



Centre for Mediterranean, Middle East & Islamic Studies

Middle East Bulletin

A GREEK REVIEW OF
MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS

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The Arab Spring:
Crossroads

Tribes: a 'back to the future' perspective on the Arab Spring *

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As the dust of the early optimism has started to settle down, the perception of the uprisings as a straightforward equation of 'disenchanted youth against authoritarian state equals democracy' crumbles against the complexity of the reality. After the youth as the revolutionary and the Islamist groups as the political subjects of the uprisings, the new actor to catch the imagination of the Arab Spring observers is 'tribes'. The resurrection of this pre-modern mode of organization bewilders the hopes of progressive post-modernity, illustrated in the social media totem; however, this anthropological entry in the Arab Spring discourse brings a little-examined actor in the 'political field' of the uprising-affected states.

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* The research for this paper has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) - Research Funding Program: Heracleitus II.



Well into the second year of the 'uprising era' in the Middle East, the inevitable question is why regime subversion was proved possible in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen (and possibly Syria) but not elsewhere in the region. The 'rentier state hypothesis' (a usual outlook on the Middle East, which sees as the main obstacle to reform the natural resource wealth, that is used to numb dissent) loses strength under the Libyan example.¹ A different explanation identifies regime type as the 'basic suspect' for uprising onset, claiming that monarchies seem to fare better compared to plain authoritarian republics. This explanation is also challenged, this time by Bahrain.² Nevertheless, although the 'regime type' explanation is one case short to plausibility, one of the control variables in Menaldo's study introduces 'tribalism' in the equation; monarchies usually are also tribal, a feature possibly related to their stability.

Historically, the Middle East has taken two distinct paths towards modernity. Arid regions of the Arabian Peninsula and Saharan Maghreb went through a late and slow sedentarization process. Even the advent of Islam, with its potent anti-tribal message (Ummah above tribe) failed to transform the social structures of these regions. The Golden Age of the Islamic Caliphate followed mainly tribal trails.³ Due to the difficulties these inhospitable areas present, in terms of logistics and administration effectiveness, they were out of reach for most of the empires.⁴ Colonial control was equally superficial. The British were content with a problem-free Arabian Peninsula, under none but British foreign influence, guaranteeing unhindered trade with India. This was achieved through a selective intervention approach. The British subcontracted the strongest tribes and directly intervened only in rare cases to restore balance. After the granting of independence these dominant tribes became the ruling royal families of Saudi Arabia and the other monarchies of the Peninsula. A similar process was followed in Jordan and Morocco.⁵

In accordance to their own tribal background, as long as the ruling elites in these monarchies had secured their rule against any serious challenge, they opted for co-optation instead of confrontation. Since the royal regimes had expressed their will to reward loyalty, in most cases the 'cooperate or perish' dilemma was answered relatively easy by the subjugated tribes. A wide patronage network was created to uphold stability, favoring -besides the ruling extended family- a large number of tribal actors. By giving the tribes a stake in the regime survival, the ruling elites pacified them through integration. Where national income could not sustain the necessary largesse to oil the wheels of the patronage network, external help or local dynamics ensured cooperation. A case in point is Jordan where the presence of a large Palestinian population has functioned as a 'rallying around the king' force.⁶ Although, in no case the tribes' loyalty is to be taken for granted and an occasional push to 'keep the plates spinning' might become necessary,



the tribal feature in these societies has proved to be a stabilizing factor.

Regions with fertile land, on the contrary, developed anti-tribal dynamics early. In these cases the available conditions for settled agriculture favored the sedentarization of large populations, weakening the tribal attributes of the societies. Since the peasant populations are more vulnerable to state coercion and taxation, these regions produced centralized entities. In terms of the contemporary state system, these regions account for the states with access to the Mediterranean such as Tunisia, Egypt and Syria. Moreover, these republics, born out of national-liberation struggles, wished to rebuild and revolutionize their societies. The Ba'ath regime in Syria, Nasser and his successors in Egypt, Bourguiba and Ben Ali in Tunisia are some examples of nascent ruling elites who saw the war against tribalism as basic component of their state-building effort. There was no co-optation of the tribes in this case, but suppression. Although even in their heyday these regimes didn't manage to exert total control over their countries, allowing tribal pockets to function semi-autonomously, the tribes have never been a potent opponent to reckon with. In these cases we can safely assume that tribalism has played a minimal role in the uprisings.

