



YOUNG DEFENDERS

Rights Violations of the Youth in the Mediterranean
and Examples of Popular Mobilization

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INTRODUCTION

An Introduction on the Situation of Youth, and Their Main Problems and Resistances in the Mediterranean Region..... 6

EIGHT CASES OF RIGHTS VIOLATIONS TO YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

CHAPTER 1

Return of Military Service and Repression of the Right to Conscientious Objection 8

- The still timid opposition to the return of obligatory military service in Morocco and Italy.
- Imprisoned for not participating in the war game. The situation of conscientious objectors in Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Fleeing in order not to die killing. The draft and asylum-seeking objectors.

CHAPTER 2

Arbitrary Detentions, Prison and Torture Against Young and Minor Activists 16

- Systematic use of administrative detention and the defense of young imprisoned Palestinians.
- Torture and persecution from Morocco against Sahrawi organized students and children.

CHAPTER 3

Young People at Fight for the Right to Land Use and Resistances Against Predatory Neoliberalism 24

- The Soulaliyates, a fight for women's rights and against colonial privatization of land.
- Youth resistance against the plundering of resources in the Western Sahara occupied by Morocco.
- Youth resistance against mega projects in the south of Europe.

CHAPTER 4

Young People in Defense of the Right to One's Own Body and at Fight for a Life Free of Violence Against Women... 32

- Youth feminist struggle against street harassment and for legalization of abortion in Morocco.
- The beginning of the end of impunity for sexual violence in Lebanon.

CHAPTER 5	Youth Resistance Against Persecution of Sexual and Gender Diversity	38
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imprisoned for defending sexual rights and freedom. • Harassment, administrative repression and defenselessness of young LGBTQ+ activists. 	
CHAPTER 6	The Right to Work: Resistances Against Youth Unemployment, Precariousness and Domestic Slavery	46
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Employ us or kill us”, the uprising against youth unemployment in Tunisia. • The fight of migrated domestic workers against 21st century slavery. 	
CHAPTER 7	Violation of the Right to Freedom of Movement and the Right to Migration and Mobility	52
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminalization and self-organization of migrated young people and unaccompanied minors in the Mediterranean. • Life in limbo: freedom of movement, frustration and youth resistances in refugee camps. 	
CHAPTER 8	Youth Uprising for Political Rights for Democratization and Against Tyranny	58
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The awakening of Hirak, the youth uprising for social justice in Rif. • Down with gerontocracy. Young people and women lead the end of an era in Algeria. 	
CONCLUSIONS	Conclusions	64

INTRODUCTION

An introduction on the situation of youth, and their main problems and resistances in the mediterranean region

Historically, and despite the difficulty of defining what it means to be a young person, youth has been identified as a social and political subject for its rebelliousness towards dominant culture, traditional values and questioning their preceding societies and generations. This irreverence has often led to stigmatization and criminalization of young people's demands, lifestyles and fights, connected with negative stereotypes such as delinquency, laziness or moral undoing. This invisibilization of young people as a subject with agency and participation ability has helped, to leave out the contribution of the youth and, in this particular case, of human rights defenders as agents of change in their territories.

This research is a part of the campaign #YoungDefenders, promoted by SCI Catalunya precisely with the aim of visibilizing the role of young activists and human rights defenders all over the Mediterranean. It is indeed very difficult to perceive the actual transformation power that these movements and activists have, and to know where their resistance was born, without getting to know the context of infringements and violences that cut across their daily lives in multiple levels. A reality which is often diluted in a sea of more general experiences and encounters, which does not allow us to understand the role of the youth and which are the risks that they endure in their societies.

It is difficult to reduce to eight topics all the universe of violations that are afflicted on young people in general — and young defenders in particular— in the southern part of the Global North and the northern part of the Global South. In this region, the economic crisis, the wildest side of financial capitalism, and the colonial dynamics between center and periphery keep on exploiting young generations. Meanwhile, climate change is approaching and, by extension, a change in land and resources is also brewing, which augurs an increase on social conflict and new unstoppable mass movements of migrated people and refugees.

In the countries of North Africa, the Arab Springs —despite their deceiving results in terms of profound transformations, which is stated in several chapters of this report— left a trace of organized, mobilized, awake and aware youth. This situation contributed to the creation of all kinds of movements in defense of human rights, in a continent with a large number of young population, that today are revived in the new fights against authoritarianism in this region.

In the territories of Palestine, Western Sahara and Kurdistan, all still in conflict, young generations take up again the historical fight for political, cultural, economic and social rights of their corresponding populations, which have unfortunately had little or no success in the recognition of their existence.

Additionally, in the countries of the European shore, extreme right-wing powers are gaining ground up to the point that they are governing in countries like Italy and are present in most of the parliaments. This is decisively impacting on the rights and the material reality of the young people — especially of women, LGBTQ+ persons, those who arrive crossing borders, and those who do not fit in the whiteness of the elitist European identity.

To set up a close and specific view on some of the material violences against which young activists organize themselves in the Mediterranean, this report deals, **in the first of its chapters**, with the violations of the right to peace that the return of military service will predictably cause on some countries. This return takes place with the excuse of fostering a bond between the State and a disillusioned youth, who are desperate because of the lack of future and jobs. In addition to the rise of militarism, we find the persecution against conscientious objectors who refuse to take a rifle to learn to kill, and we point out the case of the State of Israel. We also put it together with the reality of young Syrians who flee from their country to escape the forced recruitment at the hands of the conflict's armed actors.

In a world that dismantles the rights and protections of children at top speed, arbitrary detention, torture and imprisonment of young and minor activists has become a systematic practice to avoid mobilization. Especially, in the countries with active historical conflicts which are the focus of the **second chapter**. It is followed by the fight for resources, for the ownership of land and against violations of environmental rights. This happens in a planet that is drying up and turning into a desert at a frenetic pace, where big transnational companies keep on plundering the old colonies, and we are faced with a climate change that is not an abstract threat anymore. Resistances and victories, the new global movements that are bursting onto the scene, but also repression and punishment against those who defend a different lifestyle, are the main issues of the report's **third chapter**.

The violence against women that is raising resistances all over the world, in a context of full expansions of the feminist

movement, is the leitmotiv in the **forth chapter**. Young women organize themselves — often exposing themselves to further attacks — for the right to an abortion and the right to their own bodies, to reappropriate public space and to oppose the impunity of sexist violences, and they revive and renew the fight of previous generations. The groups and associations — presented in the **fifth chapter** — that fight for decriminalization of homosexuality join the success of the women's movement. Same-sex relationships are still persecuted with imprisonment in several countries along the Mediterranean shore and against institutional and social hate speech towards sexual and gender nonconformity, which gives way to aggressions and impunity of those who commit them.

Collective resistances against precarization of young people's lives, who are condemned to the misery created by the dismantling of social protection, more and more temporary jobs and the high unemployment rates is the focus of the **sixth chapter**. But also the thoroughly praiseworthy fight of the 21st century slaves: migrated domestic workers — all over but, in this case, in Lebanon. The contents of the **seventh chapter** are cut across, without a doubt, by all the other rights violations which afflict youth that force them to flee to other countries which reject their right to migration and citizenship, and condemn them to live under the permanent threat of violence and deportation, or confine them in refugee camps that become a suffocating reality.

The **eighth and last chapter** of this report is a slither of energy that takes again the power of the youth mobilization in the Arab Springs. It explains how the current resistance is being held in Rif and Algeria, which is a movement that fights for cultural and social rights of nations against authoritarianism, ultraconservatism, and corruption. It is clearly led by young generations and there is a massive public participation of women too. The chapter also presents the fight for the survival of new society models in Kurdistan.

In conclusion, this report aims to contextualize human rights violations against young defenders — how these infringements impact on youth and which forms these abuses present — in the countries of this sea with such a long history of fights, which force these young people to migrate from one shore to the other. Also, to explain the alternatives that are being created in their countries of origin and how they face a present that is dark and hopeful at the same time, to build together a more dignified future.

CHAPTER 1

Return of military service and repression of the right to conscientious objection

In the last decades the dynamic of the Euro-Mediterranean region, with the exception of Turkey, Greece and Algeria, was to move towards a progressive disappearance of the obligatory military service, but recently there have been some initiatives to reestablish it that have been fruitful as in the case of Morocco, and places in which these initiatives have originated the first steps for reintroduction, like in Italy or France. The revival of compulsory military service, far from answering — no need to say — to the reality of an imminent war, is closely connected to the political agenda, and especially with two factors:

- The **global militarization and securitization process**, which especially impacts the Western world and has created a return to the paradigm of conflict management mainly with bellicose response and to war as an abstract and constant threat. Reintroduction of the draft is also related to the generalized increase of military budget.
- The **criminalizing discourses towards young people**, or those that blame the young population for the origin of all failures in the society, are becoming more acute because of the radical right-wing and extreme right-wing political forces. These forces are currently rising and are combined with a supposed urgency in front of **"denaturalization" of masculinity** and a call to resocialize mostly young boys — considered lazy, hedonist, apathetic and not manly enough — through military values such as discipline and obedience.



Soldiers visiting Golan Heights. By Michael Ann Cerniglia.



Young soldiers at the Wailing Wall, Jerusalem. By Harsh1.0.

As activists from the antimilitarist organization War Resisters International point out, the expansion of military service also means more conscientious objectors.¹ Conscientious objection is a right specific for young people, in the framework of the right to peace, and recognized by Article 18 in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, that states the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and beliefs. Even though, as the Human Rights Council of the UN's OHCHR indicates, the Covenant does not expressly refer to the right to conscientious objection, in 1993 the Human Rights Committee pointed out that this right could derive from the aforementioned Article 18, "in that the obligation of using deadly force can come into conflict with the freedom of conscience and the right to show and express religious beliefs or other".²

At the same time, forced recruitment as a consequence of the Syrian war, that has caused a relevant number of asylum-seeking objectors, is added to the worrying situation that a lot of young people experience in countries such as Turkey, Northern Cyprus, Egypt and the state of Israel, where conscientious objection to military service leads to sanctions, civil death, legal persecution, or even imprisonment.

Beyond the specific persecution of those young people who refuse to do military service, the return of military service affects society in a comprehensive way, by restoring or fostering values connected to militarization, such as dehumanization, violent conflict management, misogyny, LGBTQ+ phobia and power abuse and, therefore, does not only impact on the right to objection, but also on other civil, political and human rights.

The still timid opposition to the return of obligatory military service in Morocco and Italy

It seems unlikely that, in such a convulse context of protest against lack of freedoms, and work and future perspectives in Morocco, particularly in Rif, the governmental decision of restoring compulsory military service in August 2018 was a fortuitous fact. Especially, when the government itself recognized, since they passed a law that will oblige young men and women between 19 and 25 to enroll in service for a year with the aim to “promote patriotism among young people, so that there is a correlation between rights and responsibilities”.³ The so-called Universal National Service — that was abolished in 2007 — is also set out as a solution to the desperate situation of the country, with a deficient and elitist education system and with an unemployment rate of 26% among young people aged between 15 and 24.⁴ In fact, since the first recruitment started, in June 2019, more than 133 000 young people have applied, 13 000 girls among them,⁵ a fact that made the government increase the number of posts initially planned from 10 000 to 15 000.

As distinguished activists have precisely explained, the success in the number of applicants shows a direct correlation to the general difficulty of getting a stable income and is considered a consequence of the lack of structural solutions. Furthermore, and despite this success, before the measure was adopted there were already some groups of young people that publicly showed their opposition⁶ by creating a



Refusing to serve in the IDF. By Edo Ramon 2.

Facebook group called “Moroccan Group Against Obligatory Military Service”, that achieved to gather more than 15 000 members, and that considered the draft return as a government strategy to avoid mobilization and self-organization of young people, and to channel discontent in order to strengthen the status quo. The restoring of this measure would have caused in turn, other collateral reactions such as an increase in the number of adolescents aged 17 who flee from Morocco into Europe illegally to avoid military service, according to declarations of Melilla’s regional Minister of Social Welfare, Daniel Ventura, in a hearing in May 2019.⁷

“In Italy and France, the government is taking steps to reinstate a military or pseudo-military service which reinforces the bond between young people and the State”

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO) alerts, in the words of its president Friedhelm Schneider, that “it is likely that there will soon start to arrive cases of asylum seekers for conscience reasons from Morocco, especially because the right to conscientious objection is not recognized there”.

Italy, on the other hand, has gone from accepting refugees for conscientious objection reasons, coming from, for example, countries like Turkey or Ukraine, to considering restoring military service, and first steps have been taken in that direction by the government of Movimento 5 Stelle and the extreme right-wing Lega. The main argument to reinstate the draft is, again, closely connected to this vision which states that young people have lost “the sense of State” and therefore, in the words of the Secretary of the Interior, Matteo Salvini — the actual strong man of the government —, it should be “reminded to young people that, apart from rights, they also have duties”.⁸ Although it has not yet obtained the needed supports to do so, the Italian government already took a step in the end of March 2019, when it approved the so-called *mini-naja*, a voluntary six-month training course in military barracks for young people between the ages of 18 and 22, that will also provide 12 training credits.⁹ A few hours after the approval of

mini-naja, the leading student and youth organizations expressed their opposition to this measure, denouncing it as “a political propaganda operation in a moment when more investment in education is needed”.¹⁰

In France, Emmanuel Macron’s government just launched — in June 2019 — the so-called Universal National Service, a position between civil and military service, which will be mandatory and generalized for both boys and girls from 2026 onward and that would also include pseudo-military elements, such as uniforms.

Imprisoned for not participating in the war game. The situation of conscientious objectors in Euro-Mediterranean region

In their report for years 2017-2018, the aforementioned European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO) recognized that the context of progressive militarization was not only making the implementation of the right to conscientious objection to military service more difficult, but there were also “massive and repeated” infringements detected, as well as “an obsessive persecution of objectors”¹¹ in countries such as Greece, Turkey, Northern Cyprus and Israel.

The case of Greece — where the left-wing party Syriza is governing — is particular. Before being in the government, Syriza and its political environment participated in the movement of conscientious objectors.¹² This made a lot of people think that there would be a change when they would come to power, in regard to the persecution of those who refuse to do the military service. It was also a common thought that the loss of the recognition of objectors rights would stop, and the time inequality between the military service — with a 9-month duration — and the alternative civil service — which is 15 months long — would disappear. However, during these years, according to the antimilitarist and antiauthoritarian group Xupoluto Tagma (‘Barefoot Battalion’), the persecution of objectors has continued, mostly with fines and administrative penalties, but also with trials and police raids.



Demonstration at Diyarbakir (turskish Kurdistan).
By Vıcdani Ret Derneği.

However, the current government seemed open to negotiating a law change, which has crystallized in the recently introduced Law 4609/2019. That does not mean, for some organizations such as EBCO or Amnesty International, a radical transformation of the current situation, as it is still far from the international standards in the matter of conscientious objection. And this law does not guarantee a reduction of the length of alternative civil service,¹³ thus disobeying the recommendations of the European Parliament and the UN Human Rights Committee.

In parallel, in May 2018 the antimilitarist and peace organization made a call for a boycott against the special committee that examines the applications to grant the status of conscientious objector, where military officers participate and in which the last decision is taken by the top-ranking posts of the Ministry of Defense. The goal is the abolition of this conscience exam and the end of legal and administrative persecution against those who refuse to do military service or an alternative civil service.¹⁴

“Turkey is the most flagrant case in Europe of persecution of those who refuse to do military service and antimilitarist activists, and it does not even legally recognize the right to conscientious objection”

The government of Northern Cyprus, the Turkish-Cypriot part of the island, submitted a first draft at the beginning of 2019 — judged positively by the Initiative

for Conscientious Objection in Cyprus — for the Law about Military Service, which would mean the first official recognition of conscientious objection in the island. But, in parallel, the persecution of those refusing to do military service did not stop, and in January 2019 the objector Halil Karapasaoglu was arrested for three days.¹⁵ His case was submitted to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), where the legal actions of Haluk Selam Tufanli and Murat Kanatli are also being studied at the moment. The law amendment is currently still being blocked by one of the government partners, and therefore does not seem likely that there will be a soon end to the persecution of insubordinates.¹⁶

But Turkey is, without a doubt, the most flagrant case of objectors' persecution. In fact, it is the only European country that does not even recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service. Despite the repeated sentences from ECHR against the country, Turkey has not adopted any legal change aimed to guarantee the right of conscientious objectors not to enroll as soldiers,¹⁷ and besides, in the context of open conflict with the Kurdish guerrilla, that has very often meant, in turn, human rights abuses and infringement by the Army against Kurdish civilians.

The Turkish repression against antimilitarism goes far beyond those who refuse to do military service, who have been, in some cases such as Umut Firat Süvarioğulları, more than 25 years in prison. Also antimilitarist activists are persecuted and harassed because of making calls to objection and showing publicly their opposition to the Army. In June 2018, Merve Arkun, co-president of de Vicdani Ret Dernegi, the main Turkish association for insubordination to the draft, was investigated by the antiterrorist police of Diyarbakir (Kurdistan) for a protest organized by this group on the occasion of the International Day for Conscientious Objection, on May 15th, 2016.

