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Background Paper

INSTITUTIONS, LAWS AND PRACTICES HAMPERING WOMEN ENGAGEMENT (II)

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Part 2: Women in SEM countries. An overview of social, economic and political aspects

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Introduction

Social indicators and gender statistics reveal that women in the SEM countries suffer from conditions of disadvantage if compared to men, and to both men and women from other regions of the world.

SEM women are on average more disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially than are women in other regions. In particular, SEM women are more disadvantaged than women in regions with similar income levels or at similar stages of economic development (e.g., Latin America, Southeast Asia, East Asia).¹ Similar conditions are present when it comes to other gender related statistics such as women's earned income, literacy and educational attainment rates. Women also are under-represented in governance and decision-making positions.²

Many Arab countries have in place family laws – also known as personal status codes – that confer upon women the status of dependent and minor with respect to marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Because of these family laws, States that have signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women have done so with significant reservations.³ Broadly speaking, women remain associated primarily with their family roles, and the cumulative effect is gender-based discrimination and second-class citizenship for women, albeit in varying degrees across the countries of the region.

At the same time, since at least the early 1980s, issues pertaining to women and the family have been highly politicised, partly due to Islam's cultural and political revival. One manifestation has been the re-emergence or expansion of hijab (Islamic dress, or veiling) in countries such as Egypt, which led to spirited debates among different sectors of public opinion in the 1980s and 1990s concerning the meaning of this phenomenon. Another was the stricter application of Muslim family laws by the state, partly to placate Islamist movements or revive state legitimacy. The revival of Islam cannot be understood if placed outside of a broader dynamic of political liberalisation, which spread all around the SEM region as a consequence of the conditional loans that most SEM countries were getting from the IMF or

¹ UNDP, <http://hdr.undp.org/fr/content/towards-gender-equality-arabmiddle-east-region>. For an overview of women's condition see Moghadam, Valentine M., ed. *From patriarchy to empowerment: women's participation, movements, and rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia*. Syracuse University Press, 2007.

² http://www.quotaproject.org/publications/arab_quota_report.pdf

³ [Report: CEDAW and Muslim Family Law, 2011, http://www.musawah.org/sites/default/files/CEDAW%20%26%20Muslim%20Family%20Laws%200.pdf](http://www.musawah.org/sites/default/files/CEDAW%20%26%20Muslim%20Family%20Laws%200.pdf), see also <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/CEDAWIndex.aspx>

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WB. In the 1980 and 90s, most countries were obliged to partially legalise multi-party systems and to integrate Muslim groups in the political game (traditionally, Islamist groups have been repressed in the SEM countries). Few governments even tolerated Islamist parties, albeit widespread fear of Islamism was spread in the region especially as a consequence of the Algerian civil war. The 9/11 events further complicated the scenario as Islamist groups further fragmented, with the majority of them moderating themselves to be easily distinguishable from terrorists and radical Islamist groups. This is the case for instance of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been cyclically repressed and tolerated by Egyptian governments; the PJD, the moderate Moroccan Islamist party which has been integrated in the political game at cost of moderating their positions; partly of Hezbollah, which is however a very particular case with peculiar, national dynamics. The reform of family/personal status code has often represented the 'bargain chip' for political integration of Islamist parties.

As a consequence of this Islamic revival and the integration (assimilation) of Islamist groups in institutional politics, new debates spread in the region, originating new interpretations of concept such as for instance 'human rights' and 'women's rights'. In opposition to 'Western' conceptions of women's rights and human rights (with their emphasis on individual autonomy, choice, agency, and rights), generally speaking the idea of 'Islamic' women's rights and human rights has been advanced, with an emphasis on respect for family, religion, and community. This does not mean that women in the SEM countries are merely oppressed and repressed, as many women engage debates about women's position in society, about the nature and pathways toward women's emancipation, and about the meaning of feminism and/or women's activism, originating very innovative and original reflections on this (i.e. 'Islamic feminism').

However, it is quite evident that women are, according to socio-indicators, disadvantaged when it comes to labour market, employment opportunities and education.

This should not hinder however two elements. The first is the effort that women's organisations throughout the region have been doing to 'fix' those disadvantages. Women's organisations (a very diversified universe in itself, where the cleavage secular vs religious feminism is very strong even if it does not prevent women's groups to form united coalitions when particular issues are at stake⁴) adopt different strategies to make their voices lauder. Women's collective action ranges from consensus-building (e.g., Jordan, Egypt) to confrontational (e.g., Algeria), and that Arab feminism's relationship to the state also varies. State responses to feminist activism have ranged from indifference (e.g., Palestine Authority, Lebanon) to hostility (Saudi Arabia, Egypt) to receptive (Algeria, Morocco), with a number of states now actively promoting women's rights and implementing legal reforms (Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia).

