobs which may be part-time, temporary or low paid (Standing, 2011). Survival self-employment is another widespread form of precarious work in the Global North (see Inman, 2014; MacDonald, 1996; Smeaton, 2003; Trade Union Congress, 2013), just as it is in Arab Mediterranean lands.

Among 25-29 year olds, the total employment rate (employers, self-employed, employees, apprentices and family workers) was lowest in Tunisia (just 36 percent), and this country had the highest proportion who were unemployed (29 percent). Egypt had the highest proportion (41 percent), mainly young women, who were inactive. Lebanon proved the exceptional case among the five countries. It had the highest proportion of 25-29 year olds who were in some form of employment (67 percent), and the lowest proportions who were unemployed (three percent) and inactive (26 percent). The main differences between urban and rural locations were among young women. There were only minor differences between the positions in the labour market of urban and rural 25-29 year old males. Among young women there were stark differences: 30 percent were employees in urban areas but just 11 percent in rural locations, while 47 percent and 66 percent respectively were inactive.

Before proceeding we should note that the unemployed, whatever the proportion in an age group or any other socio-demographic group, need to be disaggregated. Some youth unemployment is 'transitional'; an episode between completing education and finding a job. Sometimes unemployment becomes 'recurrent' in chequered labour market careers in which short-lived jobs are separated by spells of unemployment. Our interviews offered several examples of chequered careers.

Wajdi, age 23, lived in Tunis and was currently unemployed. He had been expelled from high school due to an argument with one of his teachers during the baccalaureate exams. Since he quit his studies, Wajdihad worked in several companies, but various circumstances had obliged him to leave. He was hired following an interview for a position in a call centre. Fifteen days later he abandoned thejob. He could not endure the work. Later on he worked for the head office of a telephone operating company. He took part in inspections which involved criss-crossing Tunisia's entire national territory in order to check the premises of local phone operators. He abandoned this job when he learnt that the agency delayed the payment of its agents or paid them in instalments in a way that meant that they could not benefit fully from their salaries. Later he worked as a receptionist for a few months in a Carthage amusement park, then was dismissed due to a violent dispute with another employee, the son of a highly ranked official in the park.

Asma was a 22 year old female, living with her family in Oran, the second largest city in Algeria, population 1.5 million, located on the North-West coast. Asma did not complete secondary school. *'I started work in a factory. I worked for one year and I found that the work was very tiring. I stopped and I went back to school, I was between work and studies. I had problems at home. My mother was sick so I went back to work because of money. I worked as a saleswoman in a clothing store downtown but far from where I live: no transport, so in winter I got home at 21.00. It was too much. Now I'm training in hairdressing. I would love to open my own salon.'*

Then there is long-term unemployment. The proportions of 25-29 year olds who were inactive or unemployed at the time of the surveys, who had never worked but still wanted to work (thereby indicating that they were not reconciled to joblessness), were just 7.8 percent among the males and 4.8 percent among the females.

Job Quality

Like unemployment, employment needs to be disaggregated. Regulated employment with a written contract is scarce in Arab Mediterranean countries outside the public sectors and large private corporations such as banks and telecommunication firms. Most private sector employment is informal (World Bank, 2014). Informal employment is normal, and not just for beginning workers. Most young people cannot hope to progress into 'quality jobs' where employees have written contracts of indefinite duration and decent pay by local standards. There are simply not enough such jobs.

The main contrast in job quality in Arab Mediterranean countries is between the public sector where most employment is formal, with a written contract, and private businesses, typically small and medium-sized, where most employment is informal. Within our samples, those employed in their countries' public sectors were by far the more likely to have written contracts of employment (77 percent against 30 percent) and to be insured in their countries' state social security systems (71 percent against 26 percent). Also, private sector employees worked more hours for less pay than their public sector counterparts. Public sector employees normally worked eight hours a day, five days a week. In the private sector an informal job would normally involve being at work eight hours a day, six days a week, and longer if required, not necessarily for extra pay. On farms individuals of any age could be hired as day labourers during planting and harvesting seasons. They would be employed one month then unemployed in the next.