Apart from the legal persecution, including imprisonment, the Turkish insubordinates face, as discussed later in this report, a situation of civil death meaning a restriction of their rights. In view of the situation of systematic persecution against the antimilitarist and peace movement in Turkey, some activists have decided to flee and seek refuge in countries like Greece, or Italy, which is taking in the Kurdish insubordinate Ugur Bilkay.

Refuseniks: the case of conscientious objectors imprisoned in Israel

At the end of 2017, 63 young Israelis all over the country, that were about to be conscripted, sent a letter to the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to show their refusal to enroll in the Israeli Army — IDF — to do compulsory military service because of their disagreement “with the implementation of a racist policy that violates human rights in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip”.¹⁸ The young people who performed this civil disobedience action were faced not only with spending weeks or months in a military prison, but also with social rejection. In their society, the matter of refuseniks — ‘those who refuse’ — creates a great controversy.

Actually, it is estimated that around 35% of the conscripted people avoid military service for religious reasons,¹⁹ that, together with having mental health problems and/or belonging to the Israeli Arab minority, are the only cases in which Israel allows exemptions to the military service. The percentage of people publicly refusing to do military service for ethical or political reasons is not significant, and the activists themselves calculate that between 5 and 15 young people do conscientious objection every year.²⁰ The process is not easy. Those who want to be granted an exemption have to appear before a military committee, which can dictate that the person should enroll in a position that does not involve combat or use of weapons, in order not to compromise the person's beliefs. All this, provided that it is determined that the exemption application is “really for conscience reasons and not political reasons”.²¹ The committee can even reject the petition if it seems to represent an action of “civil disobedience”.

Hilel Garmi (19), Adam Rafaelov (18) and Yasmin Vered-Levy (18) are three of the last refuseniks that have been going in and out of prison for months. The activists are supported by the group Mesarvot — Refusing to Serve the Occupation, which organizes those people who refuse to do military service being that they disagree with the occupation of Palestine.

The case of Hilel Garmi, who already has spent over a 100 days in prison putting together all the coming-in and going-outs, has leaked out to the public because of the letter exchange he made with Ahmed Abu Artema, one of the leaders and organizers of the Great March of Return to Gaza. In this exchange, both activists were calling for collective action to reach a “solution that will draw its legitimacy from universal principles of justice”.²² Rafaelov, from the north of the country, was sentenced by an IDF’s disciplinary court in July 2018. At the end of 2018, he had to go in prison for the seventh time, having served a total of 87 days in jail up to this moment.

The organization War Resisters International has asked for the end of persecution of both activists in several press releases.²³

The example of her fellow activists was influential on Yasmin’s decision to declare herself a refusnik. “I read the letters between Hilel and Ahmed and they helped me to understand the complexity of the decision I was taking”,²⁴ she said in a public support action to refuseniks, which was held in January 2019 in Tel Aviv, a few days before she was to be recruited in the IDF.



Hilel Garmi. By mesarvot.

One of the differences between the Israeli context and other countries that persecute conscientious objection is the presence of many insubordinate women, as the military service is set at different lengths but is still compulsory for both male and females, as well as people who do not identify themselves in gender binarism.



Mesarvot’s campaign.

Fleeing in order not to die killing. The draft and asylum-seeking objectors

When the draft intersects with a war or conflict context, conscientious objection becomes not only an ethical or political positioning, but an act of simple surviving. Asylum for conscientious objection reasons is still a controversial matter, as the EBCO announced in the launch of its last annual report, where it accused the states of the European Union of denying asylum to objectors and returning them to “countries where they will not only face obligatory military service, but worse things”.²⁵

A clear example of these “worse things”, which EBCO mentions, is the case of Syria. The draft was already used to represent massive pressure on young men even before the current armed conflict, in which it is estimated that over 120 000 soldiers have lost their lives. Previously, all young men 18 years old and older were obliged to do military service and to be reservists until the age of 42, without any legal

alternative or possibility of being declared as an objector.²⁶ But since the armed hostilities started, the draft age has increased de facto over 50. In addition, Syrian activists have announced on several occasions that the Syrian Army, as well as the governmental militias or other armed actors, were recruiting minors between 16 and 18 years old as soldiers.²⁷ At the same time, the need for substituting the dead combatants led the government to intensify the draft campaign in 2014, while those who started their military service at the beginning of the war have had to continue in the Army throughout the conflict.²⁸

“For many young men in draft age, the solution has been to abandon Syria — exposing themselves to detention and torture — to seek for asylum in other countries”

Men of draft age are arrested in their homes and recruited by the Army through raids in some neighborhoods, especially in those neighborhoods and cities where mobilizations and resistance prominently took place against Al-Assad’s regime, in checkpoints or at the border. Last protests against the draft, at the beginning of 2019 in towns like Daraa,²⁹ show the young people’s frustration and their refusal to the obligation to serve in the Army, to such an extent that they disappear from the streets when the recruitment patrols come. It happened, for example, in Aleppo, where the increase in the number of checkpoints in February 2019 led the men aged between 18 and 42 to hide in their homes.³⁰

For many young men in draft age, the solution has been to abandon the country — exposing themselves to detention and torture — to seek for asylum in other countries, such as Lebanon and Germany. In the latter country, for example, young activists are refugees, as Zain Mohammed, a conscientious objector from Aleppo who “did not want to enter the Army because [he] disagreed on using weapons against somebody that had done nothing to [him]”.³¹ Mohammed obtained the status of refugee; many others had to be satisfied with a

temporary visa that faces them with a possible return to Syria when it is considered that the conditions have improved. The young refugees fear reprisals when going back to their country, as the Syrian law punishes refusal to military service and desertion.

On the other hand, the situation of civil death that young conscientious objectors are faced with in countries like Turkey, Algeria and Egypt has led some of these activists to also become refugees in Europe. Civil death deprives them of leaving the country, getting a passport, accessing certain jobs, and forces them to live permanently under the threat of detention and imprisonments. In fact, the member organizations of EBCO in Germany are currently accompanying the cases of an Egyptian and an Algerian objector who are applying for asylum in the Central-European country.

¹ War Resisters International, “The return of draft?”, 19/01/2018: <https://www.wri-irg.org/en/story/2018/return-draft>

² OHCHR, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/35/4 “Objeción de conciencia al servicio militar. Informe analítico”, 17/05/2017.

³ Europa Press, “Marruecos restablece el servicio militar obligatorio para los menores de 25 años”, 21/08/2018: <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-marruecos-restablece-servicio-militar-obligatorio-menores-25-anos-20180821082532.html>

⁴ Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP), “La situation du marché du travail en 2018”.

⁵ Le Figaro, “Maroc: afflux de candidatures féminines pour le service militaire”, published on 10/06/2019: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/maroc-afflux-de-candidatures-feminines-pour-le-service-militaire-20190610>

⁶ H24Info, “Vidéo. Des jeunes expliquent pourquoi ils refusent d’accomplir le service militaire”, published on 3/09/2018: https://www.h24info.ma/maroc/video-des-jeunes-expliquent-pourquoi-ils-refusent-daccomplir-le-service-militaire/?fbclid=IwAR1KEt3rQlrNnnDPD3mxzQAAPyNTDbCMzxZOGiJUDXnNHk-ZVcSWwIZMb_0

⁷ El Faro de Melilla, “Aumenta la llegada de adolescentes marroquíes que huyen del servicio militar”, published on 3/5/2019: <https://elfarodemelilla.es/aumenta-llegada-adolescentes-marroquies-huyen-servicio-militar/>

⁸ Corriere della Sera, “Leva obbligatoria, Salvini e il ritorno della leva obbligatoria. Trenta: «Non al passo con i tempi»”, 12/08/2018: https://www.corriere.it/politica/18_agosto_12/salvini-ritorno-leva-obbligatoria-chi-o-contro-lui-9612d5b2-9e00-11e8-89df-b6a0ee1ba25d.shtml

⁹ Qui Finanza, “La Camera approva la mini naja: sei mesi in caserma e 12 crediti formativi”, 28/03/2019: <https://quifinanza.it/lavoro/video/la-camera-approva-la-mini-naja-sei-mesi-in-caserma-e-12-crediti-formativi/265548/>

¹⁰ Articolo 21 liberi di..., “Mini naja: la protesta degli studenti”, 29/03/2019: <https://www.articolo21.org/2019/03/mini-naja-la-protesta-degli-studenti/>

¹¹ EBCO, “Annual report. Conscientious objection in Europe 2017”, 10/12/2017.

¹² Batallón descalzo (2016), “Militarismo en tiempos de Syriza”, Editorial Segadores.

¹³ Amnesty International, "Greece: observations on the right to conscientious objection - serious violations of Greece's obligations towards conscientious objectors remain unaddressed in proposed bill despite some positive steps", 20/03/2019: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR2500882019ENGLISH.PDF>

¹⁴ EBCO, "Annual report. Conscientious objection in Europe 2018", May 2019.

¹⁵ EBCO, "Northern Cyprus imprisonment of Turkish-Cypriot conscientious objector Halil Karapaşaoğlu: A blatant human rights violation", 15/01/2019: <http://www.ebco-beoc.org/node/446>

¹⁶ Vicdani Ret Dernegi, "Kıbrıs'ta Vicdani Ret İnisiyatifi: 'Vicdani Ret Yasa Tasarısı' fiili olarak kadük olmuştur", 17/06/2019: <https://vicdaniret.org/kibrista-vicdani-ret-inisiyatifi-vicdani-ret-yasa-tasarisi-fiili-olarak-kaduk-olmustur/>

¹⁷ EBCO (2018), see quotation No. 14.

¹⁸ Times of Israel, "Dozens of 12th-graders to defy draft over 'oppression' of Palestinians", 28/12/2017: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/dozens-of-12th-graders-to-defy-draft-over-oppression-of-palestinians/>

¹⁹ Haaretz, quoting IDF's statistics, "Despite Mandatory Draft IDF Statistics: One in Six Israeli Men Doesn't Complete Full Military Service", 9/06/2013: <https://www.haaretz.com/1-in-6-israeli-men-doesn-t-finish-army-service-1.5275963>

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²¹ Refworld, Immigration and refugee board from Canada, "Israel: The treatment of conscientious objectors called up for reserve duty or military service", 10/03/2010.

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²⁵ EBCO, press release "Non-assistance to persons in danger: EBCO criticises failure of European institutions to protect conscientious objectors to military service", 13/05/2019.

²⁶ Organisation Suisse d'Aide aux Réfugiés (OSAR), "Syrie: recrutement forcé, refus de servir, désertion", 23/03/2017.

²⁷ War Resisters International, "Syria: citizens conscripted after arrest, children recruited", 22/02/2016: <https://www.wri-irg.org/en/story/2016/syria-citizens-conscripted-after-arrest-children-recruited>

²⁸ Reuters, "Seeing No Future, Deserters and Draft-Dodgers Flee Syria", 20/07/2016: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-army/seeing-no-future-deserters-and-draft-dodgers-flee-syria-idUSKCN1001PY>

²⁹ Middle East Monitor, "Syrians protest in Daraa over military conscription".

³⁰ The Syrian Observer, "Conscription Campaign Paralyzes Aleppo", 4/02/2019: <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/features/48352/conscription-campaign-paralyzes-aleppo.html>

³¹ EBCO, see quotation No. 11.

CHAPTER 2

Arbitrary detentions, prison and torture against young and minor activists

Imprisonment of young defenders, and especially of minors, in general and more specifically for political crimes, is not a minority or isolated phenomenon at all. According to a report published in 2016,¹ Human Rights Watch talks about a situation of “global abuse of minors’ detention”, some of them for acts such as not attending school, escaping from home, seeking asylum in another country, having consented sexual intercourse before marriage or aborting. In addition, all over we can find detentions and imprisonments for ethnic, racial, religious, ideological and political reasons, or caused by nationality, migratory control or sexual orientation.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated in 2009² that over a million children are in prison or deprived of liberty all over the world, many of them in unsanitary, abusive and humiliating conditions, without access to education and without contact to exterior world or to their families. However, it is difficult to estimate the exact amount of imprisoned minors because many governments do not disaggregate data. The situation is especially serious if we consider the fact that many countries which have imprisoned population under the age of 18 signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which took effect in 1990 and clearly stipulates in its articles that “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (Article 3). Moreover, the states must guarantee that no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment; also that no minor shall be deprived of his or her liberty arbitrarily and that “the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time” (Article 37).³

Far from effectively being the last mechanism to be activated, the UN workgroup that has been commissioned to the future research “Children deprived of liberty”, which will be launched in September 2019, already dares to point out that

“children, minors and young people are being detained at a younger and younger age and are held captive for longer and longer periods of time”, becoming an invisible and forgotten social group. This fact makes violations of their human rights easier; they are confined in adult prisons and in inhuman conditions, where the risk of suffering violence and sexual abuses, tortures and cruel or degrading treatment increases.

“Children, minors and young people are being detained at a younger and younger age and are held captive for longer and longer periods of time”

Beyond the situation of vulnerabilization and the circumstantial reasons related to race / ethnic group, gender and socioeconomic status, violation of the

rights of young people and children by arbitrary detention and imprisonment for political reasons are also connected with criminalization of youth. This prejudice is an intrinsic part of the comprehensive adult domination in our societies,⁴ where “youth” is associated to irreverence, rebellion and social danger. The securitization of young people, minors and even children as a population that distorts social order is a part of the global securitization process. This process has, among other things, created effects such as the naturalization and normalization of situations like the imposition of excessive or disproportionate penalties, or like the violation of rights in the framework of the “fight against terrorism”. Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, has publicly shown her concern about these effects. According to Zerrougui, in the case of children, minors and young people, detention for charges based on national security has led to a change in the vision about these children and minors, as “they are no longer perceived or considered



The walls of El Aaiun. By Nora Miralles.

mainly as victims of armed conflicts and tensions, but as a threat to security”.⁵ The representative also points out that detentions and imprisonment in the fight against terrorism in the context of armed conflicts often means a long deprivation of liberty and a prolonged isolation situation, which can devastatingly impact the psychosocial health of the imprisoned children or young people. An impact that is more serious in the case of girls, and sexual and gender dissidents who face a double discrimination in the framework of such a patriarchal institution as the prison.

In the Euro-Mediterranean region, we find especially serious situations, such as internment of unaccompanied migrated minors in Immigration Detention Centers (referred to by its Spanish acronym CIE). In fact, the Spanish Ministry of the Interior has recently recognized that at least 89 migrated minors were held in CIEs during 2018. Another example is the grave situation in Egypt, where Amnesty International denounced the torturing of six children and young people that has taken place since 2013, when they were under the custody of Egyptian authorities, and the 12 minors who have been subjected to enforced disappearance since 2015.⁶

However, violation of children and young people’s rights deprived of their liberty for political reasons and, by extension, violation of their right to peace, is especially outstanding and scandalous in two territories in which there operate similar contexts of militarization and conflict: Palestine and Western Sahara.



Image by Hossam el-Hamrawy.

Systematic use of administrative detention and the defense of young imprisoned Palestinians

The systematic detention of minors in Palestine has been a trending topic in the media, as in the case of Ahd Tamimi, a young girl from the West Bank, who was arrested at the age of 16 for slapping an Israeli soldier in the face and who spent eight months in prison, becoming a symbol of Palestinian resistance against occupation, which made her famous even in the State of Spain. However, the case of Tamimi is far — far away — from being exceptional. The Palestinian Prisoner Society calculates that at least 6000 Palestinian minors aged between 12 and 17 have been detained by the Israeli authorities or the Army since 2015⁷ and that, currently, between 205 and 250 among them are still being held in prisons of the State of Israel, 32 of them being under the age of 16.⁸ The society adds that 98% of these detained children and young people have been subjected to physical and psychological violence in the custody of the administration. And that dozens of them were arrested after being shot or wounded with real ammunition, or with rubber and steel bullets by the Israel Defense Forces, or IDF.

Among the young people in all Palestinian territories, children in **East Jerusalem** are one of the most exposed populations to administrative detentions, especially during protest periods or situations of tension escalation, such as those that took place at the Bab al-Rahma, the Gate of Mercy of Al-Aqsa Mosque, which had remained shut since 2003 until a group of Palestinian activists reopened it in February 2019.