The second element is that SEM countries present very varied conditions in terms of formal protection of women's rights and, of course, in terms of substantial implementation of those protective and emancipating measures. We range from countries such as Turkey, where historically the secular nature of the state has been guaranteeing formal rights to women, to

⁴ Labidi, Lilia. "The Nature of Transnational Alliances in Women's Associations in the Maghreb: The Case of AFTURD and ATFD." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3.1 (2007): 6-34. See also Salih, Ruba. "Transnational Public Spheres from 'Above' and from 'Below': Feminist Networks across the Middle East and Europe." *Anthropology of the Middle East* 5.1 (2010).

countries where a stricter approach is adopted. In the recent years, a number of countries have undertaken reforms of the personal code, engendering innovative and broader dynamics connected to the survival of authoritarian governments and regimes. Those reforms are indeed a good example of how women's rights may paradoxically serve instrumental goals, such as a façade *maquillage* of authoritarianism, and co-option relevant women's groups. This was the case for the reform of the family and personal law in Morocco (the Mouddawana reform) whereby the monarchy succeeded in appeasing transnational feminist groups, national feminist groups, international actors (such as the EU, whose loans and trade support were conditioned by the reform of the family law in a more progressive direction) and in co-opting national political and social forces (notably, this was the case of the Islamist party PJD⁵).

Women's disadvantage position is rooted in social, cultural, economic factors, as well as in the legal framework. The analysis of women's status requires a multidisciplinary approach, it is not a one a single aspect (i.e. the economic factor, or the cultural factor) that explain their unequal access to power and their lower status. In this chapter, we focus on the social, economic and cultural level, and we point out the main factors hampering or enabling young women's empowerment and gender equality.

Women's presence in the labour market

Women's presence in the labour market is a key issue when it comes to the analysis of women's status and the conditions of their empowerment. It is a field of conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, there has been a growing inclusion of women in the labour market in the last decades. On the other hand, deep gender inequalities persist in the access to job market, in working conditions, the level of salaries (women earn less despite labour laws that mandate equal pay and equal opportunities) and the access to higher professional positions.

For instance, table 1 shows the gender gap in the employment rate among total population, and in the unemployment rates among young people.

Table 1. Gender, employment and unemployment (2011-2014)

	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt	Lebanon
Employment rate*	Total: 40% Male: 66% Female: 12,3%	Tot: 45.79% Male: 69.1% Female: 23.7%	n.a	Tot: 43% Male: 69% Female: 17%	Tot: 43% Male: 64.69% Female: 20.39%
Youth unemployment rate **	Youth, total: 28% Male: 19.1% Female: 38.2%	Youth, tot: 18.6% Male: 18.4% Female: 19.2%	Youth, tot: 42.3% Male: n.a Female: n.a	Youth, tot: 25% Male: 14.7% Female: 54.1%	Youth, tot: 16.8% Male: 14.6% Female: 22.3%

* Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market database. Year: 2012

⁵ Serida Catalano 'Islamists and the regime: Applying a new framework for analysis to the case of Family Code reforms in Morocco', *Party Politics*, 19, 2013; and Cavatorta and Dalmaso 'Liberal outcomes through undemocratic means. The reform of the Code du Statut Personnel in Morocco', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2009, pp. 487-506

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Employment to population ratio is the proportion of a country's population that is employed. Ages 15 and older are generally considered the working-age population.

** Sources: CIA World Factbook. Year: 2014, estimated. Tunisia: year 2011

In a nutshell, there are growing opportunities for women in the economic and paid-work sphere, but still many constraints and disadvantages, if compared to men. There are also relevant differences between formal equal rights between men and women in the labour market, and the actual situation of discrimination on the ground, that are worth to be better explored.

In this frame, it is interesting to analyze the women's coping strategies in this field: how do women and young women in particular, deal with the opportunities and constraints in this field? Besides that, our analysis should focus on the consequences of these conflicting tendencies on the individual biographies of young women. It is important to take into account that these consequences vary a lot depending on the conditions of inclusion into the paid-work and on the internal cleavages (i.e., informal vs formal work; public vs private sector; low-paid instable jobs vs well-paid jobs) that contribute to differentiate women's position within the labour market. Therefore, special attention should be paid to these internal differences, and also to the policies and measures that are implemented, or could be implemented, in order to promote a better position in the labour market for women in different situations (eg low-class and middle class, high and low levels of education, women with different care loads and family responsibilities etc.).