However, is the lack of tribalism a recipe for instability and violent uprisings? The cases of Libya and Yemen refute this assumption. In both countries tribalism proved a deeply embedded societal attribute, despite the fact that both countries were republics and, as such, favored centralized governing structures.⁷ Iraq would also fit the picture had it not been for its decade-long own winter which left it out of the Arab Spring wave. The regimes in these countries faced a more daunting task in their dealings with tribalism. Ba'ath's hybrid Arab-nationalist socialism in Iraq and Qaddafi's ever-confusing Jamahiriya in Libya, struggled first to eradicate, then to keep in check and in the end embrace tribalism. The losing appeal of these ideologies fostered the resurrection of the tribe-manipulation as a substitute to regime legitimacy. Saddam Hussein re-invented tribal oaths of allegiance, especially after the Iran-Iraq and the Gulf War debacles diminished state control in the periphery and sparked uprising in the Shia'a and Kurdish areas.⁸ Qaddafi, always more symbolic, relocated to a tent.

Muammar Qaddafi, coming from the relatively small and politically insignificant Qadhadhifa tribe, had to form tribal alliances to create a credible force to oust king Idris. In the following years, his personal charisma and active involvement in various radical struggles internationally failed to turn him in the 'Brother Leader' he wished. Qaddafi masterfully secured his rule by solidifying the regime's hard core, comprising of loyal members of his family, his tribe and the two main allied tribes, Maqarha and Warfalla. This arrangement reflected Libya's regional dynamics,



favoring the western Tripolitania at the expense of the eastern Cyrenaica, and southern Fezzan. Although the patronage network was certainly more extended, these groups constituted the backbone of the regime or the ‘men of the tent’ as they were usually called. However, Qaddafi remained fearful of conspiracies to overthrow him. This exact threat of ‘palace coups’ prompted Qaddafi to apply a divide and rule approach on the ruling elite and particularly the security forces. This way every unit would be counterbalanced by another one and none would be in position to threaten Qaddafi’s rule. However, his fears were confirmed in 1993 when a coup originating from the allied Warfalla tribe was thwarted, leading to an institutionalization of tribal politics in Libya. For example, in 1994 a committee was established so that Qaddafi could consult with the tribal leaders and three years later a law was passed allowing collective punishment of tribes whose members were involved in anti-regime activities.⁹ These tools were widely used during the uprising. Several televised tribal meetings took place, full with tribal leaders’ eulogies and unreserved support to the ‘Brother Leader.’ Qaddafi confidently asserted that “all the tribes support me” while his son, Saif al-Islam, on several occasions pointed that, unlike Egypt and Tunisia, Libya is made up of tribes, clans and alliances and had it not been for the regime, chaos would engulf Libya.

A similar reasoning (with al-Qaeda seasoning) was used by Saleh in Yemen. In Yemen the tribal map is even more complicated because the regime never had the chance to attempt de-tribalization. As Saleh has smugly noted on several interviews, when he took office in 1978 no one thought he would last for more than a few months. For the months to turn into years and then decades, Saleh had no choice but to co-opt the tribes. He followed Qaddafi’s textbook to achieve that and created an inner circle of extended family and clan loyalists to staff the highest ranks of the regime. However, his weakness ruled out a credible ‘stick’ to supplement the ‘carrots’. Thus, on the one hand, the patronage network reached monstrous dimensions and on the other hand, there was a constant need for Machiavellian micro-management, pitting one tribe against the other. However, this ‘divide and rule’ policy was never an easy task. One reason is the abundance of weapons which made tribes more pro-active in the promotion of their demands. Moreover, the proliferation of arms in conjunction with the large number of inter-tribal frictions, for reasons such as access to land and water, meant that the state had to intervene also in inter-tribal crises, out of fear of escalation. Another reason is outside interference, particularly from Saudi Arabia, which in order to keep Saleh weak and protect its southern borders placed several tribal leaders on its payroll. This meant not only that these tribes were Saudi Arabia’s proxies but also by being Riyadh’s clients they were no longer dependent on the central government’s funds. That made them completely independent.