“Throwing bottles and stones in protest actions is punished with up to 20 years in prison, according to the Israeli military legislation”

It is calculated that, in the **West Bank**, around 700 Palestinian minors are judged every year in the Israeli military courts after being detained and questioned by the Army.⁹ As stated by Addameer, an organization

in defense of human rights and the rights of prisoners, some of these young people were arrested for acts such as having thrown stones or empty bottles at police cars or public transport, a crime punishable by imprisonment for up to 20 years — according to the military legislation of the State of Israel.¹⁰ Moreover, we must point out that between January and November 2018, 140 cases of detentions of minors at the hands of Palestinian security forces were documented — most of them being illegal detentions.¹¹ In **Gaza**, the Israeli soldiers' practice of opening fire on demonstrators who do not pose a threat to their lives, has led to the murder of 45 minors since March 2018.¹² This has been denounced by DCI Palestine to the UN commission which investigates the 2018 protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), and which was established during a special session of the UN Human Rights Council in May that same year.

In the last years, because of the accusation of different UN commissions for violation of minors' and children's rights, Israel has introduced some legislative changes that shorten the detention period and recognize the role of parents in the process. But, despite of that, Addameer and other defenders' organizations maintain that the situation has not changed much. A report from this NGO shows that over 40% of detained children were taken from their homes during surprise raids in the early morning, in some occasions even by hitting the relatives who were present. With rare exceptions, the minors are immediately handcuffed and, in 80% of cases, are transported blindfolded. Many of the detained young people say that they were insulted, threatened or beaten during the transportation.¹³



Ahed Tamimi's *Bethlehem Wall*. By Jorit Agoch.

"70% of detained children denounced being subjected to physical and verbal violence during questioning"

Although we are talking about minors, in 90% of the cases the soldiers do not inform their parents about the reason of the arrest or the destination of their son or daughter. They also do not inform the children about their rights, and the minors have no access to an attorney before or during questioning. Once this has finished, the minors must sign a declaration that is often written in Hebrew, a language they do not understand. 70% of them, according to Addameer's figures, will later condemn having been subjected to physical and verbal violence during questioning.

In connection with the rhetoric that criminalizes young people, which legitimates the infringement of international regulation about protection of minors' rights, the official documents of the Israeli Ministry of Justice use a clearly stigmatizing rhetoric, presenting the Palestinian young people as a population "involved in terrorist activities" and particularly "indoctrinated and violent".¹⁴ According to the same document, quoted by the NGO B'Tselem, in which the Israeli ministry defends the validity of arbitrary detention and imprisonment of minors, the presumed indoctrination of the Palestinian young people "starts in nursery school and continues up to the adult age. From stone-throwing and Molotov cocktails, to armed attacks and violent terrorist activities against military and civilians". Thus, it is justified to apply the same response to stone-throwing, in the context of an Army incursion, as to more serious acts, because "the consequences and damages caused by these attacks are the same as if performed by adults".

Torture and persecution from Morocco against Sahrawi organized students and children

The expansive news blackout of information regarding Western Sahara, denounced by Reporters Without Borders in a report published in June 2019,

makes defenders and young defenders tasks more difficult when they want to raise their voices and spread their condemnations about cases of torture and detention of young people and children. As mentioned, in Palestine, administrative detention and imprisonment of minors by Israel is common, and the same happens in these territories. Sahrawi activists denounce Western Sahara's frequent detention, questioning, abuse, and even torture of Sahrawi young people and children, and the fact that they are released after that without being taken before a judge. The latest of these cases, a 14-year-old student detained and beaten on May 25th, 2019, managed to tear this heavy silence curtain.

"I was participating in a pacific demonstration to claim for the freedom of my father, when the Moroccan police detained me. They took me to the police station where they issued identity documents and took my phone. When they discovered the RASD flag (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, referred to by its Spanish acronym) in my profile and images in support of Polisario Front, they started to spit on



Video capture of Mbarek Mohamed Bani telling his story.



Bani's family in solidarity with political prisoners.

me and punch me. After that, they accused me of stone-throwing”,¹⁵ said Mbarek Mohamed Bani, aged 14. Bani, the son of the political prisoner Mohamed Bani who was sentenced to life imprisonment for the events of Gdeim Izik — the Sahrawi protest camp which was dismantled in 2010 —, is a regular demonstrator for the release of around 50 Sahrawi prisoners that are held in Morocco, and was detained in May 25th by the police in Laayoune without being informed about the reason for his detention.

The boy maintains that he was insulted, abused and beaten in the custody of police and that he was released four hours later — without being taken before a judge —, after signing a self-incriminating document in which he was accused of stone-throwing during the protest.¹⁶

“Hundreds of Sahrawi children would have been detained, beaten and released without being taken into justice custody as an anti-mobilization strategy”

According to several activists, including Laila Leili, from the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Violations of Human Rights Committed by the Moroccan State (ASVDH in Spanish), the procedure used against Bani is a systematic practice of the Moroccan authorities. When she was invited to appear in a hearing in March 2018 by the Madrid Support Network of Sahrawi Women (REDMANSA), Leili said that it cases like Bani’s correspond to a strategy from Morocco to frighten the minors and avoid their mobilization, a process that has also been denounced by other public faces of the Sahrawi liberation movement, including Aminatou Haidar. Although the number of children who went to prison in the last years is unknown, according to Sahrawi associations, there would have been hundreds of these kinds of detentions.

Amnesty International also documented the report “Shadow of Impunity. Torture in Morocco and Western Sahara”, published in May 2015, which also highlighted more cases of torture and abuse

— including electric shocks — to force children to incriminate themselves. The documentation was possible thanks to the testimony of relatives of children detained by police officers in towns like Assa, Zag, Guelmim; the police questioned the minors without allowing them to communicate with an attorney or their legal guardians, in violation of Article 460 of the Moroccan Penal Code.¹⁷ Some of the detained people said, too, that police had retained them in police vehicles without formal arrest and had beaten, threatened and insulted them before releasing them from the vehicle. Some of these cases have even been brought to the European Parliament, as in the case of three 15-year-old boys imprisoned in 2016 in a penitentiary center for adults — the sadly well-known “Black Prison” in Laayoune — for participating in a pacific demonstration.¹⁸

With regard to the proceedings that involve a trial and imprisonment, one of the most punished groups among young activists by the Moroccan authorities are organized students, in general, but especially the Sahrawi. In this sense, the most well-known case is — a part from the aforementioned dismantling of the Gdeim Izik camp — the so-called Sahrawi Students’ Group of “El Uali”.



Kids in the most guarded neighborhood in El Aaiun.

Repression, torture and prison against the Sahrawi student movement: the case of the Student Group



Campaign from the Saharan students' group "Al Uali".

At the beginning of 2019, 10 out of 14 political prisoners of the Student Group were released. They belonged to a Sahrawi student group at the University of Marrakech and were detained in 2016. These young men had moved from their original towns — there are no higher education institutions in the Occupied Territories — to this city in southern Morocco, to take university studies. In response to the brutal attack against another Sahrawi student in the city, Lazar Yahia, the group decided to call for a pacific sit-down protest in January 23rd, 2016 as a way to denounce racially motivated attack as well as the aggressors' impunity. During the action, there was an altercation, in which a Moroccan boy called Omar Khalek died. During the following months, 12 students of this university were detained, and although they were not accused of Khalek's homicide in the police station nor during the questioning, they were interrogated about their ideology and their political actions in relation to the Polisario Front. This questioning about their ideology was pointed out in the trial that was postponed 12 times until it finally started in May 9th, 2017. In addition, the students maintain that throughout the 18 days of their detention, they suffered by way of torture, consisting of being burned, beaten with sticks, punched, threatened with rape, and deprived of sleep, among others.¹⁹

The accused — 17 young men, in the end —, as well as their lawyers, condemned the prosecution of the case for being based on false declarations and police documents, obtained under torture. This led Paloma López, a member of the European Parliament for the Spanish left-wing party Izquierda Unida, to qualify their detentions as "illegal and arbitrary". It also motivated a legal action submitted by the European Parliament Intergroup for Western Sahara to Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, considering that the case was politically motivated and that the trial's repeated postponement and the declarations obtained under torture questioned the existence of conditions for a fair trial.²⁰ Eventually, the students were accused of involuntary manslaughter, even though there was no documentation of any their participation in the events, and none of them was charged as author or co-author of manslaughter. Four of the students were sentenced to 10 years in prison and eleven of the accused to 3 years in prison.²¹

Current situation: The only political prisoner sentenced to three years who is still awaiting release is Omar Beijni, while El Kantaoui Albar, Abedmoula Elhafidi, Aziz Aluahidi and Mohamed Dada continue to serve the ten-year imprisonment they were sentenced.

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² UNICEF, "Progress for children. A report card for child protection". No. 9, September 2009: [https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Progress_for_Children-No.8_EN_081309\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Progress_for_Children-No.8_EN_081309(1).pdf)

³ United Nations (1990), Convention on the Rights of the Child: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

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⁵ Human Rights Council, "Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict", December 29th, 2014.

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⁷ Ma'an News Agency, "PPS: Israel detained over 6,000 Palestinian children since 2015", 10/04/2019: <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=783133>

⁸ B'Tselem, Statistics on Palestinian minors in the custody of Israeli security forces: https://www.btselem.org/statistics/minors_in_custody

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¹⁰ The Telegraph, "Israel introduces controversial 20-year jail sentences for stone throwing", 22/07/2015: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/11755603/Israel-introduces-controversial-20-year-jail-sentences-for-stone-throwing.html>

¹¹ DCI Palestine, "Year-In-Review: 2018 Rained deadly force on Palestinian children", published on December 31st, 2018.

¹² DCI Palestine & City University of New York (CUNY) School of Law, "Submission to the UN Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory concerning unlawful killing and use of excessive force by Israeli forces against Palestinian children", on January 11th, 2019: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/dcipalestine/pages/5218/attachments/original/1548306271/DCIP_HRGJ_Submission_to_COI_2018_Protests.pdf?1548306271

¹³ B'Tselem, "Minors in Jeopardy. Violation of the Rights of Palestinian Minors by Israel's Military Courts", published in March 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Testimony of Mbarek Mohamed Bani, recorded by Equipe Media and published on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=UgHloZayeaQ

¹⁶ No Te Olvides del Sáhara Occidental, "Detenido y maltratado un niño saharauí que pedía la libertad para su padre", 29/05/2019: <https://noteolvidesdelsaharaoccidental.org/detenido-y-maltratado-un-nino-saharai-que-pedia-la-libertad-para-su-padre-contramutis>

¹⁷ Amnesty International, "La sombra de la impunidad. Tortura en Marruecos y Sáhara Occidental", published in May 2015.

¹⁸ European Parliament, Parliamentary question for written answer E-009469/2016 about the imprisonment of three Sahrawi minors: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2016-009469_ES.html

¹⁹ Louenço, I. & Fundación Sáhara Occidental, "Information – Saharawi Student prisoners Group Companions of El Uali", published on November 15th, 2017.

²⁰ Sahara Press Service, "IU denuncia ante la UE detenciones 'ilegales' y 'arbitrarias' de estudiantes saharauis en Marruecos", April 25th, 2016: <https://www.spsrasd.info/news/en/node/1300>

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CHAPTER 3

Young people at fight for the right to land use and resistances against predatory neoliberalism

The youth fight for their right to land use, and their fights against plundering at the hands of multinational companies, against privatization of communal land and against mega projects that destroy the environment all have something in common: their background is the opposition to the predatory dynamics of neoliberalism and globalization on the communities and people.

Although the right to enjoy a healthy environment is not recognized in human rights regulations,¹ it does have a connection with several rights, such as the right to health, to peace and to development. In addition, in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development approved in 1992, the United Nations announced that "environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it".²

Thus, human rights and environmental rights are related, as the enjoyment of human rights depends on a secure, healthy and clean environment. Despite the fact that this interdependence has eventually become more solid, as the United Nations recognizes, there are also growing violations of environmental rights. Globalization of big corporations is moving forward, and especially in the case of extractivist neocolonialism. Activists in defense of the land are subjected to violence,³ because these young environment defenders defy big construction companies and extractive industries, and also because of the benefits the latter corporations represent for governments. This abuse takes place all over the world: in Latin America and North Africa, where environment defenders are murdered, imprisoned and harassed, and also in continental Europe, where the fights against mega projects and touristification are criminalized and discredited, as what happens with the new youth movements that are sparked by climate emergency.

However, the advancement and growth of the self-organized youth environment defenders in already global movements, such as Extinction or Rebellion, makes the fight for land and against the climate crisis become the future great battle of young people.

The Soulaliyates, a fight for women's rights and against colonial privatization of land

It is a declaration of war against the State, their traditions, and the men of their families in order to defend their own rights.⁴ This is how some Soulaliyate women, women from tribal communities in Morocco, define their fight for the ownership of the communal lands they live on.

Approximately 42% of the land in Morocco⁵ — around 15 million hectares — are collective or communal lands in their origin, most of them pastures and cultivation lands, which have been passed down for generations among male family members over 16 years old within the same family. These communal lands were under

the control of the tribal communities for centuries, until 1919 when France approved a government decree which transferred the control of communal lands to the State, a French protectorate at that moment. However, the peasants kept on working on these lands and harvesting their fruits.⁶ With the Moroccan independence, in 1956, the communal lands continued in the hands of the State, which constituted male peasant and stockbreeder's committees in which men represented their communities.

Soulaliyate women seemed resigned to this conditioned daily access to the lands they were working on — they are 50.6% of the agricultural force in the country⁷ — until the expropriation and land selling process was accelerated between the 1990s and 2000s by a wave of privatizations in most of the African nations. This wave was promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary



Activist movement of soulaliyates women.

Fund in order to abolish communal property, among other aims. The process of land monopolization based on the logic of economic profit, from which especially multinational companies have benefited, has not only created a privatization of the relationship with land, but also a new colonial order between center and periphery.⁸ Furthermore, it exposed, for the first time explicitly, that women had no right to land use, nor right to receiving the corresponding compensation when the State sold these lands to national and foreign enterprises.

"After 12 years of fights, Soulaliyates begin to win the battle for equality in access to their ancestral lands"

Moroccan inheritance laws are really unfavorable for women, because they cannot inherit alone, and they are forced to share the inheritance with their brothers — who receive twice as much as women — or with the men in their family, in the case that they do not have brothers. From generation to generation, this fact continues to worsen the impoverishment and precariousness of women in Morocco,⁹ as announced by the International Federation for Human Rights in 2015. Moreover, in the case of Soulaliyate women, their customary laws would not allow single and divorced women and widows to inherit their ancestral lands.

This inequality in regard with inheritance was harshly materialized with the expropriation without compensation, at the hands of the State, of the lands where many Soulaliyates lived. However, the men in their families did receive the corresponding damages pay. Therefore, some of these women progressively moved to the most marginal neighborhoods in big cities.¹⁰ In other cases, this dynamic caused the vulnerable situation of Soulaliyates to become even more serious in front of the violence they suffered at the hands of the men of their families, and in consequence they did not confront them for fear of losing their livelihood.

The exclusion of women from the lists of owners that needed a compensation sparked a resistance movement that would become the most important

national fight for land-use rights. In the background, there was the defense of communal use of natural resources and the opposition of the destruction and commercialization of their lifestyles. The situation started to change when, in 2007, a Soulaliyate from the Kenitra region, Rkia Bellout, asked the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) to help her with denouncing the discrimination that she was receiving.¹¹

The demand of these women as legitimate usufructuaries of communal lands rapidly expanded all over the territory, and the first victory arrived in 2009 with a governmental provision — which was not, however, a law and could therefore be revoked — that granted Kenitra's Soulaliyates access to the compensations for expropriation. But it was not until 2012 that the rights of all women in the tribal communities were recognized, not only to compensations, but also to the usufruct of lands.¹²

In February 14th, 2019, after 12 years of fights and 14 centuries of discrimination in the access to land ownership, the Government Council approved a law with three decrees,¹³ which, among other things, regulate the management of possessions in the Soulaliyate communes, recognizing their right to participate in the representative bodies where decisions about lands are taken.



Activist movement of soulaliyates women.

Youth resistance against the plundering of resources in the Western Sahara occupied by Morocco

The fight against the illegitimate plundering of natural resources in Western Sahara, which is an exploitation that infringes several United Nations' resolutions about the status of this region as a territory that must be decolonized, is a central topic in the demands of Sahrawi political movements, as well as Sahrawi youth movements. But the colonial appropriation of raw materials of the country — mainly phosphates, sand, fishing and, lately, wind power — is not a modern conflict. The phosphate mine in Boucraa — mostly used to produce fertilizers — was built when Sahara was under Spanish rule,¹⁴ and is still the main extraction point for this mineral, and an important and strategic infrastructure for Morocco, which currently benefits from the exportation of phosphates all over the world.

The exportation is done by two enterprises operated by the State of Morocco, OCP S.A. and Phosphates de Boucraa S.A, also known as PhosBouCraa, which extract the mineral and transport it on a 97-kilometer long conveyor belt that reaches Laayoune harbor, where it is loaded on ships and taken away from Sahara in the ratio of two to three million tons per year.¹⁵ According to Environmental Justice Atlas, this is not only a case of resources and land dispossession, but it has also caused forced displacements, militarization of the zone, abuses and other human rights violations.