Another possible contradiction to be explored here concerns the circumstances and conditions under which employment reveals to be a mean of emancipation for young women. This question has been already discussed in the case of Iran, where it has been noted that: 'However, even though the percentage of female employment has increased and to some extent this has been the result of neo-liberal economic policies, this increase cannot be assumed to be indicative of female economic empowerment. Iranian women's employment patterns resemble the global trends in female work. The percentage of women in the labour force has increased with the spread of neo-liberal economic policies but also has the level of female poverty. Throughout the Third World, as more jobs become less well paid, seasonal, and unprotected by laws and regulation, more women enter into paid employment. Additionally, more women have to work as inflation increases and government subsidies for basic services are reduced.'⁶. We should explore whether there is any similar pattern in the case of SEM countries.

Gender and education

Education is one of the main fields where deep transformations have taken place in the last decades, with a deep impact on the living conditions and opportunities of young people, and of women. Until the late 1970s, the region had one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world compared with other less-developed nations. In the last decades, literacy rate and female literacy rate have grown. Today, almost all the countries in the region report that nearly all of their children (both boys and girls) are enrolled in primary school. Women have made gains in access to education, literacy, university enrolment, and the variety of academic fields

⁶ Bahramitash, Roksana. "Market fundamentalism versus religious fundamentalism: women's employment in Iran." *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 13.1 (2004): 44.

available to them. Today, levels of female education are on the raise, even if they remain lower than the male ones (table 2).

Table 2 – Literacy rate and expected years of schooling

	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt	Lebanon
Literacy rate* (total population)	Total population: 72.6% male: 81.3% female: 63.9%	Total population: 67.1% male: 76.1% female: 57.6%	Total population: 79.1% male: 87.4% female: 71.1%	Total population: 73.9% male: 81.7% female: 65.8%	Total population: 89.6% Male: 93.4% female: 86%
Expected years of school**	Male: 13,4 Female: 13,8	Male: 11.6 Female: 10.6	Male: 14 Female: 15	Male: 12 Female: 13	Male:13,25 Female: 12.85

* Source: CIA world Factbook. Year: 2006, Algeria; 2012, estimated, Morocco; 2010, estimated, Tunisia; 2011, estimated, Egypt; 2011 estimated, Lebanon. Adult (15+) literacy rate (%). Total is the percentage of the population age 15 and above who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life. Generally, ‘literacy’ also encompasses ‘numeracy’, the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. This indicator is calculated by dividing the number of literates aged 15 years and over by the corresponding age group population and multiplying the result by 100

** Sources: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics. Year: 2010. Tunisia: 2011. Expected years of schooling is the number of years a child of school entrance age is expect to spend at school, or university, including years spent on repetition. It is the sum of the age-specific enrolment ratios for primary, secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary education.

The benefits of female education on women’s condition, on gender equality and, more broadly, on the entire society, have been demonstrated by an extensive literature. For instance, Roudi and Moghadam (2003) list the benefits as follows:

- As female education rises, fertility, population growth, and infant and child mortality fall and family health improves.
- Increases in girls’ secondary school enrolment are associated with increases in women’s participation in the labour force and their contributions to household and national income.
- Women’s increased earning capacity, in turn, has a positive effect on child nutrition.
- Children—especially daughters—of educated mothers are more likely to be enrolled in school and to have higher levels of educational attainment.
- Educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them.

However, more research is needed in order to assess which is the configuration of these patterns in SEM countries – in different countries and different social classes. In a context of economic difficulty, do these patterns follow the same logic, or is their functioning changed by those structural constraints? What is the role of social class background? How the professional integration of women goes hand-by-hand with the international division of labour according to sex and race?

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The difficult transition from school to work by young people, and especially young women, seems to undermine in part the beneficial effects of education. Women still face many constraints and strong discrimination in their access to employment and in finding their first job (even if they have high levels of credential and qualification). This gap between high expectations and low opportunities could be seen as one of the main contradictions that young women are now facing in these countries, to some extent contributing to reduce differences between the living experiences of young women in SEM countries and European countries.

There are contradictory elements and different interpretations on the effective linkage between the growth of female education and the improvement of women's social and economic status in SEM countries, as Haghghat (2010: 56) explains: "If women are educated but not given much access to political and economic power, the process of empowerment is not complete and therefore their status stays low despite higher investment on their human capital".

Moreover, the growth of female education has been read as an indicator of a general shift in social values related to the relevance of education for women and, more broadly, of the transformation of the cultural values and orientations related to women's role and position in society (mostly defined by the association to their family role, or also in reference to their role in the public sphere, professional role, etc).