On the society level, Saleh's policies had a dual effect. Sustaining such a funds-consuming patronage network, in a poor country like Yemen, came at the expense of the population's life-improvement. The result was that common people had to turn to the tribes to offer them security, justice and the basics for survival. On the other hand, however, the excessive enrichment of some tribal leaders corrupted tribal norms. Traditionally tribal authority is primarily earned, not bought. In some cases tribal leaders are even elected. Generally, their authority is based on consensus and derives from their ability to listen and help their tribesmen. Saleh's 'largesse' has, however, created a generation of wealthy tribal leaders, who had no need to earn their fellow tribesmen's trust to retain their status. They don't even come in contact with them, as many tribal leaders became 'city sheikhs', having moved to Sana'a from where they operated their personal patronage network. This way these tribal leaders have lost their moral authority, their power of persuasion, especially among the younger generation. That was more than evident during the uprising, when Saleh's effort to mobilize the tribes to his support failed, as many tribesmen simply disregarded their leaders' admonitions.

Hence, have the tribes played a role in the uprisings in these two 'tribal' cases? There is no simple answer to this question. If the 'role' refers to the outbreak of the uprising, then no. If, however, it refers to sustaining the uprising, then the answer is yes. The reason is that uprisings are spontaneous outbursts favored by societal-political and contextual factors, spurring a person to get out in the streets. But out there, facing the state's security forces, the individual and his comrades need organization for self-preservation and the advancement of the struggle. Since both Libya and Yemen are states with weak institutions, or more precisely, regime-dependent institutions, and no other than regime-sanctioned political formations exist,¹⁰ then it's only logical that the least common denominator available will prevail. Tribes played a role in these countries because revolution, much like nature, detests chaos. For the same reasons, they will play a big role in the post-uprising environment. In this fluid arena tribes will be one of the actors (Islamists are one of the others) who will try to better their standing in the political arrangements to come. The strongest tribes will play in the national league, while the minor tribes will engage in localized conflicts against other tribes. In Yemen, where tribal conflicts have been a stable characteristic for years, this dynamic is not so easily discerned. In Libya, however, tribal clashes have become a noticeable by-product of the uprising.

In sum, the 'tribalisation' of the Arab Spring discourse proves again that Middle East is the graveyard of grand theories and generalizations; exceptions are the rule. However, if a general conclusion is to be attempted, this would be two-fold. First, tribes as primordial systems are more



compatible and symmetric with pre-modern regime types (e.g. monarchies) than democracies. And second, tribalism is just a level of regression after the state apparatus collapses and in fact it is not the predominant one. As the cases of Bahrain, Syria and, outside the Arab Spring context, Iraq, have demonstrated, identity and therefore affiliation and motivation are segmented along levels; family, clan, tribe, sect and so on.■

NOTES

All links accessed on May 20, 2012

1 Hendeby, Eric, 'Oil and Revolution', Harvard Political Review, (May 19, 2011), <http://hpronline.org/covers/revolution/oil-and-revolution>

2 Menaldo, Victor A., 'The Middle East and North Africa's Resilient Monarchs', Journal of Politics, (September 16, 2011), forthcoming, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1548222 Menaldo's effort to justify the theoretical deviation of the Bahraini case presents a distorted depiction of the reality and is methodologically insufficient. p. 4

3 On the tribal characteristics of the Islamic Caliphate era, see Fandy, Mamoun, 'Tribe Vs. Islam: The Post-colonial Arab State and the Democratic Imperative', Middle East Policy, vol. 3, no. 2, 1994: pp. 43-4