The protests at the PhosBouCraa plant are not new either. Since its construction in 1973, the mine has become a target for the Polisario Front,¹⁶ which aims to cause economic damage to the extractive companies that have exploited it by sabotaging the conveyor belt, which is the most vulnerable point in the infrastructure. One of the latest and much talked-about attacks took place in 2006,¹⁷ although the protests for the plundering of phosphate prevail nowadays. These demands are still alive not only because the extractions are illegal and because they harm the environment, but also



Protest against ABB. By Western Sahara Research Watch.

because the Moroccan occupation has changed from top to bottom the demographic structure of this territory and has condemned the Sahrawi youth to unemployment, according to the Observatory of Human Rights and Companies in the Mediterranean (ODHE).¹⁸ For example, the staff of the PhosBouCraa plant is discriminatorily composed of Moroccan colonial population to the detriment of the Sahrawi population.

Currently, apart from phosphates and fishing, the protests and fights against the plundering of resources in Western Sahara focus on the exploration of possible oil wells, at the hands of six British companies and some North American enterprises with the complicity of Morocco. The prospection mostly takes place in the areas of Cape Bojador and Tarfaya, operated by companies¹⁹ such as Cairn Energy, Glencore and Kosmos Energy. The protests against oil extraction and the arrival of these companies, which mainly took place in 2014,²⁰ were harshly repressed by the Moroccan security forces.

The most recent case, which is the main focus of the Sahrawi protests against the extraction of resources, points out that so-called “clean energy” has a contradiction, because it does not produce waste, but it does lead to economic dispossession. Since 2016, companies like Siemens, the Italian Enel and the Swiss ABB Group have landed in the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara to benefit from the exceptional conditions that allow generating a great amount of wind and solar power. The Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW) calculated in a report published in 2016 that over a fourth of all renewable energy produced by Morocco will be localized in the occupied zone in 2020.²¹ In November 2016, the UN conference COP22 about climate change was celebrated in Marrakech, and the Sahrawi movement took to the streets in Laayoune — and was also mobilized throughout social networks — to denounce the construction of new renewable energy plants and the complicity of Siemens and Enel with the Moroccan occupation,²² because these companies provide energy to the mineral extraction plants in the name of the energetic transition.

The latest wave of protests and resistances took place at the end of 2018, caused by a contract with ABB Group to build a new wind power plant²³ near Bojador.

Youth resistance against mega projects in the south of Europe

The defense of land is, in southern Europe, especially represented by the opposition to speculative mega projects, defined as large-scale investments in infrastructure projects (transport, energy, water, waste management), but also in mining or fracking, touristic resorts and shopping malls.²⁴ Many of these projects are a part of the neoliberal idea of progress and are considered by the movements and activists opposed to them as devastating and harmful for landscapes and communities.

The response to these protests can be considered, in some way, proportional to the amount of money invested in the project. According to Alfred Burballa, an expert on mega projects’ impact and the opposition to them, a common characteristic of the movements in defense of land — which use classical methods of civil disobedience, like blocking — is the systematic criminalization, almost always justified with the alleged use of violence by activists.²⁵ This strategy diverts the focus from the economic, social and environmental costs of these concrete monsters.

So, the major barriers that resistance movements against land destruction are faced with are repression and the difficulty to spread further than local scale, especially if we take into account that many of these mega projects have a global impact. Some of the most well-known fights all over the continent are the ones against fracking and the protests for the closure of nuclear power stations. But the most outstanding resistances — because they are an experimental laboratory on new forms of democracy and because of the police brutality and the extremely strong judicial response they have endured — are the fight against the mega airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, near Nantes, in the French Brittany, and the firm opposition to the High Speed Train, abbreviated “TAV” in Italian, being held in the Italian Val di Susa, the conflict’s epicenter.

"No TAV". 25 years of fight and repression in Val di Susa (Italy) against the High Speed Train

The first mobilizations against the TAV in Val di Susa, a valley in the Italian Alps, emerged in the 1990s when the plans were announced to build a 54-kilometer tunnel for the high speed railway line between Lyon and Turin, through a valley which already had an environmental awareness.. But it is not until the 2000s that the European Union classified this mega project as a priority structure,²⁶ thus raising protests that expanded all over the country and which have led to what we know today as the Italian movement No TAV.

During the first years of the 2000s, support committees of this fight were forged and spread. The TAV, in the case of Val di Susa, was not only going to mean landscape destruction, but also exposing its population to high quantities of uranium, asbestos and radon, which are found naturally in the mountain's composition. But the inflection point of this protest took place in 2005, when the movement managed to stop several attempts of beginning the tunnel's perforations, thanks to passive resistance, blocking, land occupation and demonstrations. So permanent guard posts were installed in several municipalities by the protesters, and the government responded with the militarization of the valley with hundreds of riot police officers, until the policemen violently burst into the guard post in Venaus to evacuate it.²⁷ Afterwards, a massive demonstration managed to once again take back the sites occupied by police, which eventually became places to build other ways of life and radical democracy models.

In 2010, groups which opposed the TAV from the States of Spain, Italy, and France, came together to write the Hendaye Charter, and declared that "these projects constitute an ecological, socioeconomic and human disaster for the territories they cross".²⁸ They demanded the reparation and maintenance of the existing railways and the restitution of decision-making power to the directly affected towns and villages.



Protest against TAV in Venaus. By NO TAV.

The Italian movement against TAV has had the ability to go beyond the simple opposition to the mega project, in particular, in order to build — together with other similar resistance movements — a complex criticism about the development model that these speculative and environment predatory operations represent. At the same time, they experimented new ways of democratic participation.²⁹

Far from fading away, the fight is getting prepared to strongly come back in the north of Italy, after an economic study leaked out. It was commissioned by the government of Movimento 5 Stelle and Lega, and it maintains — to protect their own interests, according to activists — that to stop the construction of TAV would be three times as expensive as the costs of the tunnel.³⁰



Demonstration against TAV, by Benvegnú e Guitoli.

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² UNESCO (1992), "The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development": http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/RIO_E.PDF

³ Environmental Justice, "The Persecution and Violation of Human Rights of Environmental Defenders", FactSheet 48, 05/09/2015: <http://www.envjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/FS-48.pdf>

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⁸ Federici, S. (2013), *Revolución en punto cero. Trabajo doméstico, reproducción y luchas feministas* (Madrid, Ed. Traficantes de Sueños).

⁹ Fédération Internationale pour les Droits Humains, "Le Maroc doit garantir l'égalité femmes-hommes en matière d'héritage", 02/11/2015: <https://www.fidh.org/fr/themes/droits-des-femmes/le-maroc-doit-garantir-l-egalite-femmes-hommes-en-matiere-d-heritage>

¹⁰ Environmental Justice Atlas (2018), see quotation No. 7.

¹¹ Berriane, Y. (2016), "Droit à la terre et lutte pour l'égalité au Maroc : Le mouvement des soulaliyates", French National Centre for Scientific Research. Accedit a través de ResearchGate.

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¹³ B Les Eco Maroc, "Les soulaliyates gagnent la bataille de l'égalité", 18/02/2019: <https://www.leseco.ma/maroc/74496-les-soulaliyates-gagnent-la-bataille-de-l-egalite.html>

¹⁴ Democracy in Africa, "Natural resources and resistance in Western Sahara", 22/05/2017: <http://democracyin africa.org/natural-resources-resistance-western-sahara/>

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¹⁶ ABC Canarias, "El hallazgo por España de fosfato en el Sahara", 08/07/2017: https://www.abc.es/espana/canarias/abci-70-anos-hallazgo-espana-fosfato-sahara-201705050109_noticia.html

¹⁷ El País, "Sabotaje a los fosfatos del Sáhara", 14/10/2006: https://elpais.com/diario/2006/10/14/internacional/1160776811_850215.html

¹⁸ ODHE, web section, "Saqueo de recursos naturales en el Sáhara Occidental": <http://www.odhe.cat/es/saqueo-de-recursos-naturales-en-el-sahara-occidental/>

¹⁹ War on Want (2016): "The New Colonialism: Britain's scramble for Africa's energy and mineral resources": https://waronwant.org/sites/default/files/TheNewColonialism.pdf?_ga=2.210557525.1132336461.1562612057-127031063.1562612057

²⁰ Video testimony of a protest against Kosmos Energy repressed in Laayoune, by "Stop The Plundering", 18/10/2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GiqvKNKnO4>

²¹ WSRW, "Energía para el expolio", November 2016: https://wsrw.org/files/dated/2016-11-01/poweringplunder_esp_web.pdf

²² Middle East Monitor, "Protests in Western Sahara against solar and wind plant construction", 08/11/2016: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20161108-protests-in-western-sahara-against-solar-and-wind-plant-construction/>

²³ WSRW, "Saharawi refugees protest ABB controversy", 22/11/2018: <https://www.wsrw.org/a105x4321>

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²⁵ Burballa, A. (2015), "Criminalising resistance: the european network against mega-projects", *European Green Journal*, volum 11.

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²⁷ Struggles in Italy, "Breve historia del proyecto del TAV Turin-Lyon y de la oposición al mismo": <https://strugglesinitaly.wordpress.com/reappropriation/brief-history-of-tav-turin-lyon-project-and-of-the-struggle-against-it/es-breve-historia-del-proyecto-del-tav-turin-lyon-y-de-la-oposición-al-mismo/>

²⁸ La carta di Hendaye. Joint Declaration of January 23rd, 2010: https://www.notavalsangone.eu/documenti/CARTA%20DI%20HENDAYE%2023_1_2010%20multilingual_5.pdf

²⁹ Robert, D. (2014), see quotation No. 14.

³⁰ No TAV, "Il contro dossier della lega e lo studio della società che vuole costruire il tunnel", 31/01/2019: <http://www.notav.info/documenti/il-contro-dossier-della-lega-e-lo-studio-della-societa-che-vuole-costruire-il-tunnel/>

CHAPTER 4

Young people in defense of the right to one's own body and at fight for a life free of violence against women

The increasing growth of the feminist movement is a global phenomenon that outstandingly affects the Euro-Mediterranean region. It is difficult to point out only a few countries in which women rights — especially young women rights — are not infringed with limitations of sexual and reproductive health, vulnerability in front of violences, inequalities in access to legal, citizenship, heritage or divorce rights, subjection to virginity tests, female genital mutilation or child and early forced marriages. But it is also difficult to pinpoint only a context with growing acts of resistance. In some cases, such as in Italy and the State of Spain, the resistance has become a comprehensive and mass political movement and, in other cases, such as in Tunisia, a historical and consolidated feminist movement has held back successive attempts of counter-reforms. Two of the common demands that cut across this phenomenon in the region are the right to one's own body — especially, but not only, the right to an abortion — and the right to a life free of violence against women. In countries which are specifically afflicted by these violations, such as Morocco, Egypt, and Lebanon, the resistance initiatives have been outstanding thanks to the growth of young feminist actors and also because of the context of post-Arab Spring.



Banner "Feminism will win" in a demonstration in Casablanca.
By Sarah Ben El-Hadj, from Al Fam.

With regard to sexual and reproductive rights, which were included in Women's Human Rights by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995,¹ young people face specific obstacles in access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, as recognized by the Human Rights Council of the OHCHR itself, which limit the enjoyment of the right to one's own body. An example of this is in countries where laws and politics force young women to ask for a parental

or guardian authorization to get contraceptives² or a husband's authorization for an abortion. In their general comment No. 20, the Committee on the Rights of the Child points out that access to basic sexual and reproductive products, as well as information and assessment, should not be impeded by the requirement of consent or authorization of a third party. The Committee urges, moreover, for legalization of abortion³ to guarantee that young and minor women are able to interrupt their pregnancy in safe conditions and with further medical follow-up.

“Between 40% and 60% of young women in countries of the MENA region have been sexually harassed in the street”

Male violence against women and girls does not only infringe their human and fundamental right to a life free of violence, it also creates long-term impacts in their lives, restricting their growth, future and agency potential. On a normative level, the rights

of young and minor women are protected under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). According to UNICEF's figures, however, around 15 million adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 have been sexually forced at some point in their lives,⁴ while a 2017 research investigation in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) showed that between 40 and 60% of women have experienced sexual harassment in the street.⁵

In the case of forced marriage, one of the realities exposed in the report, it is estimated that approximately 650 million young women and girls in the world have been married before the age of 18,⁶ although it is detected that the incidence of this phenomenon is smaller than in the last decade. As well as being a rights violation, forced marriage also represents a mechanism of sexual control of women and very specifically of adolescent girls who, because of this intersection between gender and age, often suffer a lack of voice, power and agency about their own lives and decisions.



By Fadoua Rasmouki, Al Fam.

Youth feminist struggle against street harassment and for legalization of abortion in Morocco

In Morocco, the social upheaval that led to the Arab Spring and the awareness raising that this moment represented for a part of the population also came along with a revival of feminist claims, and the emergence of an eminently young movement that succeeds the historical associations of Moroccan feminism. The young feminists have a great mobilization power in social networks, typical of the post-revolutionary context, which is characterized by the “liberation of the word”,⁷ as defined by Leïla Taïl, expert on Arab feminisms. This movement contributes to its environment by making public demands that are aimed at reappropriation of public space by women, reporting violence, the right to make free use of one’s own body and the rights to sexual and gender dissidences.

We find several examples of feminist actions: the accusation of the Amina Filali case, a young girl aged 16 who took her own life in 2012 to avoid being forced to marry her rapist; the viral campaign “Be a free woman”, after a debate was open in the social networks about the “need for banning women from going out of their homes with indecent clothing” --- summer 2018; and the street kissing to protest against the detention of three young people for images of them kissing on Facebook in 2013. These provocative actions of the



“My body, my property! You don’t touch it!”.
Demonstration in Casablanca. By Sarah Ben El-Hadj, d’Al Fam.

youth feminists have started to crack traditional taboos about relationships in the private sphere and have begun to make visible a change in values.⁸

One of the inflection points of the new feminist wave in Morocco was the response to a sexual aggression towards a girl on a bus in Casablanca in August 2017. The attack caused a claim against gender violence in public spaces — street harassment of women in Morocco — and against rape culture, which resulted in a sit-down protest in cities such as Rabat, Tangier, Agadir and Casablanca itself. The sit-down in Casablanca led by the organization Al-Fam, which fights for women’s safe access to public spaces, saw over 300 people gathered in protest over a duration of 18 hours.⁹

“In Morocco, where sex outside of marriage and abortion are persecuted with imprisonment from six months to two years, between 600 and 800 clandestine abortions are performed every day”

The demand against these kinds of violence has aimed the debate to adoption and application of Law 103-13, related to violence against women.¹⁰ The law, passed in February 2018, criminalizes some displays of violence in public space, such as harassment, which is punished with up to 6 months’ imprisonment and a fine from 1000 to 2000 dirhams, and sets prevention and protection measures for the survivors. However, the law has some shortcomings, as the lack of financing for refugees and attention centers for women, and does not set action protocols for the police, prosecutors or judges,¹¹ nor does it meet the international standards regarding protection of women rights, according to organizations such as the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM).

In the latest years, one of the favorite topics of Moroccan feminists has also been the right to one’s own body. In a country where adultery and sex outside of marriage are criminalized by the Articles 490 and 493 of the Penal Code, which state that

women and girls can be persecuted for getting pregnant outside of marriage,¹² and where between 600 to 800 clandestine abortions are performed every day¹³ — according to figures from the Moroccan Association for the Fight Against Clandestine Abortion (AMLAC) — the fight for decriminalization of voluntary interruption of pregnancy is a key question, especially when the access to contraceptive methods is not easy. Currently, girls under 18 need parental consent to access contraceptive methods and only married women between the ages of 30 and 45 who have three or more children alive, including a boy, can access the voluntary sterilization, provided that they have their husband's permission.¹⁴

The campaign for the right to abortion in Morocco

In 2016, the Moroccan government council approved the introduction of a law change that would open the door to abortion in three situations: in the case of a rape or incest, when the mother suffers from a mental disorder, or when the fetus has critical illnesses or malformations. However, as the feminist and sexual health associations have repeatedly denounced, the proposal has never been taken to the Parliament for its approval, and it does not seem that there is a compromise to do so soon, therefore intentional abortion in Morocco is still punishable by law with a penalty of six months up to two years in prison¹⁵ and a fine of 500 to 5000 dirhams.

Far from resigning themselves, the associations and groups that fight for the right to one's own body have run a permanent campaign with demands that go from the approval of the law amendment up to the complete legalization of abortion. To this end, AMLAC called for a gathering on June 25th, 2019, in favor of abortion, in front of the Parliament of Rabat, considering that the three situations which would be set by the new law are absolutely insufficient.¹⁶

Another group leading the campaign is the Alternative Movement for Individual Freedoms (MALI), which was founded in Rabat in 2009, and proclaims civil

disobedience, feminism, secularism and the defense of sexual and reproductive rights. MALI led an action in protest against the parliament's inaction on changing the law on the night of April 24th, 2019 at the Ministry of Health headquarters which consisted of sticking sanitary towels with fake blood and slogans written on them such as "my body, my rules" and "my uterus, my decision" onto the walls of the building. These actions were filmed by the French digital television France.tv Slash, in a video-series by the youth group Clit Revolution.¹⁷ MALI had previously launched the campaign "My uterus, my decision, my freedom" in 2018, and the action of April 2019 was carried out within its framework.