Mona, a 29 year old female graduate was living in the Imbaba district of Cairo. Her mother's views capture the perceived benefits of public sector employment. Mona had a bachelor degree in science and a diploma in statistics. Shehad never been employed or even searched for work, but was waiting for marriage to get her out of the house and introduce her to a new life. Mona said that, *'Anyone who comes to propose and ask to marry me, the first question my mom asks is whether he is employed in the public sector or not. If he is, he can be considered and we can start thinking. If he is very rich and doesn't have a public sector job, she does not accept him. My mom thinks that a public sector employee has a fixed wage at the end of each month regardless of any circumstances. Even if he borrows off his father and mother, he still knows that there is a fixed amount coming every month. If anything happens to him and he cannot work anymore, there will be some type of pension and social security that will sustain us.'*

Self-employment is a frequent resort of young people who are dissatisfied with the available jobs. Sobhy, a 28 year old Egyptian man, lived in Kafr El-Sheikh, a city 134 kilometers north of Cairo in the Nile Delta. Sobhy had graduated with a degree in social science in 2008. He had also just finished a one year diploma in education. These qualifications had not assisted Sobhy's job hunting. He had therefore become a business owner, not an employee: he had created a chicken farm in a village close to his home following the failure of a fish farm in Sinai. Discussing his own experience in the labour market, Sobhy stressed that he had applied many times for public sector jobs but had consistently failed to be hired.

Zidane was an unemployed 23 year old male who lived with his family in Akbou, a village in Algeria's Oran region. *'There is no problem getting a job. This is due to our closeness to an industrial area. This region does not suffer from a lack of job opportunities. The problem is*

*that the kind of job one can get here is low paid.'*Job availability varies from place to place. In cities there are always jobs that can be sought, but this is not the case in rural areas.

Informal employment is not always low paid, and the jobs can last indefinitely, but employees never have the security of written contracts or the benefits of state social security. Aymen, a 26 year old male student from Zanouch, a small village 30 kilometers from Gafsa (population 111,000), which is the main city in Tunisia's mining region, had experience of a mixture of good and bad informal jobs. He had been taking holiday jobs on construction sites in Sousse, in Libya and on Djerba Island (off Tunisia's coast) since age 15. He had also worked as a waiter but decided against this work because there were always problems with revenue at the end of a day. On construction sites he could earn €25-€30 a day.

Informal employment can be for a day, a week, a month or for an indefinite period. Young people can build progressive careers in informal jobs. Rashid, a 30 year old male, is an example, and his experiences are worth reporting in detail, using Rashid's own words, because they highlight lows and highs of work in the region's informal economies. Rashid was living in Ain Taoujdate, a small rural town in Morocco (population 22,000), midway between Fez and Meknes. *'At the age of 13 I quit school.'* Rashid explained that when he quit school he had already mastered the work assisting his father in a cobbler's shop. *'My work consisted of helping the artisan. I earned €7 to €10 on a good day. I worked there for six years but then the work became irregular*.' Rashid felt the need to find another job. During this period Rashid was visiting Ain Taoujdate from time to time, where some of his family members lived. So he came to live in Ain Taoujdate and started to work at the *Mouqef,* a gathering place where labourers are picked up for a day's work. His cousins were already working at the *Mouqef*and Rashid started to work with them. He recalls his first working day well. *'The first day my cousins woke me at five o'clock in the morning. We were four young men: my two cousins, one of their friends and myself. While walking from our house to the Mouqef, I wondered about the work and how I was going to do it. When the client arrived at the Mouqef my cousins told the client that I would join them. We left in a Mercedes-Benz 207. My cousins told the client that it was my first day of work, and he replied that he would find an easy job for me. I carried the boxes in which the peaches were stored. We started at seven o'clock in the morning and we finished at 12:30. I earned €7. I was happy and took some peaches home.'*

When interviewed Rashid had been working for 14 years in the agricultural sector. He explained that people now trusted him since each year he had worked with the same farmers. He usually worked with four farmers. Because of his professional network he sometimes did not have to go to the *Mouqef* to find a job. *'Now people call me and inform me that a certain job needs to be done.'* Rashid's professional reputation had created trust among farmers who gradually gave him more responsibility and provided him with the opportunity to upgrade his professional status. *'I used to be a simple labourer, then four years ago I became a cabran (gangmaster). Not everyone can become a cabran and usually the profession is filled by men.'* To become a *cabran,* Rashid explained that you needed to be trustworthy. In informal economies employee security is based on trust, not written, legally binding contracts. Rashid explained how he received payments which he had to distribute to the labourers and, *'As the labourers don't know where to find me, I can easily not pay them. But I have never done anything like that. Nobody has ever complained to a farmer about me.'* Since he had been working for many years in the sector he had developed a certain knowhow and a kind of expertise. He knew the different specialities of