4 For a graphic illustration, see 'Imperial History of the Middle East', Maps of War, www.mapsofwar.com/ind/imperial-history.html

5 Menaldo, Victor A., op. cit. pp. 18-21

6 King Abdullah and his father before him have repeatedly used the tribes in order to keep in check the Palestinian and the Islamist challenge. This manipulation is manifested in the polit-

ical field in the constant gerrymandering of electoral districts and in the cultural celebration of tribal identities. For more on the tribalism in Jordan see for example, Layne, Linda L., 'The Dialogics of Tribal Self-Representation in Jordan', American Ethnologist, vol. 16, no. 1, 1989 and Alon, Yoav, 'The Tribal System in the Face of the State-Formation Process: Mandatory Transjordan', 1921-46, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2005

7 Victor Menaldo attributes this deviation to the history of monarchic rule in these countries (p. 21). However, prior to the current republicanism, monarchies have also ruled in Egypt and briefly in Syria and Tunisia.

8 For an excellent account of Saddam's neo-tribal policies see Baram, Amatzia, 'Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1997

9 Mattes, Hanspeter, 'Survival Hinges on Tribal Solidarity', *Spiegel*, (23/2/2011), www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,747234,00.html

10 In Yemen where parties were allowed, intra-party dynamics are strongly affected by tribalism. For example, Islah, the largest opposition party, represents a coalition between Islamists and tribal actors. The tribal component is the al-Ahmar family who are part of the Hashid tribal confederation where Saleh's tribe belongs to. They used to be Saleh's allies but turned into his biggest foes.



The race for Hegemony

Iran, Turkey and the Arab Spring

Efpraxia Nerantzaki

The Arab Spring has changed the balance of power in the Middle East and North Africa. Iran and Turkey have been engaged in an undeclared, and sometimes declared, rivalry for regional leadership, while trying to win the hearts and minds of the Arabs and targeting expanded relations with the emerging political entities. The Syrian crisis has intensified their confrontation, which goes beyond the race for hegemony observed during the last year.



Turkey and Iran have been both rivals and allies. Generally, it can be said that the two countries' relations have been characterised by pragmatism, translated into an economic, trade, energy and security cooperation. It goes without saying that their relations have also been affected by changes at a national and a regional level. In this context the isolation of Iran right after the Iranian –which ended up being Islamic- Revolution led

Turkey to overlook the possible ideological differences and to view its south-eastern neighbour as a good economic partner, taking advantage of its losing prestige in the region. The 1990s were accompanied by some tension in the Turkish-Iranian relations mainly as an outcome of the Islamic fundamentalist threat linked to Iran and the Turkish political and military elites' conviction that the latter was supporting Kurdish militant activities. Ties have been restored between AKP's Turkey and the Islamic Republic and today Iran is Turkey's second largest energy supplier. Ankara's support for Iran's quest for nuclear capability and a shared, at least to a certain extent, hostility towards Israel are among the factors that bring the two non-Arab Middle Eastern countries closer. However, one of the characteristics of the Turkish-Iranian relationship has been the more-or-less straightforward rivalry for regional hegemony and the one's attempt to constrain the other's clout. The lack of a strong political leadership in the Arab



world and Turkey's increasing activism has made this competition more apparent in the last years. The race for influence in Iraq and Ankara's recent decision to allow the deployment of a NATO ballistic missile defence system in Malatya have added more tension to Ankara-Tehran relations. The Arab revolutions and uprisings have changed the distribution of power as known in the region and have given the rivalry a new turn. The two non-Arab players (Saudi Arabia could be added to them too) are courting the countries of the Arab Spring in order to secure themselves a prominent position in the changing order revealing the divergence of their interests and their differing strategic regional outlook.