But the action of MALI for abortion goes far beyond the demand of the current law amendment. In 2012, MALI created a phone line to help with self-management of abortions that allowed being able to obtain Artotec, a medicine that causes it. The phone line was quickly cut and the chemists started requiring a prescription to buy the drug. Eventually, the Ministry of Health ended up withdrawing the drug from the market, although the activists still obtain it by other means in order to be able to deal with the hundreds of messages that they receive, and in order to guarantee a less risky option and less prohibitive price than clandestine abortions offer, especially when some doctors are making a business of it. The activists constantly face a threat of up to five years imprisonment for "encouraging abortion".



"We, women, decide". Campaign to decriminalize the abortion by MALI.

One of the practices also denounced by the group are the still existing so-called virginity tests, which are mostly performed to the brides, often at the request of the husband's family. In a press release on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹⁸ posted in December 2018, they describe this practice, criticized by the WHO and that is also frequent in other countries of this region, like Libya and Egypt, as "torture" and "sexual aggression".

The beginning of the end of impunity for sexual violence in Lebanon

Lebanon is far from being the only country where forced marriages are arranged in case of rape. This practice is still a reality in other countries like Morocco; and also in Algeria, where the Article 326 of the Penal Code allows the kidnapper or rapist of a minor to escape punishment by marrying the victim. However, Lebanon is the country where, thanks to women's mobilization and pressure in 2017, the parliament repealed the article that guaranteed impunity for sexual aggressors via marriage,¹⁹ although the clause is still applicable if the victim is aged between 15 and 18 and the marriage had been allowed before the rape.



"A White dress does not hide your rape".
Campaign from ADAAD association in Lebanon.

The controversial measure that suspended the criminal responsibility of the rapist, who would face a penalty of up to seven years of prison if he did not follow Article 522 by marrying the victim, was defied

for a long time by the opposition of associations and groups in defense of women's human rights. The most famous action against the impunity of sexual violences in the country was the campaign "A White Dress Doesn't Cover the Rape", led by ABAAD, a Lebanese NGO for gender equality, which among other things hung 31 torn wedding dresses from trees on the promenade in Beirut, causing a great impact.

The action, carried out at the end of 2016, symbolized the 31 days of the month in which women can be assaulted, and the dresses represented women that are forced to live together with their aggressors, that in addition can keep on attacking them with impunity in a country where, as the activists regret, forcing the wife to have sexual intercourse is not considered a rape.²⁰ The massive support of the cause — 85% of the Lebanese population considered that Article 522 seriously compromises the dignity of raped women²¹ — and its impact were recognized with the SGD Action Award 2019, which values the defense of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, for the best campaign.²²

"Campaigns such as 'Not before 18' or 'Rise the Age' have put decisive pressure on the different religious communities in Lebanon to compromise towards ending with forced marriage of minors"

The success of the action does not, however, disguise the still remaining forced adolescent marriages in Lebanon that are hard to fight against because of the complex legal structure of the country and its constitution, which in Article 9 gives authorization to each of the 18 religious communities to organize the laws of the so-called "personal status" which rule people's lives. There is, therefore, no unified law in regard to marriage, nor a common minimum marrying age, and the application of the law varies depending on which religious community the girl comes from,²³ which makes it even more difficult to fight against forced union of minors and young people. The pressure of activists and civil society

through campaigns and actions such as “Raise the Age”, led by the association KAFA, or “Mesh Abel El 18” (‘Not before 18’), by the Lebanese Democratic Women’s Gathering (RDFL), has forced most of religious communities to raise this minimum age.²⁴

It is important, in order to better understand the intersection of different vulnerabilization conditions of young women in the Lebanese society, to point out that forced marriage has a “space incidence” among the Syrian refugee population which fled from their country’s war conflict. Yes, according to the last report from the NGO Plan International, more than half of the surveyed women — of a sample of 400 girls between 10 and 19 years old — maintained that they had suffered physical or sexual violence, or harassment or verbal abuse in the streets of Beirut, the capital.²⁵ The reaction — in terms of freedom of movement restriction — as it means to the risk for their security and honor has not the same implications for the Lebanese young women and minors as it does for the refugees and migrated women. In fact, according to the same survey, 10% of the Syrian minors in the sample have been married or engaged quite before 18. It can therefore be said that the Syrian humanitarian crisis is in turn aggravating the fundamental rights situation and the free movement of young girls and minors of this refugee community in Lebanon, because some of the reasons that lead their parent to arrange a forced marriage for them have a direct relation to the incidence of assaults and harassment in the streets and in the refugee camps.

⁷ Jeune Afrique, Tribune “Une jeunesse féministe arabe assoiffée de liberté, d’égalité et de démocratie”, 8/03/2019: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/746241/societe/tribune-une-jeunesse-feministe-arabe-assoiffee-de-liberte-degalite-et-de-democratie/>

⁸ Houria Alami M’Chichi, “Les féminismes marocains contemporains. Pluralité et nouveaux défis”, in *Féminismes au Maghreb*. Nouvelles Questions Féministes 2014/2 (Vol. 33), pp. 65 to 79.

⁹ France24.com, “Maroc : sit-in à Casablanca pour dénoncer les violences sexuelles contre les femmes”, 23/08/2018: https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2017/08/23/harcelement-sexuel-_n_17806868.html

¹⁰ Document Law 103-13 with regard to violences against women, 22/02/2018: <http://adala.justice.gov.ma/production/legislation/fr/Nouveautes/lutte%20contre%20les%20violences%20faites%20aux%20femmes.pdf>

¹¹ HRW, press release “Morocco: New Violence Against Women Law. Progress, but some gaps; further reform needed”, 26/02/2018: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/26/morocco-new-violence-against-women-law>

¹² HRW, “World Report 2019, Morocco & Western Sahara”, 17/02/2019: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/morocco-western-sahara#49dda6>

¹³ Association marocaine de lutte contre l’avortement clandestin (AMLAC): <http://amlac.org.ma/>

¹⁴ Sexual Rights Initiative, Morocco: <http://sexualrightsdatabase.org/countries/455/Morocco>

¹⁵ HuffPost Maghreb, “Un sit-in pro-avortement organisé mardi prochain devant le parlement à Rabat”: https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/un-sit-in-pro-avortement-organise-mardi-prochain-devant-le-parlement-a-rabat_mg_5d0a5f54e4b0e560b70d2f48

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ France TV Slash, Clit Revolution, Episode 6 “L’IVG c’est sacré”, transmitted on 16/05/2019: <https://www.france.tv/slash/clit-revolution/996913-l-ivg-c-est-sacre.html>

¹⁸ MALI, press release “My vulva is mine”, 10/12/2018: <https://www.facebook.com/MALIMaroc09/photos/a.1006430119439429/1961287607287004/?type=3&theater>

¹⁹ HRW, World Report 2019, “Lebanon”, 17/02/2019 (2019): <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/lebanon>

²⁰ Civil Lebanon, “One Step Ahead The Famous ‘Rape Law’”, 2017: <http://civillebanon.com/one-step-ahead-the-famous-rape-law/>

²¹ ABAAD MENA, “A White Dress Doesn’t Cover the Rape –16 Days of Activism against GBV – 2016”: <https://www.abaadmena.org/programmes/advocacy-and-policy-development/project-58748b6fa56f85-59472059>

²² UN SDG Action Awards, 2019 edition: <https://sdgactionawards.org/initiative/1225>

²³ OHCHR (2017), “Report on child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage in Lebanon”: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage71-175/Lebanon.pdf>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Plan International, “Adolescent girls in crisis. Voices from Beirut”, June 2019: <https://plan-international.org/publications/adolescent-girls-crisis-beirut>

¹ UN, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20S.pdf>

² OHCHR, Human Rights Council, “La juventud y los derechos humanos. Informe del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos”, published on 28/06/2018.

³ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, 6/12/2016.

⁴ UNICEF (2017), “A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents”, pp. 73, 82.

⁵ Promundo & UN Women (2017), “Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey – Middle East and North Africa”, p. 16.

⁶ UN Women (2017), “Facts and figures: Ending violence against women”: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

CHAPTER 5

Youth resistance against persecution of sexual and gender diversity

Homosexual relationships and sex activities are still punished in 70 countries.¹ In 9 of them, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen, these relationships are punishable by the death penalty. In the Mediterranean, the violation of the rights of LGBTQ+ people is systematic and generalized, although it presents different forms depending on the country, with variation of the many actors that infringe on these kinds of violences. In 6 of these countries, all of them in North Africa and Syria, the main actor responsible for the persecution of movements and individuals that defend sexual freedom is the State. In others, it is violent extremist groups who attack gays, lesbians and trans people. In the majority of these countries, all of these actors are combined, leading to this systematic infringement of rights, with different degrees of impunity.

Some of the forms that present this kind of discrimination are: prohibition of homosexual sex activity and relationships under administrative penalty or imprisonment, sometimes by subterfuges like use of ambiguous laws or laws that have been made to punish other kind of behaviors; stigmatization and harassment; extrajudicial murders and beatings; forced anal examinations; refusal of medical treatment; ban of public events; technological surveillance; dissemination of hate messages by politicians and media; but also rejection of asylum to asylum seekers that adduce persecution caused by their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The lack of international specific regulations about the protection of the right to sexual orientation has been, for decades, an additional barrier against criminalization. In 1995, there was a proposal for protecting sexual



Image by Stock Catalog (Flickr).

orientation as a right in the structure of the women's rights to control their own sexuality, during the Beijing Platform for Action, in the context of the Fourth World Conference on Women. However, this first attempt of some states for the inclusion and recognition of non-heteronormative sexual realities was unsuccessful.²

It was not until 2011 that the United Nations approved the first resolution on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity, with a very narrow margin of 23 votes in favor and 19 against.³ It proposed, among other things, the first official report that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the OCHCHR, wrote about the violation of the rights of gays, lesbians and trans people all over the world,⁴ with a series of recommendations to protect their human rights.

Nevertheless, it would be unfair to just expose the infringement of the rights of young LGBTQ+ persons in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and to present them as mainly victims of violences, in front of the great variety, richness and diversity of experiences and resistance movements that have been born — especially after the Arab Springs — in those places where these violences have afflicted their lives, in order to fight homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia. To only talk about violence, without recognizing the potential of these fights and the agency of these LGBTQ+ groups, networks and activists, means to contribute to the invisibilization of their efforts to transform the societies where they come from.

Imprisoned for defending sexual rights and freedom

Almost all the countries in North Africa criminalize adultery and — generally — consented sex outside of marriage in some way. And what's more, in Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon and Tunisia, being a homosexual, an activist for LGBTQ+ rights or to publicly show a nonconformist sexual or gender identity can be a reason for criminal persecution, torture and imprisonment.⁵ Also in the case of Syria, where in the last years the conflict and the territorial

expansion of the Islamic State have worsened the situation of LGBTQ+ people, persecuted in the territories under Al-Assad's control. Most of these people have been forced to abandon the country as political and war refugees.

Some activists pointed out, in a report by Human Rights Watch,⁶ that the upheaval born in the Arab Springs had positive effects for the expansion and growth of the fights for sexual and gender freedom; almost a dozen LGBTQ+ groups were created between 2011 and 2012, and many young people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities made the jump into activism, became visible and put this matter in the agenda of political movements. For other groups, the political changes and the revolutionary processes have not completely created transformations in the regional sphere "despite the fights, campaigns and mobilizations".⁷



In Morocco, campaign to ask for the freedom of two lesbian girls detained for kissing. By Per AMDH, Akaliyat i ASWAT.

In Morocco, the fight focuses on the repeal of Article 489 of the Penal Code, on one hand, which punishes the "unnatural act with an individual of the same sex" with penalties of six months to three years in prison. While, on the other hand, it aims at the denouncement of aggressions to LGBTQ+ persons or people who are suspected to be so, which are "continuous" happenings, according to Akaliyat young activists.⁸ But few of these aggressions end up appearing in the media. In 2016, the one week incarceration of two girls, aged 16 and 17, for stroking and kissing on a rooftop, raised a huge reaction, unprecedented in this country. The

campaign in defense of the adolescents' rights that demanded the repeal of Article 489, led by the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), Akaliyat and the collective ASWAT, managed to collect over 85 000 signatures.⁹ Both girls were absolved in December of that same year.

"Besides repression, youth activism for LGBTQ+ rights is blocked, in North Africa, because of the bureaucratic barriers to register and legalize political associations"

The authoritarian dynamic of the State of Morocco against sexual diversity finds an extension in the social stigmatization and in the complicity of the population and the families of young LGBTQ+ activists, used in turn as strike forces and a repression tool.¹⁰ In some regions, beating, lynching, aggressions, cyberbullying, ostracism and expulsion of the family are especially frequent.

Moreover, youth activism for LGBTQ+ rights is hindered not only by the penal criminalization and social stigmatization of sexual and gender nonconformity, but also by restriction to the freedom of association. The latter is afflicted by specific infringements in all these countries and that "makes it virtually impossible to work publicly in the defense of these rights",¹¹ because of the previous barriers for registration and legalization of associations with a political aspect. This is the case of the aforementioned Akaliyat, which had its legalization application rejected at the beginning of 2017, for bureaucratic reasons that the collective itself denied.¹² Another example is Shams, a Tunisian LGBTQ+ organization created in 2015, which is currently in the middle of a serious attempt of illegalization at the hands of the country's authorities.¹³

Among other things, Shams works for the repeal of Article 230 of the Tunisian Penal Code — considered by many as the country in North Africa with more right-based guarantees in terms of rights and freedoms —, which punishes homosexual acts between men, and also between women, with up to three years imprisonment. As 115 people were detained in 2018¹⁴ — 38 of them

latter incarcerated — for their alleged sexual orientation, the government was doing its best to silence the voice of this group. To that end, they again took legal action against the association, which had previously had to pause its work for a month in January 2016, until the Court of First Instance of Tunis sentenced that Shams was acting according to the Law of Associations and lifted the veto.¹⁵ The cruelty against the collective revived at the beginning of 2019 by taking advantage of alleged bureaucratic errors, as in the case of Akaliyat.

There is a similar situation in Algeria, where the Penal Code establishes penalties of up to two years in prison and fines that can reach 2000 Algerian dinars (around 20 euros) for homosexual behavior.¹⁶ Also in Libya, where the West recognizes a conflict situation between the government and other militias that struggle for winning territory and power, activists denounce that different factions have performed arbitrary detentions to men suspected of being gay.¹⁷



Campaign against article 489 of the Moroccan Constitution, by MALI association.



Demonstration for the decriminalization of homosexuality in Tunisia, by Shams.

The detention of two young transsexuals and forced anal examinations in Egypt

In Egypt homosexual relationships and transsexuality are not explicitly considered a crime, unlike in the rest of North Africa, but this does not mean at all that these behaviors are not criminalized nor persecuted in practice. Since the 90s, the governments that followed one another, and especially the current military regime lead by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, in power since 2014, have been using a law against prostitution — Law No. 10/1961 — to repress sexual and gender nonconformists in the country. Specifically, by Article 14, which punishes “incitement to debauchery”.¹⁸

One of the population groups with a higher risk of being persecuted by this law — and also because of the dismantling of citizens’ freedoms in general in Egypt — is the trans community. The latest case is Malak Al-Kashef, a 19-year-old transsexual girl, and Hossam Ahmed, a trans boy, who were detained by the police after the mobilizations sparked by an accidental crash at a train station in Cairo at the beginning of March 2019.¹⁹ Immediately after that, activist groups made an urgent call on social networks in front of the high risk that both activists, but especially Malak, were being subjected to abuses and tortures. This concern was shared by Amnesty International’s North Africa and Middle East Deputy Director, who declared that “there are real fears for the physical safety and psychological well-being”²⁰ of the young trans woman accused, together with Ahmed, of “supporting terrorist organizations and the misuse of social media websites in inciting crimes against the law”.²¹

This trans activist is still in prison after she got her pre-trial detention renewed for the sixth time on June 16th, 2019.²² She denounced being subjected to a forced anal examination, consisting on the introduction — by a doctor — of fingers or instruments in her anus, to evaluate if there was “evidence” of homosexual sex. This is a practice used in Egypt — but not only there; it is also performed in Tunisia, among others, and in Lebanon it was performed until it was banned in 2012 — systematically against detained LGBTQ+ population, despite the call made by the World Medical Association, OHCHR and NGOs like Human Rights Watch to urgently prohibit this examination considered degrading and inhumane.²³

Forced anal examinations, which activists describe as “shame tests” or “raping tests”, were also performed in one of the most serious cases of violation of LGBTQ+ activists that the country has lived. It was in

the autumn of 2017, some days after the image of a gay boy, Ahmed Alaa, waving a Rainbow Flag at the concert of the Lebanese band Mashrou’ Leila in Cairo, sparked a wild polemic in the media. The repressive raid against LGBTQ+ activism ended up with 76 detentions of people suspected to have homosexual behavior, and over 40 incarcerated persons. Some of the imprisoned have denounced being subjected to the aforementioned test and other kinds of abuse and sexual aggression.²⁴

These detentions are part of a constant attack dynamic from Al-Sisi’s government towards political dissidence in Egypt. This happens in the form of massacres, arbitrary detentions, tortures, websites’ and social network account-closedowns and the enactment of a law that puts barriers up to the extreme against the work of social organizations²⁵ and of civil society as a whole.