the labourers and which tasks to give to whom. *'To pack the peaches I hire female wageworkers. I choose the women who are familiar with this task.'*
Rashid explained that the last job that he completed was a week ago and involved planting onions. The plants were brought from the nursery and he was in charge of ensuring that the onions were well planted at field level. This activity took five weeks. He relied on approximately 30 wageworkers (depending on the transport facilities and labour needed each day). Some farmers had their own transport, but on other occasions Rashid had to rent a car (€4 a day). Rashid explained that he preferred to hire labourers from Ain Taoujdate because he knew them. Young men and women wageworkers could work together, yet Rashid usually preferred to work with young men, *'Because for this activity men are tougher'*. Yet for some activities Rashid preferred to work with young women because, *'They are more docile than young men'*. He gave the following example to illustrate the genders' different abilities. *'For planting onions, the lines should not exceed 50 metres. The young women only do four lines, but they respect the distance between the different plants. The men may plant more lines, but they are often not done in a neat way. Young men just do the work fast to earn more money at the end of the day.'*
Rashid explained that the mode of payment varied from one farmer to the next. The last farm where Rashid worked paid him €650 per hectare. He explained that €450 was used to pay the labourers, €4.5 to pay for the transport and another €4.5 for other expenses. He kept the remaining €90. Yet, the work was not regular and Rashid often did not work between different jobs. Consequently, considering that he did not work every normal working day, he said that he averaged about €6.5 to €7.5 a day. It is possible to live cheaply in the Moroccan countryside. Houses are privately owned and families can grow most of their own food. Rashid was age 30 when interviewed. During his 20s his career had progressed, and this had been a general trend. Irrespective of the type of employment – formal, informal, employee or self-employed – individuals' earnings had risen with age. Career progress had been a normal experience.
The occupational profiles of Arab Mediterranean countries in which the careers of young adults progress are typical of pre-industrial societies – high levels of both self-employment and informal employment(see Elliott, 2017). By the time of our surveys these profiles had spread from rural areas into the region's cities.When employment itself is informal, the same inevitably applies to job searching and recruitment. In the Arab Mediterranean countries these informal labour market processes are controversial when they operate in recruitment to formal employment, especially in public sector jobs. It is widely believed that without *wasta*(useful connections) or *piston* (interventions) entering these labour force segments will be very difficult if not impossible.
Shimaa was a 23 year old Egyptian woman who, like Sobhy, lived in Kafr El-Sheikh, 134 kilometers north of Cairo. Shimaa had graduated from university in 2012. She also had aone year diploma in education. When interviewed she was working as a scientific researcher, a job with a written contract, but one that she did not enjoy as it had nothing to do with what she had studied.*'I graduated from the Faculty of Commerce and so banking is the sector for me. I took several entrance exams and still I need wasta not grade. I know a physical education graduate who is working in a bank. It's all about wasta to live or die.'*
Karima, a 28 year old female lived in Akbou, an Algerian provincialvillage. She was a university graduate, currently unemployed. *'I have not found a really interesting job. I wanted to work in a private school but it takes connections. There was another candidate.*

She was not even a graduate. So they made me do the interview and they saw that I had diplomas but they did not even call me. They recruited the other candidate.'

We must note, however, that the same individuals who complained about lack of *wasta* excluding people like themselves from decent employment were most likely to feel fully justified in doing all that they could to assist their own family members and friends, and had no qualms about seeking such assistance for themselves. Connections and interventions had been involved in obtaining all kinds of employment (as in Rashid's work history), and had been *least* used when seeking and obtaining formal public sector jobs.

The Arab Mediterranean Context

Issues of job availability, quality and access are currently being experienced by people of all ages in specific Arab Mediterranean historical and cultural contexts. When the countries achieved full independence between the 1920s and 1960s their first genuinely post-colonial regimes all subscribed to some version of socialism. Public sectors were expanded with the eventual aim of offering decent, modern jobs to all. Upper secondary education was modeled on the system of one of the European colonial powers, usually France in all the countries in this research except Egypt where the English grammar school was the preferred model. Egypt had the highest proportion of young people who completed their secondary schooling with a vocational course. Elsewhere students who continued their education beyond age 16 aimed for a baccalaureate qualification. They would attempt this examination time after time until they passed, thereby qualifying for higher education, or gave up. Why not persist when an earlier transition into progressive employment is highly unlikely or, in the case of females, when the alternative is years of waiting at home until they can marry?