The events that swept the Middle East and North Africa were viewed by both Ankara and Tehran as an opportunity to increase their regional influence by demonstrating their soft power capabilities. The rivalry between them becomes visible mostly through an effort to cement their ideological, political and economic presence in the region. From an Iranian perspective, the Arab Spring could represent an opportunity to promote the revolutionary Islamist model and to revive its diminishing lustre. On the other hand Turkey, generally portrayed as a model for the Islamic countries in transition, is trying to consolidate its power as a leading actor and increase its regional and international credibility.

Iran rejects the -prevalent in the Arab and Western discourse- term "Arab Spring." It has been working to put its imprint on the regional transformation by labelling the popular uprisings as a belated result of the Islamic Revolution export policy and at the same time the beginning of an 'Islamic awakening' in the region. From the first

weeks of the Arab Spring the religious leadership and the Revolutionary Guards, resorting often to populist practices, have been trying to appropriate the revolutions and to depict themselves as patrons of the oppressed popular movements. Tehran wants to see the emerging political powers as advocates of the Iranian Islamist experience and theory, adherents to the Iranian-led 'resistance axis.' It sees the overthrow of the western-backed tyrants of Egypt and Tunisia as a clear-cut message against the arrogant West and as the first step towards the establishment of new states, "the civilisation of [which] will arise from the characteristic nature of Islam, and Islam alone." In other words, the Iranian leadership is trying to promote an Iranian-style theocracy. Within the framework of the Iranian struggle to this end, two events were held in Tehran, the First International Islamic Awakening Conference in September and the consequent International Islamic Awakening and Youth Conference in January, with Muslim thinkers, activists and youngsters from 80 Muslim countries. In February 2012, another Islamic Awakening Conference took place in London.

From a Turkish perspective, the Arab Spring could bring opportunities for the creation of a number of democratic and secular states in the MENA region. Turkey's AKP, although a party with strong Islamic roots and often Islamist overtones, operates within a political culture, in which the concept of secularism remains dominant. In his first tour in North Africa Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish Prime Minister and leader of the AKP party, called for a secular form of government, stating that "secularism does not mean atheism or irreligion; it means respect to all religions"² and encouraged Egyptians "not to be afraid of secularism."



Therefore Erdogan, a pious Muslim himself, opposes the concept of theocracy and presents a secular liberal democracy, with an Islamic tint as the most appropriate governing model in light of the Arab Spring. Furthermore in contrast to Iran's adherence to Shia's Islam, he generally avoids taking sides in the sectarian conflict within the Muslim world and does not stress his Sunni identity.

Erdogan's political trips to North Africa in September have been criticised by the Iranian leadership and media as part of a Turkish plan to capitalise on current developments in order to reinforce Turkey's position as a hegemonic power in the Arab world at Iran's expense. Iran sees the 'neo-Ottoman' tendencies of Turkish leadership as a threat. Turkey aims at "replacing the true Islam" as practiced by Iran and promotes "innovative models of Islam", such as the Turkish version of "liberal Islam."³ According to the Iranian discourse, Turkey attempts to "divert the uprisings from the correct path" and promotes the Turkish model of Islam across the Arab world participating in an "American project", while serving Western interests. Despite the fact that Turkey has in the past years adopted an anti-Israeli stance, its active role in NATO makes Iran suspicious regarding its intentions for regional dominance. Iran sees itself the only genuine independent power in the Middle East with an authentic form of Islamic governance, and thus the only champion of the 'true Islam.'

Parallel to their ideological confrontation, both Turkey and Iran have been trying to establish relations with rising political entities throughout the region at all levels. Both have declared their willingness to provide financial aid to the countries of the Arab Spring. Iran, trying to exploit the new

order for re-establishing ties with Cairo, has announced publicly that it is prepared to provide financial aid to Egypt and increase its investments in the country,⁴ while economic and trade cooperation between Iran and Tunisia is also expanding. At the same time Iran has dispatched multiple aid convoys through its Red Crescent Society to Libya and Yemen and broadcasts related progress reports in English and Arabic language Iranian media.⁵ Turkey, on its part, has also taken initiatives to boost the weak Egyptian economy and to strengthen trade ties with Egypt. Soon after Mubarak's fall the Turkish President Abdullah Gül paid a visit to Egypt expressing his solidarity to the Egyptians. Within the framework of the business diplomacy the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoglu, has visited Egypt five times the last year, while Erdogan visited Egypt, accompanied by a large number of businessmen and entrepreneurs of all sorts.⁶ The creation of a new strategic military alliance with the post-Mubarak Egypt features also among the Turkish moves to secure a strong presence in the Arab world.⁷