Demonstration against anal tests in Tunisia, by Shams association.

Harassment, administrative repression and defenselessness of young LGBTQ+ activists

The open legal and police persecution represents an extremely obvious violation of sexual rights, but there are more subtle infringements that enormously hinder and hamper the lives, freedom and self-organization of LGBTQ+ persons in the Mediterranean. Some examples of the forms that present these kinds of violations of sexual rights are administrative persecution, — even if homosexuality is not classified as a crime —, homophobic statements and hate speech, defenselessness in front of aggressions, and/or the rejection of political asylum for LGBTQ+ people.

Jordan, for example, formally repealed the strict laws against homosexual activities, inherited from colonial times in 1951, when it adopted its own Penal Code after independence. And although the sharia — Islamic law — does prohibit this behavior, it cannot be formally punished with a fine or prison. But, in spite of the fact that there is no open persecution, this does not mean that LGBTQ+ persons have, in this country, freedom to live their sexuality and sexual preference. Beyond the social stigma and the wide rejection that it causes — 97% of the population believed, in 2013, that homosexuality is unacceptable —, the government's position does not contribute either to normalization of diversity.²⁶ In July 2017, the Media Commission of the Jordanian parliament blocked access to the local online magazine My.Kali, which since 2007 has published contents aimed to LGBTQ+ public, after a member of parliament from an Islamist party, connected to the Muslim Brotherhood, requested an inquiry into the site²⁷ because according to her it violated the Press and Publication Law. The Jordanian Ministers of Justice and the Interior took advantage of the great stir caused by the investigation of My.Kali by writing two official letters declaring their broad intolerance of the already marginalized LGBTQ+ people of the country,²⁸ and they made it clear that the government would not defend the rights of Jordanian gays, lesbians, bisexuals, trans and intersex people.

"In May 2019, the Lebanese Minister of Telecoms ordered to block the well-known gay application Grindr all over the country"

Four years before, in February 2014, the Lebanese authorities arrested 10 gays and lesbians, holding them for days, for hosting a reception at a party hall in Amman, the capital. The administrative governor who ordered the arrest told the agency AFP that these activists were held for "preventing a disturbance of the peace".²⁹

The cases of Lebanon bear many similarities to this one, especially because of the attempts of the authorities to apply Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which punishes "unnatural" sexual activity to criminalize same-sex intercourse, although different sentences maintain that it is not illegal and that this Article cannot be invoked in connection to it. The last of these sentences, from July 2018, is especially considered as a historical step towards decriminalization of sexual nonconformity: in regard to nine detained people in 2015 in a suburb of Beirut for being suspected of being gay and transgender, it establishes that "homosexuals have a right to human and intimate relationships with whomever they want, without any interference or discrimination in terms of their sexual inclinations".³⁰

But the attempts of blocking activism in Lebanon mostly means administrative obstacles as many and LGBTQ+ people have found. There are several examples of these obstacles: authorities attempted to cancel the annual conference organized by the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality, or AFE, a group which works for LGBTQ+ rights. Moreover, at the Pride festival in 2018,³¹ which intended to organize nine days of cultural and education events about LGBTQ+ rights, many activists were detained and there was great pressure to cancel the events. In addition, the well-known gay application Grindr was blocked under the orders of the Lebanese Minister of Telecoms.³²

The block of the Pride festival in Beirut was replicated in Turkey when mobilization of LGBTQ+

pride was systematically banned in Istanbul in 2015, even having been celebrated for the 17 years prior, adducing reasons of security.³³ Despite the last prohibition, in June 2019, activists have kept on demonstrating in the streets of the city, as well as in other places in Turkey, in some cases, receiving strong police charge.³⁴

In the southern countries of Europe, with regulated right-based guarantees towards protection of LGBTQ+ rights, there is a main concern about the rise of hate speech and attitudes of denial of sexual and gender diversity reality, connected with the increase of extreme right-wing political options. And also concern about the strong bias between the protection of local LGBTQ+ population, and the fulfilling of obligations and compromises about the right to asylum for reasons of political persecution and life risk. In this sense, one of the borders where these violations are more cruelly visibilized is the Spanish southern border, especially in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla. In January 2018 there were around thirty Moroccan gays in the immigration detention centers of Melilla,³⁵ waiting for making a formal asylum application in Spain. The process of having the asylum application accepted is almost an impossible mission in a country that rejected 3 out of every 4 applications in that same year, and left over 780 000 applications without resolution.³⁶

Additionally, the protection laws against homophobia and hate crimes did not prevent over 50 formal complaints for LGBTQphobic attacks which are registered every month in the State of Spain,³⁷ nor the death of gay activist "la Ely" after receiving a brutal aggression in Valladolid.³⁸ A similar case, also of extreme seriousness, was the murder in broad daylight of the queer activist Zak Kostopoulos, "Zackie Oh," in Athens on December 21st, 2018. Kostopoulos was beaten by Thanasis Chortariás, a jeweler and a member of a fascist group, and by the police, who kept on thrashing him when he was lying on the ground, handcuffed and unconscious.³⁹ The media widely transmitted the version of the murderers, which suggested that Kostopoulos was trying to rob the shop under the influence of drugs. Both accusations were refuted.⁴⁰

³¹ Amnesty International, LGBTI rights (updated in 2018): <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/lgbt-rights/>

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³³ UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council resolution 17/19 on "Human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity", 14/07/2019.

³⁴ OHCHR (2012), "Born free and equal. Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in International Human Rights Law": <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/BornFreeAndEqualLowRes.pdf>.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch (2018), Report "Audacity in adversity. LGBT activism in the Middle East and North Africa".

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Association Akaliyat, "Communiqué à l'occasion de la journée mondiale de lutte contre l'homophobie, la transphobie et les LGBTphobies", 22/05/2019: https://thevoiceofthequeer.com/fr/communique-a-l-occasion-de-la-journee-mondiale-de-lutte-contre-lhomophobie-la-transphobie-et-les-lgbtphobies/?fbclid=IwAR2DQILQImMLMxZqwrzTAGUtCdiUg6Mz_-Df9CS-xwDxon0tiQ-kyEI8lls

³⁸ La Directa, "Si ets activista LGBTI al Marroc, les autoritats et vigilien i et molesten constantment". Interview by Víctor Yustres to a spokesperson of Akaliyat, 14/05/2019: <https://directa.cat/si-ets-activista-lgbti-al-marroc-les-autoritats-et-vigilien-i-et-molesten-constantment/>

³⁹ Middle East Eye, "Homosexuality in Morocco: Girls' trial sparks debate on decriminalisation", 11/12/2016: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/homosexuality-morocco-girls-trial-sparks-debate-decriminalisation>

⁴⁰ HRW (2018), see quotation No.5.

⁴¹ International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), "State Sponsored Homophobia 2017: A world survey of sexual orientation laws: criminalisation, protection and recognition", May 2017.

⁴² ActuMaroc, "Les autorités marocaines refusent de reconnaître la première association homosexuelle", 6/02/2017: <https://www.actu-maroc.com/les-autorites-marocaines-refusent-de-reconnaitre-la-premiere-association-homosexuelle/>

⁴³ Afriques en lutte, "Tunisie: Une organisation de défense des droits LGBT menacée de dissolution", 3/03/2019: <http://www.afriquesenlutte.org/afrique-du-nord/tunisie/article/tunisie-une-organisation-de>

⁴⁴ Amnesty International, "Tunisia: Authorities must end shameful attempts to shut down prominent LGBTI organization", 28/02/2019: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/02/tunisia-authorities-must-end-shameful-attempts-to-shut-down-prominent-lgbti-organization/>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Algerian Penal Code (1971), Articles 333 and 338, pp. 100-102.

⁴⁷ HRW (2018), see quotation No. 5.

⁴⁸ Refworld, Egypt: Law No. 10/1961, on the Combating of Prostitution: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5492d8784.html>

⁴⁹ The voice of the queer, press release "Freedom to Malak Elkashif and Hossam Ahmed", 16/05/2019: <https://thevoiceofthequeer.com/en/freedom-to-malak-elkashif-and-hossam-ahmed/>

⁵⁰ The Independent, "Fears for transgender Egyptian woman held in men's prison", 07/03/2019: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/egypt-trans-woman-prison-malak-al-kashef-lgbt-rights-a8812281.html>

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CHAPTER 6

The right to work: resistances against youth unemployment, precariousness and domestic slavery

Global impoverishment of working classes decisively affects young people in the Euro-Mediterranean region and worldwide. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 145 million young workers live in poverty,¹ which disproportionately impacts on this population segment, especially after the last world's great economical crisis. One of the underlying causes is the precarization of the labor market and the dismantling of the social and labor protection system in many countries. In fact, 76.7% of employed young people work in the informal sector, which is in turn less regulated, with inferior salaries and less protection. At the same time, young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, and in 2017, the incidence of youth unemployment affected around 70.9 millions of young people in the world.²

The tendency in the last fifteen years towards a progressive tertiarization of labor market, in sectors such as finances, services and care, has incorporated more young people in the employment market, although these are mostly under temporary or flexible contracts. In Europe, the austerity and the crisis in the south of the continent, and the increase of temporary contracts have especially impacted the labor conditions of young people in countries like Italy, Greece or Spain. Meanwhile, the Middle East and North Africa are still two of the regions with a major incidence on youth unemployment.

Moreover, in a report published in 2018 about the situation on young people's human rights, the UN Human Rights Council pointed out that the expansion of non-paid work experience as the gateway to the world of work represents a comparative disadvantage for those young people who cannot afford to work without being paid.³ The Council maintains that the establishment of "youth" salaries is one of the main examples of discrimination towards young people in the world of work, as this practice violates the principle of equal payment for equal work, which is stated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Impoverishment of young people also affects the enjoyment of other fundamental rights, such as the right to adequate housing.

In addition, young women face further obstacles in the work environment; wage discrimination, the burden of non-paid reproductive labor, persistence of specific violences such as sexual harassment, and the fact that women hold most of the part-time jobs or posts in the informal economy with lower and worse paid positions.⁴ These inequalities are even more serious for migrated young women, especially those in an irregular situation who represent the labor force of informal economy and in the domestic and care field. In that environment, social and trade-union protection is usually non-existent, and therefore it is even more important to emphasize the experiences of fight and self-organization.

All the aforementioned situations clearly represent a violation of the individual and collective right

to work of young people, recognized in Articles 23 and 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Women's Convention (CEDAW) and in other international regulation mechanisms. There are several specific rights that were mentioned in these conventions and that are being infringed upon: the right to work under fair conditions, equal pay for equal work, without discriminations, safe working conditions, sufficient rest and leisure and limited working hours. Likewise, Article 8 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights protects the right to form or join trade unions, a right that has experienced a perilous regression in the last decades.



Youth demonstration in Lebanon against the Kafala System (2018), by Pat Sy.

“Employ us or kill us”, the uprising against youth unemployment in Tunisia

The uprisings that expanded all over North Africa in 2010 and 2011 were led by indignant and fed-up young people, who demanded political and civil freedoms. The frustration caused by the lack of work and future perspectives beyond informal economy and precariousness was one of the factors to trigger the revolt. As a matter of fact, Mohamed Bouazizi, a young man from the Tunisian city Sidi Bouzid, used to be harassed by the police for selling fruit in the street, in a tremendously corrupt country, and in consequence he set fire to himself. He was the tenth Tunisian young man to self-immolate with this method in 2010,⁵ lighting the flame of what would be known as the Jasmine Revolution, which overthrew the autocrat Zine el Abidine Ben Ali.

Eight years later, youth unemployment in North Africa is five points above 2011 indexes and is over 15% of the population in Tunisia, being almost 30% in the case of young people with higher education.⁶ The unemployment situation in the country has therefore become “a structural phenomenon which afflicts the whole youth, with especially high rates in the case of college-educated people and women. Unemployed young people without higher education, twice the average rate, end up joining the ranks of the precarious informal economy”.⁷

In Tunisia, there have been several governments that have succeeded one another, but none of them have managed to create thorough enough reforms against youth

unemployment thus far. They did not even approach the matter in the miners’ interior regions of the country, the most afflicted by poverty and marginalization. Meanwhile, the bureaucratic and economic structure of the regime have remained with minor damage. The economic situation and the distribution of wealth have not substantially changed in this small Maghrebi country since the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, and the frustration and tiredness caused by precariousness and lack of access to a dignified job have not disappeared either.

“In September 2018, 591 protests were registered all over the country, most of them in the most impoverished and forgotten provinces, the birthplace of this movement of unemployed, student and college-educated youth for the right to work”

Thus, the year 2018 saw a new wave of protests being born, which fought against authoritarianism and repression, lack of jobs and the miserable living conditions in North Africa, especially in the Rif (Morocco), Algeria and also in Tunisia. But the indignation about another phenomenon has joined the aforementioned protests and it seems that it will worsen tremendously in a future: lack of access to water and increased power cuts — which, again, disproportionately affect the interior regions.

In May 2017, thousands of young people camped in the desert zone of Tataouine for weeks, fed up with waiting for a job in a region rich in extractive resources where the oil companies that operate there prefer to hire foreign workers, and therefore the governmental investment in concessions and infrastructures does not revert to local population.⁸ Full of anger, demonstrators shut one of the main oil pipelines, at El Kamour, and confronted the Tunisian national police, who had tried to burn down the protest camp days before. During the confrontation, a demonstrator died as he was knocked down by a racing vehicle of the national police. In the middle of June, after the pipeline had been shut for a month, the mobilized young people reached an



Youth demonstration in Tunisia by AslanMedia.

agreement with the government, through the mediation of the Tunisian majority trade union, UGTT.

In January 2018, when the 7th anniversary of Ben Ali's escape from the country was commemorated, there was a generalized increase on prices and taxes in compliance with the austerity measures imposed on the country to facilitate the return of the 2400 million Euro loan from the IMF. This situation stirred up mobilizations all over Tunisia, and young people (students and unemployed) were the main participants. The mobilizations, which mainly took place in the capital city and in the interior, were called by the movements Fesh Nestanneu ('What Are We Waiting For?') and Manish Msamah ('I Will Not Forgive'). The coalition of these two movements was born in 2016 with the aim to stop a law that, in practice, granted economic amnesty to the corruption network which was holding the dictator's regime.⁹

The atmosphere in the capital, Tunis, was a celebration of the revolutionary legacy, and the protests rapidly expanded to the most impoverished zones of the city, where young people do not only face an even higher unemployment rate than the national average, but also the stigmatization of being pointed at as criminals for living in a specific neighborhood. During the two nights of mobilization and riots that followed the commemoration, over 200 people were detained, and an activist died.¹⁰ But, without a doubt, the peak of this

new wave of social mobilizations took place in September 2018 when 591 protests were registered all over the country,¹¹ most of them in the governorates of Kairouan, Gafsa, Sidi Bouzid, Sousse and Sfax, the birthplace of this movement of unemployed, student and college-educated youth for the right to work.

The fight of migrated domestic workers against 21st century slavery

All over the world the conditions of extreme vulnerabilization of migrated women — especially of those who do so in illegal or irregular situations — make their exploitation easier in the work environment. The circumstances of these women usually confine them to the shadow market or informal economy, and especially to domestic and care work, in conditions of social isolation, defenselessness and, in some cases, semi-slavery or almost slavery. According to ILO's figures, there are 67 million domestic workers from the age of 15 years old on, 80% of them are women and 17% migrated people.¹²

In the words of the activist Carmen Juarez, the self-organization of migrated domestic workers against



Antiracist march in Lebanon.

“the 21st century slavery” has led to some of the most powerful fights in the last years. These workers are often exposed to all kind of power abuse, including sexual abuse, and rally together in resistance movements such as the group of live-in domestic workers in Barcelona, the association SEDOAC in Madrid, or others in Mexico, Philippines, United States, Mozambique, South Africa and Hong Kong. One of the most outstanding mobilizations in this sense in the Euro-Mediterranean region is the fight of migrated domestic workers in Lebanon, because it is mostly led by young women and because of the extremely abusive conditions they suffer.