On the other hand, different researches suggest that young women and their families often seem to spend their high education as symbolic resources in the marriage rather than in the labour market. In this way, high level of education turns to be a credential to find a good marriage, to achieve a better social and financial status through marriage. This would reveal that the growing interest in women's education is not always an indicator of a change in the cultural values and orientations of their family (or of the young women themselves). It would also reveal that the path to women's social mobility and status still tend to depend more on the dependence to a male figure than on women's resources and skills.

For these reasons, among the questions related to education, youth and gender (addressed in WP2) we suggest to include a special attention to the dimension of expectations, exploring the factors that shape the expectations of young women, and their families, in relation to education, and how they are changing in the current period of social, political transformations. A second relevant focus of our analysis entails the consequences of education for different subjects. We would like to understand the role that education plays in the lives of young women, compared with young men, in different contexts. When exploring this issue, it is important to pay attention to the dimension of class, and urban/rural residence, and to avoid focusing only on higher educated girls, on high and middle class urban youth etc. We should ask: where is the class element here? How does class mark a difference in the way education is experienced by young women (and men) and in the strategic use of the educational qualification? Do low class and middle class or poor women attach different expectations to education? (e.g. Richer girls are expected to study more and marry some peer-rich guy. After that, they are not expected to go to work. After getting university degrees, poorer or low middle class girls must work...)

Trends in family formation and marriage in the Arab world

Family formation and marriage in the Arab world are undergoing relevant changes as new patterns of biographical transition are taking root in the region. First of all, early marriage is no longer as popular as it was in the past. The average age of both men and women marrying has significantly raised, and this reality is of particular interest and relevance in the case of women specifically. More and more women are staying at their parental house longer and some of them do not marry at all. Table 3 shows this trend, providing data on women's average marriage age in 2011, and on women's average age at the first birth in the previous decade. When it comes to fertility, rates and the number of birth per woman have also significantly dropped (Table 3).

Table 3– Marriage and parenting: gender dimensions

	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt	Lebanon
Fertility rate, total (births per woman)*	2.78	2.15	2	2.87	1.74
Age at first birth (different years, 1992-2008)**	Female (1992): 24.9	Female (2003): 25.4	Female (1988): 24.5	Female (2008): 22.9	
Marriage age (2011)***	Female (2011): 29.6	Female (2011): 26.4	Female (2001): 25****	Female (2011): 23.6	Female (2011):: 27*****

* Sources: United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects; United Nations Statistical Division. Population and Vital Statistics Report. Year: 2012. Total fertility rate represents the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with current age-specific fertility rates.

** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Fertility Report 2012. Year: 1992 Algeria; 2003-2004 Morocco; 1988 Tunisia; 2008 Egypt;

*** Olmsted, Jennifer C. "Norms, economic conditions and household formation: A case study of the Arab world." *The History of the Family* 16.4 (2011): 401-415.

**** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Fertility Report 2012. Year: 2001

*****Sources: Estimated from Carmichael, Sarah. "Marriage and power: Age at first marriage and spousal age gap in lesser developed countries." *The History of the Family* 16.4 (2011): 416-436.

These transformations are linked to broader socio-economic changes that are taking place in the region. Arab and SEM economies have increasingly moved away from an agrarian system, which supported both early marriage and extended families. The majority of the Arab world's population lives in cities and is involved in the industrial or service sectors. Arab youth are more educated compared with previous generations, and young Arab women are more likely to work outside their homes in paying jobs. These changes challenge women's

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traditional roles in the household and society as a whole. Understanding how Arab marriage patterns are changing is now particularly important because Arab countries are seeing unprecedented numbers of young adults entering their 20s, when the great majority of people worldwide marry and start families.⁷

Women throughout the Arab region once typically married in their teens or early 20s. In recent decades, however, early marriage has declined sharply in parts of the region (Libya and UAE in particular). In Tunisia, Algeria, and Lebanon, only 1 percent to 4 percent of women ages 15 to 19 are married, and the percentage of women ages 35 to 39 who have never married in these countries now ranges from 15 percent to 21 percent. The percentage of women ages 35 to 39 who have never married is a good indicator for measuring changes in the universality of marriage, because the likelihood of a single woman marrying after age 40 is quite low (table 5). Despite the lack of statistics and data, another relevant phenomenon is the one of marriage-age gap (women commonly marrying older men) which is particularly pronounced in Arab societies. It is calculated that one-quarter of recent marriages in Egypt and Lebanon had women at least 10 years younger than their husbands.⁸

What are the reasons for the delay in marriage? And what are the consequences?