The rivalry becomes even clearer in the light of the Syrian crisis which should be seen under a different prism because of the risks linked to it and its significance for the two regional players. Damascus is Tehran's most important ally in the fight against Zionism and an integral component of the 'resistance axis.' The possibility that a Sunni-led regime will take over Syria and will turn towards its Arab neighbours or Turkey represents a great concern for Iran. The Islamic Republic has been declaring that the Syrian president should have been given a chance to carry out the promised reforms and has been providing Assad with invaluable support. Turkey, a former ally of the



Ba'ath regime, has adopted a diametrically opposite stance with regard to the Syrian crisis. It has denounced Assad's practices from the very beginning and has clearly sided with the opposition. Iran has been criticising Turkey as being aligned with the "arrogant Western governments" and the "regional dictators," planning to intervene militarily and violate the Syrian sovereignty. The issue of whether Turkey represents an acceptable form of Islam from an Iranian point of view holds again a prominent position in Iranian criticism. The Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arinc responded by questioning the Islamic principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran,⁸ in light of the crackdown on protesters by the Syrian government and the security forces. Arinc has also accused Iran for nourishing religious fanaticism and promoting sectarian divide in the Muslim world.⁹ In a manifest affirmation of the rivalry, Yahya Rahim-Safavi, military advisor to the Iranian supreme religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has threatened Turkey that unless it reconsiders its attitude towards Syria¹⁰ and stops following the "wrong path" there will be serious negative implications for its relations with Iran, Syria and Iraq.¹¹ Regarding the dichotomy over

Syria, analysts claim that Iran may choose to play the Kurdish card against Turkey as a way to support Assad and weaken Turkey.

No developments in the Middle East can be seen as disconnected from the Arab-Israeli issue. The Arab Spring may affect the Arab-Israeli conflict and the intra-Palestinian conflict, and therefore Iran's regional footing. Hamas has partially redefined its regional alliances and has approached Turkey and Egypt. At the same time Hezbollah, Iran's ally, may be significantly weakened if the Syrian strongman falls. Iran's traditional alliances are under threat, while Turkey has already stolen a part of Iran's limelight with regard to its antipathy to Israel. The possible loss of Iran's strong card intensifies the competition between Turkey and Iran, since the latter has been rushing to retain its power as a major regional actor. The fact that Egypt brokered a reconciliation pact between Hamas and Fatah in April 2011 gave the North African country part of its old prestige. Egypt's changing foreign policy orientation may insert new parameters in the game of regional influence.■



NOTES

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2 It is worth noting that in his very trip to Egypt, Erdogan declared that his is not secular himself. Sabah, 'Başbakan Erdoğan'dan laiklik açılımı (Dissemination of secularism by the Prime Minister Erdoğan),' (15/9/2011), www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2011/09/15/basbakan-erdogandan-laiklik-acilimi

3 Ahlul Bayt News Agency, 'Ayatollah Shahrudi: Turkey seeking to promote "liberal Islam"', (25/8/2011), <http://abna.ir/data.asp?lang=3&id=261694>

4 Bar'el, Zvi, 'Muslim Brotherhood lawmaker: Arab Spring headed to Iran', *Haaretz*, (28/2/2012), www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/muslim-brotherhood-lawmaker-arab-spring-headed-to-iran-1.415380

5 Fulton, Will, 'After the Arab Spring: Iran's Foreign Relations in the Middle East', *Iran Tracker*, (28/9/2011), www.irantracker.org/analysis/fulton-iran-middle-east-arab-spring-september-28-2011