Table 2: Populations (in millions).

	1950	1980	2010	2017
Algeria	9	19	36	41
Egypt	22	43	82	95
Lebanon	1	3	4	6
Morocco	9	20	32	35
Tunisia	3	6	11	11

Table 3: Total fertility rates.

	1960	2015
Algeria	7.5	2.8
Egypt	6.6	3.3
Lebanon	5.7	1.7
Morocco	7.1	2.5
Tunisia	6.9	2.1

Up until their parents' generation, young people who succeeded in upper secondary and higher education were rewarded with commensurate jobs, usually secure public sector jobs with written employment contracts, and today's school and university leavers feel equivalently entitled. Parents share their children's view. The reasons for this let-down are, first, that since the 1990s the ruling regimes in all the countries have adopted neo-liberal social and economic policies. Government spending and employment had been held down or rolled back at a time when increasing numbers of young people have been entering the countries' labour markets. Second, during the second half of the 20th century the countries' populations doubled then doubled again (see Table 2), which overwhelmed the supply of decent jobs. Fertility rates have now fallen but are at a sub-replacement level only in Lebanon (see Table 3). In the other four countries the numbers entering the labour market year-by-year will continue to increase, but more slowly than in the recent past.Under these conditions, extremely unregulated labour markets have held down unemployment by allowing the creation of swaths of low-quality, low-paid and insecure jobs. It is this, rather than a straight-forward job deficit, that is the source of the labour market problems experienced by most of region's young people and their families. Those like Rashid who progress in these conditions feel pride in their achievements, and earn the respect and admiration of their families and peers.

Education and Employment

Like jobs, young people need to be disaggregated. There are differences in aspirations and expectations between males and females, and by levels of education. During the 1990s and early-2000s the Arab Mediterranean countries followed the advice of international financial institutions. The countries were rewarded with loans while they liberalized markets, privatized as much as possible, and held other government spending down while investing heavily in 'human capital'. The outcome has been that the proportion of males with primary education or less declined from 51 percent among respondents' fathers to 19 percent among their sons. Among females the decline was from 60 percent among the mothers to 19percent of their daughters. The proportions completing higher education had risen from 10 percent to 34 percent among males and from six percent to 34 percent among females. Respondents' fathers had been better educated then their mothers, whereas this gender gap had been eliminated among our respondents.

A labour market outcome has been significant levels of unemployment among higher education graduates, and even more widespread under-employment (beneath their qualification levels), and mis-employment (outside the fields for which they are qualified). Mohamed was an ambitious 22 year old man in his early working years. He lived in a recently built district in Giza, to the north of Cairo. Mohamed had pursued education up to university level and had a degree in business administration. He explained that, *'It is relatively easy to find a job in Egypt, but it is virtually impossible that you find a job related to your field of study. You can still get a job as a worker in a factory at a low wage.'* Mohamed preferred to remain unemployed.

International advisers are now urgingthe countries to follow quantitative expansion by improving the quality of education. They want standards of attainment in secondary and

higher education to rise, less rote learning, fewer tick-box tests, and closer alignment of curricula with the requirements of employers (see Boudarat and Ajbilou, 2009; Chaaban, 2009, Dhillon et al, 2009; Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). In all countries our ínterviewees complained about out-of-date syllabuses, poorly motivated teachers, and cancelled classes due to teacher absences. They knew somehow that the quality of their education was inferior to that being received by young people in Europe.

Syrine, a 19 year old female, lived with her family in El-May, a town on Tunisia's Djerba Island. She, like many other young people, was harshly critical of the quality of her education. *'It is all routine! The same old story from primary school up to now. For example, the history programme: WWI, WWII, and Tunisia facing the war - programmes which are really senseless, tiring and boring. As for Arab literature, the programme still includes the same authors our parents studied for their baccalaureate exams. Sure, pupils should know the classics, but there are modern authors who deserve to be part of the programme.'*

In our surveys we found that respondents whose fathers had been to university were more likely than other young people to have attended private schools, where sometimes the normal language of instruction was French or English rather than Arabic, and to have received supplementary, paid-for private coaching. Awareness of this, however vague, must have reinforced the feeling among young people whose education was entirely in public schools, that they were handicapped by being given second class opportunities to succeed.