Causes

Economic condition: high rate of unemployment and the fragmentation of the social contract between the state and the people in the Arab world before the introduction of neoliberal reforms in late 1970s have worsened the economic condition of significant segment of society. Unemployment is quite significant and marriage is quite expensive. Arab young men in their 20s commonly say that they are saving now in order to be able to marry some years in the future. Unfortunately, young people in the Arab world face a tough economic situation. They appear to be the first generation of young people in the recent history of the region that does not necessarily expect to fare better economically than their parents, despite having the largest increase in education attainment over their parents of any Arab generation. → what consequences in terms of youth cultures?

Raising education: Levels of female education are on the raise, even if they remain lower than male level of education in SEM countries. Education and marriage and family formation are interconnected because women are expected to study more and, consequently to delay their marriage and formation of their own family. Education then is considered as a cause of women's emancipation. → is it really like this? Or is it the other way around, namely that delay of marriage (caused by the structural variables mentioned) has the effect of pushing women towards education as a viable alternative to marriage?

Female employment: Studies show that when women have the opportunity to earn their own incomes, they tend to delay marriage and parenthood and hence bear fewer children in their

⁷ Nearly one in every five Egyptians is between ages 20 and 29, and the United Nations projects that the population in this age group will grow by 20 percent between 2005 and 2025, from 13.5 million to 16.3 million (source: Rashad, Hoda, et al. "Marriage in the Arab world." Health for the Millions 29.1 (2004): 38-41.)

⁸ Special tabulation done by the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo using the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (2003) and the Lebanon Maternal and Child Health Survey (1996).

lifetime.⁹ Employment has an effect on fertility in both directions - women may choose not to work if they have children, and for women who are working, it may influence the number of children they choose to have. Social and cultural changes such as a decline in fertility rates, an increase in age at marriage, and a demand for more educated men and women, all contribute to a larger supply of younger women who are, at least, temporarily freed from family responsibilities (i.e., early marriage, subsequent pregnancies, child care responsibilities, housework) and therefore more available to be employed. However, as suggested previously, the effective consequences of this trend in terms of women's emancipation, largely depend on the working conditions and the sector of employment (e.g. formal vs informal labour market, well-paid vs low-paid jobs, etc.), as well as on the presence and effectiveness of public and private interventions sustaining a fair redistribution of family and work responsibilities between men and women.

Consequences

The nexus marriage-fertility: As highlighted by Elhum Haqiqat,¹⁰ early age at marriage does not always correspond with high fertility. For example, in 2002, about 60 percent of women under age twenty-five (between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, group I; and twenty and twenty-four, group II) were married in the MENA region (table 4). In Egypt (group I: 12 percent, group II: 53 percent) and Turkey (group I: 15 percent, group II: 59 percent) a high percentage of women under age twenty-five were married (table 4), and yet these two countries' total fertility rates (TFRs) were not as high as expected - 3.5 for Egypt and 2.5 for Turkey (see table 4). If women getting married at a young age correlates to families having more children, then Egypt and Turkey should have much higher fertility rates. The inconsistencies in these patterns are an indicator of the complex relationships among fertility patterns, marriage practices, and women's status in MENA societies.

Women's status: In Arab societies, women's status is mainly defined by their roles as mothers and wives. By 'failing' to meet these expectations, single women do not have an easily defined or comfortable niche in society. Single women with no education or job skills face particular problems in the Arab world because of their lack of financial independence. However, increasing numbers of Arab women are single, forcing their societies to grapple with a 'new' category of women. Successful career women are more likely to escape from the traditional stereotype and find opportunities for self-fulfilment beyond the roles of mother and wife. These women are no longer necessarily portrayed by their family members and society as failures for being unable to secure a partner. Indeed, they are increasingly characterised either as having made a choice to remain single or (at the very least) as good women unable to find a partner because of a limited pool of suitable candidates.

These changes raise a number of important questions in relation to youth and young women. A first, fundamental question regards the impact of these changes on young women's identity and roles: What kind of values and orientation do women express in relation to work, education formation of a family and motherhood? What kind of value and relevance do they

⁹ Brewster, Karin, and Roland Rindfuss. 2000. "Fertility and Women's Employment in Industrialized Nations." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 271-296.

¹⁰ Haghghat-Sordellini, Elhum. *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: change and continuity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

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attribute to these personal goals and life choices, to these different parts of their biographical projects? Do their expectations and identities continue to construct around family roles (mothering, marriage) or also around public roles (education, work, political participation)? Do they imagine and seek their self-fulfilment in relation mostly to traditional roles in the private/family sphere (motherhood..) or also pursuing education – professional goals? How do they cope with these different goals and source of identity and biographical project? Which are the differences and continuities under this point of view with the previous generations? Are new gender models and identity arising in younger female generations?