6 It is interesting to note here that the Turkish exports increased in the first three months of 2012 by 82% with Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. Hürriyet, 'Arap Baharı'nda ihracatçılar için mutlu son (Happy end for the exporters after the Arab Spring)', (3/4/2012), <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/printnews.aspx?DocID=20256154>

7 Tok, Evren and Hany Besada, 'Tumultuous times for Egypt and Turkey', *Business Today*, (23/2/2012) <http://businesstoday-egypt.com/news/display/article/artId:300/Tumultuous-Times-for-Egypt-and-Turkey/seclId:7>

8 TRT Haber, 'Bülent Arınç'tan İran'a eleştirisi (Bülent Arinc criticises Iran)', (6/2/2012), www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/bulent-arinctan-irana-elestiri-27306.html

9 Uygur, Hakkı, 'İran ve Arap Baharı (Iran and the Arab Spring)', *Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı*, no. 52, March 2012

10 Apart from the anti-Assad stance, Rahim-Safavi has also referring to Turkey's recent decision to host a NATO missile defense radar and its activism in the Middle East promoting Muslim secularism.

11 Al Arabiya News, 'Iran tells Turkey to change tack or face trouble,' 8/10/2011, www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/10/08/170833.html



S u n n i C a m p

Syria, Iraq and the stakeholders

Zakia Aqra

The so-called Sunni camp in the Middle East is in the centre of the world's attention. More specifically, Syria is of high geostrategic and geopolitical importance to the region, since it is being used as the 'theatre of operation' of Sunni-Shia'a rivalry. Primarily, the Sunni Camp is a countervailing force against the Shia'a camp or to be more precise, Iran. On the other hand, the Sunni camp per se is a complex orbit that involves other peripheral players that do not necessarily have a religious alignment. Nonetheless, the sectarian tension is increasing in the Middle East.

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The Arab Spring weakened the rhetoric of sectarian tension until it reached the borders of Syria. The main camps within the sectarian tension are the Sunnis and the Shia'a. The heart of the battle lays in Syria and Iraq. Although Sunnis in Syria constitute the majority, they are being governed by the Ba'athist regime of Bashar Al-Assad, which is- being Alawite dominated- a Shia'a leaning sect. On the other hand, in Iraq the Sunnis- who are abated politically- constitute a minority of 30%-40%, ruled by a Shia'a government lead by Nour Al-Maliki. Prior to the uprising, Syria and Iraq had been opponents over the domination of the region for decades. The already dire relation of the two was exacerbated when allegedly Syria sent fighters and arms to the Sunni Iraqi during the US invasion. During and after this period many Sunni Iraqis fled to Syria seeking refuge. Meanwhile, the Sunnis in Iraq have been squeezed out from the political scene and the security forces, especially since Maliki's appointment as Prime Minister. This trend also continued after the departure of the US army.¹

Once the circumstances changed in Syria and the revolt of the Syrian people started, the relationship of the two states changed into what seems at first sight as a sectarian alignment. The Iraqi Shia'a government is supporting the Alawite Syrian regime in the name of 'stability',² since the impact of a Syria without Assad and his policies would be catastrophic for the balance of power in Iraq and the broader region. Thus, not irrationally, Iraq augurs a peaceful transition, because an alternative scenario would leave a vacuum. In other words, Baghdad fears that a Sunni dominated Syria could probably affect and stimulate Iraq's internal sectarian issues. Moreover, the Syrian sectarian tensions would spillover to Iraq and, as a consequence, shake the balance of power supported by Iran, which is a common ally of Assad's and Maliki's regimes.