However, it is easier to demonstrate the prevalence of low scores in internationally standardised tests, especially in public schools, than to prove that the recommended changes would enhance young people's job prospects.In support, advocates of educational reform might point to someevidence from our surveys. Just 43 percent of 25-29 year old respondents felt that their education had prepared them for the labour market, but this varied by levels of education from 21 percent of those with no more than primary schooling to 63 percent of those with higher education qualifications. Among male 25-29 year olds, the proportion in employment among those who had progressed through higher education waslower than among those who had ended their education with a vocational course (57 percent and 75 percent) while the proportions who were unemployed at the time of the surveys were 17 percent and four percent. However, these findings are not replicated in the female samples. University educated young women had a higher employment rate than those who had finished education with a vocational course (46 percent and 18 percent). More of the graduates were unemployed (19 percent and five percent) but this was mainly because more from the vocational group had become inactive (28 percent of graduate women and 73 percent of those who had completed their education with a vocational course).

One reason why young men (and young women even more so) will hesitate and probably decide against a vocational route when they have the option of university is that graduate 25-29 year olds commanded far higher salaries than any other educational groups. The average monthly pay of 25-29 year old graduate employees in our surveys was €955, for those with just full secondary schooling it was €741, €492 for those whose highest qualification was vocational, and €477 for employees with no more than primary schooling. The indications are that, just as in Europe, in Arab Mediterranean countries, certainly for males, vocational routes are simultaneously safety nets (reducing risks of unemployment) and sidetracks away from the best paying jobs (see Shavit and Muller, 2000). For women, higher education is the

most likely route to a job, and to a higher paying job, than will be the outcome from any other educational route. That said,salary levels in the graduate jobs that might be gained was not a reason given by interviewees who defended their decisions to pursue university education. Sofiane, a 22 year old male unemployed university graduate who lived in Tunis, was one of eight children. He was the only university graduate (in legal studies) in his family. All his brothers had opted for vocational diplomas and they all had jobs. Even so, Sofiane did not regret his decision. *'A university degree is still socially valued. This gives respect.'*

In Northern Europe and North America, higher education graduates will move down the labour market rather than remain unemployed. This is what employers and their families expect them to do. They thereby pass down risks of unemployment to the least qualified (see Zwysen, 2016). Graduates move down despite suspecting, as they must, that lowering their starting points will not open doors to fast upward moving career escalators but could lock them long-term into lower status and lower-paid occupations than they might have obtained by waiting (see Vohemer and Schuck, 2016). Waiting is culturally acceptable to families in southern Europe and the Arab Mediterranean countries. They will support their graduate children with housing, subsistence and spending money. Families are prepared to be patient,and employers will not be prejudiced against graduates who have spent months or even years waiting rather than earning. Family and economic culturesinterlock to make waiting not just acceptable but far preferable to stepping down.Parents may feel duty-bound to support a 'waiting' 20-something son or daughter in order to retain hope that the family's investment in education will be repaid. There is a big drop from a career job with a written employment contract of indefinite duration into the typically much lower pay, perpetual insecurity and absence of structured opportunities for career progression in the Arab Mediterranean countries' informal labour markets.

Graduates explained why they were reluctant to 'trade down' the labour market. Ahmed was an ambitious 28 year old man who had graduated in 2006 with a bachelor degree in community service. Ahmed lived in his home town of Menya which is a governorate located in the Nile basin to the south of Cairo. Although he had applied to a number of places in an attempt to work, he could not find a suitable job in the public or private sector. *'People like me with degrees tend to require higher positions, and will not accept offers that will contribute nothing to our future careers. As for public sector jobs, they unfortunately tend to be readily available only through family connections and we suffer inequality through nepotism.'* A friend had told Ahmed that a job opening existed in a company called Telemart where Ahmed had worked for a year. His job was to receive orders and deliver them to the doorstep. His wage was a mere €100 per month. Ahmed quit! Graduates are reluctant to trade respect for low, demeaning pay.

There is a powerful feeling across the SEM region that not only are graduates entitled to commensurate graduate jobs, but also that governments ought to provide these jobs. Young graduates expect their countries' governments to honour this unwritten contract (see Bogaert and Emperador, 2011). Until suitable jobs are offered, graduates feel justified in waiting while they protest and campaign for governments to fulfil their side of the contract.