Life under the Kafala system: the case of young domestic workers in Lebanon

In Lebanon, there are over 250 000 live-in domestic workers, coming from countries such as the Philippines, Ethiopia, Madagascar and Sri Lanka. Most of them are under 30 and entered the country in their early 20s.¹³

Despite the relative invisibility to which these workers are condemned in Lebanon, on June 16th, 2018, International Domestic Workers’ Day, hundreds of women were called to the streets of Beirut by the NGO KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation, which fights against gender discrimination, ABAAD, Anti-Racism Movement and other Lebanese associations. This manifestation requested for the abolition of Kafala system, or ‘sponsorship system’, which establishes the legitimization and continuity of the serious abuses that live-in domestic workers suffer in this country.

Kafala system, original from the Gulf countries and which is also used in other countries such as the neighboring Jordan — where there is a similar situation of exploitation — and Nepal, means total control of domestic workers at the hands of their employers. Up to the point that, according to KAFA figures, in the great majority of the cases (could reach up to 94%), the people who are hiring domestic workers use this opportunity to confiscate their passports and identify documents. This common practice is not only an

invasion of their right to privacy, but it also restricts their freedom of movement and makes it more difficult for workers to denounce abuses or leave the job. In fact, this system, binds the migrated worker to her employer and makes her 100% dependent in legal and economic terms.¹⁴ If, for example, the employer does not renew the worker’s papers, or she escapes the house, she is immediately an illegal person even though she has legally entered the country.

In 2014, a judge in Beirut deemed that the practice of retaining passports was violating basic rights guaranteed in the international agreements that Lebanon has ratified, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and therefore, that “deprivation of liberty cannot be a means of guaranteeing these rights”. This is in reference to the popular argument of the fear of losing the funds invested when importing the worker.¹⁵

But violation of the rights of domestic workers under the Kafala system goes far beyond all this. It also implies the prohibition of going out in the street without permission — around 22% of employers lock their workers in the house —, and employers often obligate them to work endless hours without breaks or holidays. Moreover, the workers sometimes do their jobs without pay or they get irregular payment of wages, which affects 40% of these women. Other examples of rights infringement in this context are physical violence, restrictions on communication with their families or food malnutrition.¹⁶

In addition, migrated live-in domestic workers have no recognized right to form or join trade unions, because they are not included in the Lebanese Labor Code, which makes their defenselessness situation more serious. Apart from their own mobilizations, campaigns such as “Think about it, think about her”,¹⁷ by KAFA, try to raise awareness among employers to be more conscious about the illegalities that they are committing. This approach has received criticism because it individualizes the structural problem that these semi-slaves are suffering and consigns it to each house. It delegate the exclusive responsibility for a change to the employers and absolves the State, despite the existence of many systematic violations of the rights of migrated people, with practices that are close to, and sometimes even emulate, human trafficking networks.¹⁸



Demonstration in Beirut against the Kafala System, by Charlotte Gaudreau.

¹ International Labour Organization (2017), "Global employment trends for youth": https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/global-employment-trends/WCMS_598669/lang--en/index.htm

² Ibid.

³ OHCHR, Human Rights Council, "La juventud y los derechos humanos. Informe del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos", 28/06/2018.

⁴ Human Rights Council, A/HRC/37/32, "Realization of the right to work. Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights", 04/01/2018.

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⁶ Tunisian National Institute of Statistics (INS-NAT), Unemployment rate by sex in May 2019: <http://www.ins.nat.tn/fr/themes/emploi#1908>

⁷ ILO (2015), "L'inventaire de l'emploi des jeunes en Tunisie: Trente ans de politiques de l'emploi (IEJ)": https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_444914.pdf

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¹¹ Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux (FIDES), "Rapport du mois de septembre. Des mouvements sociaux, des suicides et des violences", No. 61, September 2018.

¹² International Labour Organization, The Care Economy, Domestic Workers: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/domestic-workers/lang--en/index.htm>

¹³ Amnesty International (2019), report "Leur maison, c'est ma prison": <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1800222019FRENCH.pdf>

¹⁴ Jureidini, R. for KAFA (Enough) Violence & Exploitation, "An Exploratory Study of Psychoanalytic and Social Factors in the Abuse of Migrant Domestic Workers by Female Employers in Lebanon", January 2011.

¹⁵ The Legal agenda, "Lebanese Judge: Passport Retention of Domestic Workers Violates International Law", 28/11/2016: <http://legal-agenda.com/en/article.php?id=3244>

¹⁶ Jureidini, R. (2011), see quotation No. 14.

¹⁷ KAFA, (enough) Violence & Exploitation, campaign "Think about it, think about her": <https://www.kafa.org.lb/en/node/47>

¹⁸ Pande, A. (2018), "The Paper that you Have in Your Hand is My Freedom": Migrant Domestic Work and the Sponsorship (Kafala) System in Lebanon", International Migration Review, Volume: 47 issue: 2, pp. 414-441.

CHAPTER 7

Violation of the right to freedom of movement and the right to migration and mobility

Over 3% of the world's population resides, temporarily or permanently, in a country which is not their country of birth or origin. The progressive consideration of migration as a threat to national security at the hands of many Mediterranean countries, and the securitization and militarization of these countries' responses to the migration phenomenon, have created very serious impact on the human rights of people who migrate, and have left international mechanisms of protection towards these migrated persons almost ineffective.

These mechanisms try to guarantee that promotion and protection of the human rights of migrated people are respected, particularly when the State uses its sovereignty to decide who enters its territory and who does not. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) recommends respecting these human rights and so does the General Comment No. 27 of the UN Human Rights Committee, which considers the freedom of movement as an essential condition for the free development of a person.¹ Even more if the people who migrate are in the middle of their development process and construction of their personal autonomy, as it is the particular case of young people, who are the focus of this report.

As a matter of fact, the youth represents a big percentage of migratory flows (approximately 70% of migrated people and asylum seekers are under the age of 30), and it is estimated that around 27 million young people have migrated or are in transit.² Moreover, they are migrated people with specific needs and barriers, which are hardly approached. With the current migratory and security rhetoric and policies, these needs and difficulties are not only ignored in many cases, but also increased by the institutions that signed the protection agreements themselves.

For instance, some of these infringements on migrated young people are group deportations and on-the-spot deportations (literally "hot deportations" in Spanish) to countries where it is probable that they suffer torture, persecution and other human rights violations. This kind of deportation is banned by the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, signed in Geneva in 1951, and its Protocol of 1967.³ A specific example of these practices are the last deportations to Morocco of Rifian activists who were persecuted by the Moroccan government.⁴ The Spanish government has rejected their asylum application, despite the current repression context and the around 400



Spanish south border, by Martí Albesa (La Talaia Agency).

people — most of them young people — imprisoned for participating or leading protests in that region.

The situation of the children of migrated people who were born in another country, or who have resided in that country since they were very young, is not easy either. Their right to citizenship is still conditioned, in many Mediterranean countries, by their parents' nationality and political will, which represents a grievance of human and fundamental rights and impairs the enjoyment of civil and political rights of people who have no access — or partial access — to citizenship. In this regard, the youth movements that demand access to citizenship become especially interesting, such as the Greek campaign "Ithageneia" ('same rights'), led by Generation 2.0 RED, which defends the rights of young second generation migrated people who are considered second-class Greeks.

Finally, one of the most invisibilized cases of restrictions to the freedom of movement, and therefore to the construction of autonomy, is the situation of thousands

of young people that live in the refugee camps. These infringements take place in the camps that shelter those who arrived to the European borders in the last years, and also in the camps where Palestinians and Sahrawis have been living for over 30 years, suspended in a historical oblivion — which is also connected with collective violations of the rights of nations.

Criminalization and self-organization of migrated young people and unaccompanied minors in the Mediterranean

The phenomenon of the migration of young people and unaccompanied minors has created one of the most serious political crisis and rights violation in the Mediterranean region. Particularly if we consider the impact of the new approach of migratory policies in

the European Union, consisting of the externalization of EU borders to third countries where monitoring human rights is much more difficult and there is even fewer protection against abuses. UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration and the OHCHR have alerted on the increasing incidence of this phenomenon, and about the particular vulnerability that migrated minors suffer in their journey to Europe.⁵ Moreover, these children are tormented and extremely exposed to rights violations in the prisons and migrant centers of these countries.⁶

According to UNICEF's latest statistics on refugee and migrated children,⁷ in Greece 86% of the children and youth that migrated did so unaccompanied by their relatives. In Italy, 83% of migrated minors were unaccompanied, and 81% in Spain. The immense majority of these unaccompanied minors are boys, and in the case of Italy, 93% of these boys are between 15 and 17 years old. In December 2018, there were approximately 13 000 unaccompanied minors in the State of Spain, although some organizations like the Andalusian Association for Human Rights (APDHA) denounce that there is no exact and reliable data about the real number of migrated children⁸ who travel without being accompanied by an adult relative.



Tindouf camps (Western Sahara), by Carmen A. Tamés.

The reasons that force young people to migrate are diverse. In many cases, as in the aforementioned situation in the Rif, these reasons are connected with the right to peace and to a life free of violence, especially in the case of those who flee from war, from systematic human rights violations or

because of persecution motivated by their origin, ethnic group, gender or sexual orientation.⁹ But the reasons can also be related to the look for means of livelihood, in a colonial global economic system, which extracts, plunders and privatizes the resources of the Global South countries, thus contributing to the impoverishment of their people.

“Stigmatization of migrated youth as a whole, and especially of Maghrebi young people, paves the way for abuses such as racially motivated raids and larger tolerance towards hate speech”

In the case of migrated minors, the structural lacks of the reception system lead to rights violations that start as soon as these children enter the country.¹⁰ These infringements are really serious if we take into account that children's rights are protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges to prioritize the child's interests, and to which all southern European countries are adhered. In the State of Spain, for example, associations like APDHA, and others, have documented in their reports multiple situations in which the minors were handcuffed with zip ties when they entered the country, retained in non-equipped sites together with adults and without sufficient resources for their attention, and transported without guarantees in police vehicles. In Catalonia in the summer of 2018, it was found that they were accommodated in absolutely inadequate spaces, such as police stations, because of the lack of specialized centers. All these situations highlight this system's failure. In addition, there is some worrying news, such as the 89 migrated minors held during 2018 in Immigration Detention Centers,¹¹ known as CIEs in Catalan, was denounced by the NGO Save the Children, or other news like the death of a minor in Almeria, which is currently under investigation, who was violently restrained.¹²

Apart from the problems and violations connected with the reception, social stigmatization of migrated youth as a whole, and especially of Maghrebi young people, there is also a common dehumanizing

criminalization of the youth caused by racism and by an unusual disproportionate perception of insecurity, in a context of rising of openly racist political groups all over Europe. Thus, abuses such as racially motivated raids and larger tolerance towards hate speech become wide-spread. To oppose stigmatization, migrated young people who are or were under guardianship lead pioneer experiences of self-organization and empowerment with a very clear premise: “stop talking about us without us”.¹³



Demonstration organized by APDHA (Human Rights Association from Andalucía), by Laura Ortiz.

The Association ExMenas, an example of self-organization against fear and isolation in Barcelona

Criminalizing speech against migrated youth is not only harmful, but it also contributes decisively to socially isolate these young people and leave them even more unprotected. In addition, this rhetoric has created a peak of racist violence in Catalonia, reflected in attacks such as the ones that took place in Canet de Mar, where a man entered a minors center armed with a knife, and in Castelldefels, where a group of young people with an aggressive attitude burst into another minors center, in March 2019. One of the voices that emerged and gained importance during the reaction after the attacks, in society and media, was the Association ExMenas. A MENA is the Catalan abbreviation of an unaccompanied migrated minor, and ex-MENAs are those young people

who are now of age but who entered the country unaccompanied when they were minors.

The association's members are girls and boys that have been in the Spanish guardianship system at some point in their lives, or who arrived in Catalonia and directly faced this criminalization. The organization was created to build another speech about migrated youth, to oppose the hegemonic rhetoric that connects migrated young people with drug addiction and with criminality — although figures confirm that over 80% of them have no criminal record.¹⁴

In addition, this group wants to give a voice to a reality and especially to a perspective that is completely invisibilized in the media. They also want to be a bridge between neighbors, organizations, institutions and migrated young people, as well as to denounce the racist raids and discrimination, and the situation of abandonment of many young people who are not in guardianship anymore when they are of age.¹⁵ This means for many of them — it is estimated that now, in 2019, there are around 1000 former foster young people in Catalonia alone — taking a leap in the dark, because they cannot benefit from any protection system.¹⁶

The Association ExMenas is, up to this moment, the only formal self-organized movement of foster and former foster youth in the State of Spain, although there are some informal groups of local and migrated young people because of the seriousness of the situation, and there are also other organizations, like Extutelados ('former foster youth') in Malaga, that work for involving and assessing migrated young people.

Life in limbo: freedom of movement, frustration and youth resistances in refugee camps

The lack of freedom of movement — and sometimes the lack of space — determines the lives of young people in the Mediterranean refugee camps, who are trapped in a wait which has an uncertain end. It takes a different shape in the insanitary camps of Moria on

the island of Lesbos, where thousands of refugees, who have entered Greece in the past few years seeking a future in peace are staying, are living; and in the camps where Palestinian and Sahrawi people take shelter, since decades ago, to ensure — especially in the case of Sahrawis — their survival as a nation while they are waiting for the right to self-determination and return that never comes true.

For the young refugees in the Greek camps, the situation is simply a “hell”. In Lesbos, 9000 people are confined in a site made to shelter 3000, which leads to desperation of the youth and adolescents — a third of the camp’s population — because of the lack of access to education and the undignified living conditions.¹⁷ According to Médecins Sans Frontières, This despair has created an emergency situation because of the increase of suicide attempts and self-injuries among this population group.¹⁸ There are other young people that have also faced several human rights violations, including sexual violence, during their journey to Europe, and they suffer from mutism, panic attacks, aggressiveness and constant nightmares. Some organizations point out the little specific attention towards young people as a subject in the refugee camps, although they face a high risk of exposure to trauma and poor mental health,¹⁹ and present higher rates of anxiety, psychosomatic diseases and depression.

However, the journalists who are familiar with the situation in refugee camps announce that there are experiences of self-organization in general, and also among the youth, although they are not formal.

The experiences of youth resistance and self-organization are much more consolidated in the Palestinian and Sahrawi camps. The Sahrawi diaspora consists of 174 000 people living in 5 camps in the middle of the Algerian desert since 1975. At the beginning, they had the hope that there would be a fast resolution to their conflict with Morocco with a self-determination referendum, which the UN had promised, but this faith disappeared and in its place we find a harsh and daily fight against the hostile climate conditions and a growing oblivion from the international community.²⁰ Among the young people, the perspective of not going back to their territory of origin in the near future creates frustration and unease. Their discontent is caused by boredom, lack of jobs, increasing

economic restrictions and a desire of individual and collective freedom, and in some cases it pushes them to ask for a return to arms. Therefore, groups like UJSARIO, the youth movement of the Polisario Front, try to channel this despair with political efforts.

In addition, there are many Sahrawis that have the possibility to study in Cuba, Spain or Algeria thanks to scholarships, but once they go back to the camps it is difficult for them to find a job adequate for their education and this becomes another element of frustration.²¹

The fourth generation of young people in the Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East lives a similar situation. They live in the oldest refugee camp of the currently existing camps, which was built after the Nakba, the great expulsion in 1948 of thousands of Palestinians from their territories at the hands of Israel. This solution — transitory since more than 60 years ago — creates an effective discrimination on many levels against the Palestinian youth: to start with, there is a comparative disadvantage in the access to education. In Lebanon, for example, Palestinian refugees have restricted access to public schools and cannot afford the private centers. Moreover, there is a discrimination of civil and political rights of the refugees who live in the camps,²² socioeconomic difficulties — 70% of the Palestinian young population in Lebanon is poor and 5% live in extreme poverty²³ —, barriers to access certain kinds of jobs, and the high youth unemployment rate (36.4%).



Tindouf camps in Western Sahara, by Sarlin/e on Flickr.

This entire situation is worsened by the double diaspora of the Palestinian young people who lived in refugee camps in Syria²⁴. Their conditions have worsened and their rights have been violated to a higher degree, because they had to escape to Lebanon in order to flee from the current conflict in Syria.

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CHAPTER 8

Youth uprising for political rights for democratization and against tyranny

“Disgraceful the nation where the youth shall not shake the tyrant”, said the Ecuadorian philosopher Juan Montalvo. Young people’s fight against the tyranny of autocrats and for democratization and political and cultural rights in the Mediterranean presents different forms of resistance. For example, the current mobilization in Algeria has shaken — a lot — not only the almost nonagenarian country’s president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, but also all the gerontocracy of old liberators that was holding the regime.

This is a dark time for human rights, according to Human Rights Watch, which announces a global advance of autocracy,¹ but also a situation of rising and strengthened resistances. Thus, while in southern Europe the youth are on their guard awaiting a possible election victory that would bring the extreme right to power — like it already happened in Italy —, in North Africa the spirit of the unfinished Arab Springs revives to condemn the socioeconomic situation, the lack of freedoms, and the suffocation of nations’ cultural manifestations.