The second question regards the impact of the delayed marriage for young women and for young men. We would like to explore how the changes in marriage and parenting (fundamental markers of transition to adulthood) affect the cultural construction and definition of youth. Do they leave to new social expectations and norms that guide the behaviours and role for young men, and women, in society? How is this “prolonged youth” perceived by young people (men and women) and by adult society? As a stage of limbo or as a new condition? Which differences between young men and women in relation to this?

Table 4. Percentage of married women for age

Table 5.1 Selected reproductive health indicators in the MENA region, 2000–2004

	Women married: 15–19 years old (%)	Women married: 20–24 years old (%)	Total Fertility Rate	Married women 15–49, using any method of contraception (%)	Married women 15–49, using modern contraceptives (%)
Algeria	4	30	2.8	64	50
Bahrain	3	30	2.5	62	31
Egypt	12	53	3.5	56	54
Iran	16	—	2.0	74	56
Iraq	—	—	5.3	—	—
Jordan	8	38	3.6	56	39
Kuwait	5	40	4.2	52	39
Lebanon	—	—	2.4	63	40
Libya	1	12	3.9	45	26
Morocco	10	37	3.3	58	49
Oman	15	58	6.1	24	18
Qatar	4	31	3.9	43	32
Saudi Arabia	7	39	5.7	32	29
Syria	11	42	3.8	47	35
Tunisia	1	14	2.1	63	53
Turkey	15	59	2.5	64	38
United Arab Emirates	8	40	3.5	28	24
Yemen	26	70	7.2	21	10
MENA	12	47	3.3	59	45

MENA: Middle East and North African region.

Source: Mensch et al., 2005: 39; Roudi-Fahimi, 2003: table 1, pp. 4–5; 2002 Women of Our World. Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C.

Source: Haghghat-Sordellini, Elhum. *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: change and continuity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 64.

Table 5. Marriage patterns

Table 1

Marriage Patterns in Selected Arab Countries

	Year survey was conducted	Percent ever-married women, by age group		Percent never-married women ages	Percent of ever-married women (15 to 49 years old) who married a first cousin
		15-19	20-24	35-39	
Algeria	2002	2	17	17	22
Bahrain	1995	4	31	9	24
Djibouti	2002	5	26	15	25
Egypt	2003	10	52	3	20
Jordan	2002	6	34	13	26
Kuwait	1996	5	42	11	26
Lebanon	1995	4	30	21	18
Libya	1995	1	12	11	43
Mauritania	2001/02	28	60	4	43
Morocco	1996/97	13	39	12	19
Palestine*	2004	14	59	12	28
Oman	1995	16	61	1	34
Qatar	1998	4	32	11	34
Saudi Arabia	1996	7	40	3	41
Syria	2001	11	43	11	29
Tunisia	2001	1	15	15	24
UAE	1995	8	42	3	24
Yemen	2003	17	59	3	31

* Includes Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem).

SOURCES: League of Arab States, Pan-Arab Project for Child Development: Arab Mother and Child Health Surveys (Lebanon and Libya 1995, Morocco 1996/97) and Pan-Arab Project for Family Health (Syria and Tunisia 2001, Algeria and Djibouti 2002, Morocco 2003/2004, and Yemen 2003); Council of Health Ministers of GCC States, Gulf Family Health Surveys (Bahrain, Oman, and United Arab Emirates 1995, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia 1996, Qatar 1998); ORC Macro, Demographic and Health Surveys (Mauritania 2001/2002, Jordan 2002, and Egypt 2003); and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' special tabulations of the 2004 Palestinian Demographic and Health Survey.

Source: Rashad, Hoda, et al. "Marriage in the Arab world." Health for the Millions 29.1 (2004):3

Table 6 – Gender and health

	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt	Lebanon
Life expectancy*	male: 75.12 years female: 77.72 years	male: 73.44 years female: 79.74 years	male: 73.6 years female: 77.9 years	male: 70.82 years female: 76.2 years	male: 76.03 years female: 78.46 y
Child mortality (deaths/1,000 live births) *	Total population: 21.76 male: 23.54	Total population: 24.52 male: 28.96	Total population: 23.19 male: 26.63	Total population: 22.41 male: 23.9	Total population: 7.98 male: 8.4

	female: 19.9	female: 19.87	female: 19.51	female: 20.84	female: 7.53
Maternal mortality rate**	97 deaths/100,000 live births		56 deaths/100,000 live births	66 deaths/100,000 live births	25 deaths/100,000 live births

Source: * CIA World Factbook. Year: 2014 estimated

** CIA World Factbook. Year: 2010

Final remarks

Considering what has been outlined in this paper, few general remarks are made here by answering some of the most relevant questions asked by the project (Sahwa).