Conclusions

Some features of Arab Mediterranean youth labour markets make the region different from the Global North: the high proportions of young females who do not enter the labour markets; university graduates' unwillingness, often determination, to wait until they are offered jobs which they consider commensurate with their qualifications; and the normality of informal employment. However, these differences are not mysteries that Western academic minds cannot solve: they are comprehensible using Western social science's theories and concepts. Other features of Arab Mediterranean youth labour markets have been found in Western countries: the differences have more to do with historical timing and sequencing than scale. The informal sectors in Arab Mediterranean countries are the equivalents of the precarious employment that has spread throughout many advanced Western economies, especially since the financial crisis of 2007-2009. In Western countries there have also been increases in the numbers in low income self-employment. The UK is one such country, and its occupational profile has been regressing to what was normal before industrialization (Elliott, 2017). In Arab Mediterranean lands traditional occupational profiles with high levels of self-employment and informal jobs, and smaller numbers of formal jobs, have been brought into modern cities as populations have shifted from rural to urban areas.

A striking feature of the voices in the interviews quoted above is the complete absence of outrage. The region's young people were committed to building the best lives possible in circumstances that they could not change. For many university graduates this meant being patient. The circumstances that young people were encountering were not traditional, but had existed for long enough and become sufficiently widespread to be accepted as normal. On entering the labour market young people were encountering obstacles, but their lives were not sinking into crisis. The personal crises in interviewees' biographies had always involved family events, specifically parental divorces and separations, illnesses and deaths. This was the background to Wajdi's problems at school which resulted in his exclusion and missing the baccalaureate examinations thereby changing his life course. Asma's mother's illness had triggered her permanent exit from education. Rashid had quit school at age 13 and sought work in another town where relatives lived after his own parents separated. When interviewees expressed resentment and frustration about their constrained lives, this was always a reaction to strict parenting, not labour market conditions.

A personal crisis is different from a societal crisis. Family break-ups may be tragedies in the lives of the children and young people who are involved, but these personal crises will not shake an entire social system. A societal crisis would arise if insufficient numbers from a cohort of young people were unable to secure livelihoods to be able to rear a successor generation in new family households. Young women remaining outside Arab Mediterranean countries' labour forces will not be a societal threat or burden for as long as the economies do not need their labour and the women are able to find husbands who can support them economically. Youth unemployment becomes a societal crisis only if it corrodes the willingness and ability to work of sufficient numbers of young people, specifically young males in Arab Mediterranean countries. Long-term youth unemployment may have this consequence, and 16 percent of the 25-29 year old males in our surveys were unemployed or inactive in the labour market at the time and had never held a job. Maybe the countries'

economies will never need their labour power. Young women's positions become a societal issue only if they remain outside the workforce, cannot achieve economic independence, and are unable to marry for whatever reason. Seventeen percent of 25-29 year old females in our surveys were 'at risk', having become long-term inactive in the labour market, and were neither married nor 'in a relationship'. However, the fact that fertility rates have remained above population replacement levels in all our research countries except Lebanon suggests

that beyond age 29 enough women become mothers, and enough men are able to support new family households, to rear the future workers who will be needed to support the ageing populations that will be found in all Arab Mediterranean countries by the mid-21st century. There have been no recent transformations in the prospects awaiting school and college leavers in the region. Unlike 1989 in East-Central Europe and 1991 in the former USSR (Roberts et al, 2000; Roberts and Jung, 1995), the events of 2011 have not been a turning point. Not a single interviewee experienced the Arab Spring events as a moment when their futures changed. Only minorities among Arab Mediterranean youth have been able to obtain public sector and other formal jobs for over 20 years. Most of the rest have needed to make do with precarious work. Labour markets have not improved anywhere for young people since 2011. The labour market conditions in the region are an example of what still seems new and shocking to older cohorts having become anticipated by and normal for the latest cohorts of young people. Our evidence, situated within a youth transitions paradigm in which specific episodes (of unemployment for example) are set in their longer-term biographical contexts, does not give cause for alarm. It does not justify a vocabulary of crisis. A hopeful, possible and realizable future for the region will see economic growth strengthening labour demand, leading to a decline in youth unemployment and sustained improvement in job quality. The examples of Libya and Syria show all age groups in other countries in the region that in their own lands things could be worse than now.

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