As a matter of fact, youth uprising against authoritarianism and tyranny cuts across almost all the rights violations previously mentioned in the report, especially because these fights are often sparked by the worsening of their life conditions and by the lack of future. But the resistance ability and the leadership of those who keep alive the hope for a profound change make it necessary to put some light in the dark. Therefore, this chapter is focused on the context in the Moroccan Rif and in Algeria, which are currently scenes of unfinished mobilizations that could lead to substantial transformations in the near future. There is only another focus of optimism that resists, in the Middle East, against the Turkish authoritarianism and the havoc wreaked by the war in Syria. The Kurdish are protecting their project of a new society like a seed, threatened in northern Kurdistan by Erdogan’s extreme repression against the Kurdish people and their political expressions, and also jeopardized by the Turkish partial occupation of Rojava in southern Kurdistan.

One of the most outstanding processes of these three movements is, apart from the youth element, the high amount of women in the fight. In the case of Kurdistan, this is because of the gender transformation that is proposed by their ideology, which probably

represents the most important social experiment of feminist construction in the last fifteen years. In fact, in the Mediterranean countries, young population is the largest population group, but these figures contrast with their actual opportunities of political participation, economic emancipation and social respect.²

According to the geographer Laurent Chalard, in Morocco — but this could be extrapolated to other contexts — there are three factors that considerably increase the probability of a revolution outbreak: authoritarianism, a fragile economy caused by the adjustment and privatization policies, and a peak on the number of births in the last two and a half decades.³

The awakening of Hirak, the youth uprising for social justice in Rif



Demonstration in the Rif, by Hirak News Casablanca.

The Rif only needed a spark to burst into flames, and this spark was the death of Mouhcine Fikri, a fish vendor who was crushed to death in a rubbish truck in Al-Hoceima, in October 2016, when he was trying to get back the goods that the police had confiscated from him.⁴ Fikri, aged 31, used to fish illegally for a living, in waters that are almost privatized for the exclusive fishing of UE ships. His precariousness was shared by almost all his generation, condemned to survive of the remittances that their migrated relatives send them or

growing cannabis and/or smuggling across the Spanish border. This is the situation in the Rif, a region with high rates of students leaving school early and a third of the population surviving thanks to informal economy;⁵ an area with a high analphabetism rate and lower access to higher education than the average in the country, especially in rural areas where 45.7% of the population is illiterate, with a special incidence in women. Moreover, this region has a historical situation of divestment and economic marginalization and has almost always been militarized since the independence of Morocco.

What started as an 18-kilometer march from the morgue to the young fisherman's house to call for a clarification of the circumstances of his death, ended up reviving the political, economic and cultural demands of this mostly Amazigh region, which were, among others demands, the construction of an oncology hospital and a public university. Indignation soon became popular self-organization and within it a movement for social justice was born. It is called Hirak ('The Movement') and it has expanded to other parts of the country, confirming thus the greatest fears of Makhzen⁶ (the apparatus of the State of Morocco).

After months of pacific protests in the region and a demonstration with over 250 000 participants in Al-Hoceima, a repressive raid took place, during the period between March and June 2017. It increased the tension of the confrontations with the police, and it ended up with the detention — between May 26th and 31st — of at least 71 people in this seaside city and the neighboring towns of Imzouren and Bni Bouayach.⁷ Among the detained people, there were dozens of children — according to Amnesty International —, and Nasser Zefzafi, the public face of the movement up to that moment. The arrest of Zefzafi, far from making the mobilizations fade away, was responded with demonstrations of thousands of people.

"The number of persons crossing borders to Spain from northern Morocco increased sixfold in 2017, especially after the detention of Zefzafi"

But the wave of massive detentions had another expected consequence: the exodus of young people that had participated in the protest⁸ to the State of Spain and to other parts of Europe. The agency Frontex, itself, points out that the repression in the Rif's protests is one of the two reasons that explain the six-fold increase in 2017 in the number of persons crossing borders to Spain from northern Morocco through the Strait of Gibraltar's route, in comparison to the previous year, and that the amount especially increased after Zefzafi's detention.⁹

The protest particularly revived during the trial when 52 Rifian activists in Casablanca were eventually sentenced in June 2018, one year after their detention, to 300 years imprisonment all together. Four of them, including Nasser Zefzafi, had penalties of 20 years in prison for "attempting against the internal security of the State" and participating in illegal protests. The reports from the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) announce that, in all, over a thousand people went to prison for collaboration, membership or support to the Hirak movement in 2017 and 2018.¹⁰ According to the estimations of its ex-president, Khadija Ryadi, there are still between 300 and 400 victims of reprisal against the Rif's protests in prison, while detentions and trials continue. As a further matter, during this same period, at least 66 people who were detained in massive demonstrations in the Rif maintained that they had been subjected to beating and asphyxia, they were undressed and threatened with rape, and they suffered verbal violence at the hands of police.¹¹ Also 8 journalists were arrested for covering the protests.

One of the most outstanding facts, as mentioned before, in the evolution of Hirak, is the feminization of the protest, especially after the massive detentions in 2017. This is a very common process — leaving apart the specific considerations in the matter of women's participation in Amazigh societies of the Rif — in these kinds of contexts: men are substituted by women because of the lack of militants, thus women have open access to organization and movements, and there is a female leadership.¹²

Many of the women that participate in the movement are relatives of the hundreds of political prisoners, who are scattered in ten Moroccan prisons, some

of them thousands of kilometers away from the Rif.¹³ Some of the other women are the activists that held the Amazigh's fight for social justice in the Rif since the first months. This is the case of Silya Ziani, a 23-year-old girl who was the first detained woman in the Rif's protests,¹⁴ while she was supporting Zefzafi's family during their son's trial in Casablanca.

In a similar way, the protests in Algeria have summoned many women: the young women's generations, literate and educated, who take advantage of this context of open changes to push them into profound social transformation, and also the experienced fighters for the Algerian independence. One of these old hands is Djamilia Bouhired, aged 84, who is back in the streets to revive those old slogans of equality that consigned women to oblivion after the military coup against the first president in an independent Algeria, Ahmed Ben Bella, in 1965.



Protest in the Rif, by Hirak News Casablanca.



Relatives of the Rif's prisoners asking for their freedom, by Hirak News Casablanca.

Down with gerontocracy. Young people and women lead the end of an era in Algeria

There was an awkward silence in 2014, when Abdelaziz Bouteflika decided to stand for election in what was his fourth mandate as a presidential candidate for the National Liberation Front (FLN). He was almost octogenarian, ill and weakened because of a brain embolism. Bouteflika was still recovering and had just come back from a three-month convalescence in a hospital in Paris, and even though he did not participate in any events of the election campaign, he won with over 80% of votes. There were accusations of fraud, and in that context was born the citizen's movement Barakat, with a background in the Arab Springs, which dared to question not only

the old president, but also the opposition, because they were blocking substantial changes towards democratization and social justice. In that moment, public opposition to Bouteflika, at least with people daring to talk publicly, was marginal, and members of Barakat announced in the press that "maybe we will not see the change, but it is necessary to sow the seeds".¹⁵

Five years later with a fifth presidential mandate of Bouteflika in the horizon, announced in February 2019, the Algerian youth said: "20 years are enough".¹⁶ Thousands of young people demonstrated on February 22nd in a mobilization unprecedented in the country, even larger than the ones during the Arab Springs, and took to the streets with messages like "You leave, or we leave" to demand a real change of regime. They had the power of protest, but also "demographical power":

people under 30 are 60% of the population in Algeria,¹⁷ while most of the government members were over the age of 70 at that moment.

On February 26th the protests expanded and a dozen student demonstrations took place all over the country, which gave them a national significance that was also a novelty.¹⁸ Eventually, after months of mobilizations, Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned on April 2nd, leaving the general Ahmed Gaid Salah to rule over the country. But this small victory did not stop the fight, youth and student protests continued demanding a real transition process and the demilitarization of the country's political institutions.

Far from calming the atmosphere, Gaid Salah has decided on using a firm hand against the weekly student demonstrations, and in the middle of June 2019 he also banned waving the Amazigh flag in the protests. Eighteen people have been detained for "undermining national unity", which opened up an old wound: the massacre of 125 people during the governmental repression against the popular uprising in 2001 in Kabylia, right after Bouteflika started in the government.

In this context, women, and especially young Algerian women, have taken advantage of the revival of civil society in their country, and of the opening-up of a new political and generational context in order to massively reappropriate public space.¹⁹ Female students, lawyers, journalists, mothers and rural women fight side by side in the streets to put the defense of women's rights in the political agenda of the transition, in a country where abortion, sex outside of the marriage and homosexual activity, among many other restrictions, are banned. Also, old fighters for freedoms in Algeria have taken to the streets; they are women who were forced, like in other contexts, to go back to their homes after the conflict. As in the case of the aforementioned Djamila Bouhired, ex-FLN militant, who considers this mobilization a "second Battle of Algiers",²⁰ and who advises young people not to allow their revolution to be stolen-as it was taken away from her.

¹⁷ HRW (2019), "World's Autocrats Face Rising Resistance": <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/keynote/autocrats-face-rising-resistance>

¹⁸ Council of Europe and the European Union manage partnership and joint programmes, "Youth participation and active citizenship": <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1667911/2.4.pdf/64ce8034-440c-4ebc-b325-2fe3be0190f5>

¹⁹ Laurent Chalard a Orient XXI.info, "La démographie comme facteur révolutionnaire en Afrique du Nord", 05/08/2015: <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/la-demographie-comme-facteur-revolutionnaire-en-afrique-du-nord,0967>

²⁰ Tel quel, "La mort de Mouhcine Fikri à Al-Hoceima provoque une vague d'indignation contre la 'hogra'", 30/10/2016: https://telquel.ma/2016/10/30/la-mort-de-mouhcine-fikri-provoque-une-vague-d-indignation-contre-la-hogra_1521268

²¹ Jeune Afrique, "Tensions à El Hoceima : les chiffres des inégalités sociales qui expliquent la grogne marocaine", 25/05/2017: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/441734/politique/tensions-a-el-hoceima-chiffres-inegalites-sociales-explicitent-grogne-marocaine/>

²² El Salto, "Represión en el Rif y nuevos 'Hirak' en Marruecos por una vida digna", 02/02/2018: <https://www.elsaltodiario.com/marruecos/marruecos-ahmed-zefzafi-rif-represion-hirak-vida-digna>

²³ Amnesty Internacional, "Maroc. Vague d'arrestations massives visant des manifestants dans le Rif", 02/06/2017: <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2017/06/morocco-rif-protesters-punished-with-wave-of-mass-arrests/>

²⁴ Frontex, Migratory Routes, Western Mediterranean Route 2017: <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-mediterranean-route/>

²⁵ El País, "La frustración que expulsa de Marruecos a los jóvenes", 03/12/2018: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/11/24/actualidad/1543051591_038477.html

²⁶ L'Economiste, "L'AMDH s'insurge contre la hausse du nombre de 'détenus politiques'", 01/11/2018: <https://www.leconomiste.com/flash-infos/l-amdh-s-insurge-contre-la-hausse-du-nombre-de-detenus-politiques>

²⁷ Amnesty International, "Maroc. Des dizaines de personnes arrêtées dans le cadre de la contestation qui secoue le Rif dénoncent des actes de torture en détention", 11/09/2017: <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2017/08/morocco-dozens-arrested-over-mass-protests-in-rif-report-torture-in-custody/>

²⁸ Miralles, N. & Rodríguez, Z. (2017), "¿Qué podemos aprender de los procesos de resistencia y participación de las mujeres en contextos armados?", in Martínez, J. (coord.) *Participar desde los feminismos: ausencias, expulsiones y resistencias* (Barcelona, Icaria Editorial).

²⁹ Revista 5W, "Las voces femeninas del 'Hirak'", 27/09/2018: <https://www.revista5w.com/who/las-vores-femeninas-del-hirak>

³⁰ ElDiario.es, "La historia de Silya Ziani, la primera mujer detenida en las protestas del Rif", 12/06/2017: https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/historia-Silya-detenido-protestas-Rif_0_653735288.html

³¹ El Confidencial, "Casi octogenario y enfermo: Bouteflika vuelve a ganar las elecciones en Argelia", 17/04/2014: https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2014-04-17/casi-octogenario-y-enfermo-asi-ganara-bouteflika-las-elecciones-en-argelia_117997/

³² El Watan, "Boumerdès : «20 ans de gabegie, barakat !»", 02/03/2019: <https://www.elwatan.com/edition/actualite/boumerdes-20-ans-de-gabegie-barakat-02-03-2019>

³³ Le Parisien, "La rue se lève contre Bouteflika, du jamais-vu dans l'histoire de l'Algérie", 23/02/2019: <http://www.leparisien.fr/international/la-rue-se-leve-contre-bouteflika-du-jamais-vu-dans-l-histoire-de-l-algerie-23-02-2019-8019054.php>

³⁴ Jeune Afrique, "Mobilisation anti-Bouteflika : «La nouveauté, c'est la dimension nationale de ce mouvement»", 28/02/2019: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/742055/politique/mobilisation-anti-bouteflika-la-nouveaute-cest-la-dimension-nationale-de-ce-mouvement/>

¹⁹ The conversation, "Algérie : les femmes à la conquête de l'espace public", 07/03/2019: <https://theconversation.com/algerie-les-femmes-a-la-conquete-de-lespace-public-112726>

²⁰ Blogs Mediapart.fr, "Djamila Bouhired au cœur du soulèvement: «J'ai l'impression de revivre la Révolution»", 03/03/2019: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-marc-b/blog/030319/djamila-bouhired-au-coeur-du-soulevement-j-ai-l-impression-de-revivre-la-revolution>

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

In the Mediterranean, the advancement and expansion of authoritarianism and the probable increase of tensions and conflicts, and the poverty gap and migratory flows because of a climatic emergency do not seem a hopeful horizon for the respect of fundamental human rights. Especially in the case of the youth, who do not benefit from a regulated and formal structure of protection of their specific rights as young people, as has been announced in this report. This lack of specificity also is caused by the complexity of homogeneously defining the category of “youth”.

In truth, the generalized attack against the system of human rights cannot be ignored. This violation is fostered by a paradigmatic change towards global militarization and securitization. With this process, young people who cross borders to seek a more dignified future are even more dehumanized and criminalized. As well as those who flee from an almost certain forced recruitment in the wars that take place in the region, women and LGBTQ+ people are criminalized and, what's more, their lives and bodies are devalued.

To sum up, the infringements that are afflicted on the youth as a whole in this region are the following:

- The return to obligatory military service, the persecution against conscientious objection and forced recruitment are part of a global strategy for the militarization of territories and follow interests that do not seek to solve the structural problems that affect the youth, but put these young people in danger.
- Systematic arbitrary detention and imprisonment of minors in territories such as Western Sahara and Palestine, or of migrated minors in Immigration Detention Centers in the State of Spain, not only represent a violation of their rights, but also a systematic and serious violation of all child protection mechanisms.
- Privatization and over-exploitation of land, as well as the construction of big unnecessary infrastructures under a false idea of progress, contribute to worsen the youth's socioeconomic conditions and future

perspectives. In addition, these practices destroy the environment and the means of livelihood, and they dedicate all resources to the predatory and neocolonial machinery.

- A certain opening-up might take place — although mid-term — in the situation of infringement of the right to one's own body and sexual rights, mainly promoted by the creation of new feminist and LGBTQ+ groups of young people. Although these young activists are still harshly persecuted by some states in the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, they have managed to reopen the debate about the need of decriminalizing the freedoms and stopping the impunity of violence. However, in the northern shore, the rising of traditionalist, extreme right-wing groups materially threatens the advancements in the right to an abortion and protection in front of gender violence and LGBTQ+ phobic violence that young people suffer.
- It is foreseen that the situation of rights violations on migrated youth and on those young people who stay in their countries will become even worse because of the increase in repression in several points of the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores, the high unemployment rate, the growing desertification and the migratory movements caused by the action of transnational and extractive companies.
- The new strategy on migratory policies in the European Union, which externalizes its borders, creates spaces where rights are non-existent and violations are invisible and unpunished. This process is contributing and will keep on contributing to undermine the right to travel, the right to life, and especially the right to physical and mental integrity of young people.
- The rising of new protest movements that demand profound transformations, especially in North Africa, give way to youth empowerment in the defense of rights and to a revival of the fights that were born in the unfinished Arab Spring.

In general terms, the existence of youth fights and resistance movements for the rights to life, peace,

work, land, return, one's own body, migration and freedom of movement all over the region, in every country, are common elements that prompt the young people of all the Mediterranean territory to come together. This brother- and sisterhood represent a dose of hope and optimism, left on the agency and determination of these young people and those who will come.