Why is gender a relevant topic to understand youth realities in Arab countries?

Gender politics and, among them, politics for women's empowerment, are very much 'on the move' in the SEM countries, particularly after the so-called Arab Spring. There are 'new' findings pointing out that there is a shift in the women's rights question from state-defined action to atomised and autonomous forms of activism.¹¹ This is in line with the finding from the study of activism, informal politics and social non-movement as inherently political, despite their apparently non-political characteristics (see our background paper on youth cultures). Politics is no longer controlled by a single party, set of state actors or a by a single man. Rather, it has increasingly taken the form of popular 'activisms', rejecting state-imposed binaries such as state/society in favour of non-institutional forms of political intervention and contestation. The call for gender dignity and justice, in this new period, echoes the style, media and dynamics of Arab Spring politics more broadly. Despite being recognised by the scholar, these dynamics of autonomy of activism and women's activism in particular deserve further examination.

Beyond analysing the impact of structural variables (employment, education...) on activating women politically, it should also be analysed how gender impacts on the practice activism. Is there a specific way/style SEM women adopt when struggling for the improvement of their condition? How did it happen that those women took part in the protests, and there was any specific style of activism they had? Female informal workers or poor women could offer a privileged point of observation for wider dynamics of political empowerment.

Many 'venues' can be observed to make sense of the autonomisation of politics and activism: informal activists' groups, website and blogs ethnography, ethnography of alternative music/artistic scene, university campuses and policy-making processes¹².

¹¹ Singerman, Diane. "Youth, Gender, and Dignity in the Egyptian Uprising." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 9.3 (2013): 1-27. Le Renard, Amélie. "Young Urban Saudi Women's Transgressions of Official Rules and the Production of a New Social Group." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 9.3 (2013): 108-135.

¹² Ben Salem, Maryam "Traditional and new forms of young women political engagement in transitional context" CAWTAR, 2013.

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To identify where is the knowledge on the issue (specifically in relation to youth and gender), what are the gaps in the studies?

Major gaps revolve around: the culture that comes with women's activism; the production of new forms of contestation and contentious politics (culture and practice); the impact of changing structural variables on women's living conditions; the urban/rural cleavage.

The impact of changing structural variables. In particular, economic liberalization has brought new job opportunities to the region and even though the percentage of female employment has increased, it is debated whether this increase could be assumed to be indicative of female economic empowerment. The percentage of women in the labour force has increased with the popularity of neo-liberal economic policies but so has the level of female poverty¹³. Throughout the Third World, as more jobs become less well paid, seasonal, and unprotected by laws and regulation, more women enter into paid employment. Additionally, more women have to work as inflation increases and government subsidies for basic services are reduced. What is the consequence of this, in terms of women's emancipation and autonomy?

The urban/rural cleavage. It is often assumed that rural communities are more traditional and less involved in social transformations. However, the 'Arab uprisings' started from rural and peripheral towns – although it is true that it is only when protests spread in the capital, they reached the apex of strength. However, this is not valid for Turkey where the so-called 'Gezi protest' took place in big cities first and then in smaller cities. Again, it is very important here to keep in mind that such thing as 'the SEM countries' does not really exist and that there are relevant, internal differences. For instance, some countries are more urbanized than others.¹⁴ Broadly speaking, more focus could be devoted to the study of rural areas and social changes happening there, as well as the study of the suburban zones with their specific cultures and practices.

The spread of university branches beyond the biggest cities in the country could, for instance, signal that relevant dynamics are also taking place in more rural settings. For instance, they reveal a new internal demand for high education, from small cities, rural and suburban areas¹⁵. How those dynamics impact on gender-construction and on broader structural variables (employment, education...)?

Centre/periphery axis. Capitals in SEM countries hardly are the only political and economic centre of their countries. And city centres hardly are the only place to be to grasp relevant socio-political dynamics. Poor neighbourhoods and satellite cities deserve more attention. In this case, a relatively understudied issue is informal economy and the gendering of that economic (non-)sector.

Available at http://www.cawtar.org/upload/telechargement/Resume_Cawtar_Anglais_V22.pdf

¹³ CAWTAR, "Gender Impact of Trade Liberalization in the MENA Region", 2006;

¹⁴ For instance: Morocco (Pop: 31,968,361 ab, Urb rate: 58%), Egypt (Pop: 80.000.000 ab., Urb rate: 49%), Lebanon (Pop: 4,140,289, Urb rate: 78%), Turkey (Pop: 79.790,000, Urb tax: 70%).

¹⁵ Many of the students and scholars in SEM countries are coming from rural and sub urban zones, while students from the richer sectors of urban population can afford education in foreign universities.

To provide a gender approach to the research themes of SAHWA so as to orient their research (Education, Employment and Social Inclusion, Political Participation and Mobilization, Youth Cultures and Values, International Migration and Mobility and International Cooperation and Public Policies). To formulate research questions 'genderising' those five topics.

It is very important to highlight the differences among the SEM countries: Tunisia is not Morocco, Algeria is not Lebanon....

Education, employment and social inclusion (WP2)

Education:

Which role does education play in the lives of young women (compared to young men)? How the new opportunities in education for girl are impacting on their social position, and on their identity? Which are the expectation of young women and their families (compared to young men), to what extent are they full filled? Is higher and more widespread education indicative of women's emancipation? Does higher education indicate women's emancipation or is university a sort of 'parking' for girls who cannot find a job? Is there a class element there? How does class mark a difference in the way education is experienced by young women (and men) and in the strategic use of the educational qualification?

Employment and social inclusion:

Which are the main tendencies and indicators of gender discrimination on workplaces? Which are the actual conditions in which women work, and what are the internal cleavages (i.e., informal vs formal work; public vs private sector) that mostly differentiate women's position in the labour market? What are social welfare measures women can count on (maternity leave...)? What is the difference between formal rights and the actual situation on the ground (it is likely to see differences here according to national history and the different experience with colonialism)? How do young women deal with the opportunities and constraints in this field, while constructing their biographical projects?

Political participation and mobilization (WP3):

Is there anything specific to women's political participation and mobilisation? What about intra-generational cooperation? What about conservative women's groups? This is relatively understudies in ME Studies, and would deserve much more attention (Muslim Sisters in Egypt...). In the case of some countries under investigation, we had a bold 'state feminism' under previous administrations. Do you see any difference in the conceptualisation and practice of feminism, after the Arab Uprisings?

Youth cultures and values (WP4):

Is there anything specific to women's youth cultures and values? What are the issues debated? How are the changes in the social condition of young men and women (compared with the previous generation) mirrored at the cultural level? Do they leave to new social expectations and norms that guide the behaviours and role for young men, and women, in society? Which is their impact on young women's identity and role? To what extent do young women drawn

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upon, or rather contest, the prevailing visions of femininity and female roles, rooted in the dominant cultural and religious values, as strongly associated with motherhood, care work and marriage? What kind of values and orientation do women express in relation to work, education formation of a family and motherhood? What kind of value and relevance do they attribute to these personal goals and life choices, to these different parts of their biographical projects? Do their expectations and identities continue to be construct around family roles (mothering, marriage) or also around public roles (education, work, political participation)? Which are the differences and continuities with the previous generations? Are new gender models and identity arising in younger female generations?

Which are the changes in the gender relations that young men and women are experiencing in their everyday life? To what extent and how the social representations, norms and values, and cultural models around masculinity and femininity are changing in younger generations, compared with adult generations?

Which impact have ICT in the everyday life of young women, do they open up new possibilities for action, autonomy, self-determination – or, on the contrary, make room or new forms of social control – etc? [sources for this: Arab Barometer, WWS...]

International Migration and Mobility (WP6):

as outlined in our background paper on youth culture, migration and the ‘circulation’ of cultures are very relevant dimensions we should examine. What kind of values migrant women transfer? What is the role of Diaspora politics when it comes to lobby for women’s rights ‘back home’? Conversely, how do migrants’ influx impact on SEM countries and gender roles?

Public Policies (WP7):

Policy-making is an underexplored issue in Middle Eastern Studies. There is no study today about, for instance, the policy-making process of public policies. It would be very innovative to ‘follow’ a women’s organisation in its negotiation (if any) of some gender-related policies. Another important level of analysis regards the impact of gendered-related policies and laws. A first, relevant focus here regards policies and interventions against gender-based violence. How these politics are developing in the region and in the different countries? Which are their effects, in terms of their ability to reducing or controlling the level of violence, and in terms of their impact on the social perception of gender violence (e.g a public or private concern, a socially legitimized practices or not, etc)?

A second and broader aspect concerns the impact of laws and policies establishing and fostering gender equality: to what extent do these policies succeed in changing the social representation related to the women’s role in family and society? How the representations and values related to gender relations and to the social role of women are changing among younger generation (boys and girls), as effect of these legislative reforms?

Sources and databases on the topic:

<http://data.worldbank.org/>

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/genderstats.org>



Researching
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www.sahwa.eu



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