Nevertheless, at the level of the people, there seems to be a large dosage of ‘Sunni Solidarity.’ The Sunnis in Iraq want to compensate for the assistance offered from their Syrian Sunni brothers - during the bloody civil war of Iraq in 2004-2007- with the same means: arms and fighters. Even though there have been several reports³ denying such actions, there are many others, such as leaders from the Dulaim tribe, whose population spreads through Syria, Iraq and other countries, who claim otherwise.⁴

As far as the domestic affairs of Syria are concerned, even though the revolt per se was not initiated as a Sunni revolt against the Alawite regime, it seems to be unfolding as such. Syrian opposition is not defining itself as Sunnis that seek to govern, but as representatives of the Syrian people that seek a democratic government. The Arab Spring as a whole has a framework of national sentiment. Nevertheless, if the Arab Spring should be categorized within a sectarian framework, it might be placed under the Sunni Camp. While

the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia doesn’t claim rivalry against the Shia’a, despite being an Islamist political organization, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood faces a different outlook due to its distinct establishment.

The Syrian Brotherhood was born out of a confrontation with a non-Sunni regime. Despite the fact that they have been undermined in the Syrian political scene since the 1980s, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has managed to spread through various bodies of the Syrian opposition. Most of them were in exile and managed to become competent businessmen. While within the Syrian opposition domestically they hold 10%, abroad they reach up to 25% of the Syrian opposition.⁵ It should be noted that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is the core of the exiled Syrian National Council,⁶ which is recognized internationally by the Friends of Syria and favors outside intervention. On the other hand, the internal opposition (National Coordination Body for Democratic Change) is against it. In general, the Syrian opposition as a whole is not holding a unified front: even though both have the same goal – the fall of Assad- they differ on the manner of how Assad will be overthrown. This is the reason the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is not as solid as the Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood.

This emasculated stance of the opposition automatically creates a vacuum, allowing for an inflow of external influences that aim to implement their own interests within Syria, a country of high strategic importance to the region. The notion of a Sunni camp has wider implications, which go beyond Syria and Iraq. Particularly, the external influences stem from the periphery of Syria and are divided in two camps: the one camp consists of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and US; the other consists of Iran, Iraq, and even Russia and China. Unavoidably, this hauls more players in the game which, each for different reasons, have grave impact on the domestic realities of the Syrian political scene. This is translated into a Sunni-Shia’a rivalry



and brings Syria to the doorstep of a proxy war, which would unavoidably transform Syria into an arena of Saudi- Iranian struggle.⁷

A protagonist role goes to Saudi Arabia, which found an opportunity in Syria's unrest to weaken Iran, which is 'backing' Assad's regime. Within the framework of the Sunni-Shia'a rivalry, Saudi Arabia wants to deprive Iran from its Syrian ally. Assad's regime links Iran through Iraq, all the way to Lebanon. Thus, Saudi Arabia attempts to clinch Syria into a Sunni orbit. Since the Saudis would never proceed to a full scale military intervention, they have found other means to distort the situation. The Saudis tried to mobilize the international community and the Arab League into imposing economic sanctions⁸ to isolate Syria, and eventually, Syria was suspended from the Arab League. In addition, as Saudi Arabia has been funding the Syrian Freedom Army, many suggest that the Saudis are trying to convince forces of the Syrian government to defect and join the rebels.⁹

The Sunni camp engulfs also non-Arab states such as Turkey, which is a key player in the Syrian 'crisis.' Not only because any outcome within Syria would have a direct impact on Turkey- due to the large shared border and common Kurdish issue- but also because Syria is the doorway through which Turkey projects its influence on the Arab world. Initially during the 'crisis,' Ankara tried to stand on the side of Assad and assist him in controlling the unrest in Syria.¹⁰ Assad went too far and ended up being almost entirely isolated from the majority of the international community. This gave Ankara no choice. At this point, the math for Turkey is very simple: Assad's regime will eventually fall, and Turkey cannot afford being excluded from the new regime. More precisely, Turkey wants to emerge as a preeminent power in the Middle East. Already, Ankara is rather popular in the region, especially among the Sunnis. So, for now, Saudi Arabia and Turkey definitely share a common interest and are aligned regarding Syria. Nonetheless, it is possible that in the future this can evolve into an antagonism between Saudi Arabia and Turkey over who will win the heart of the Sunnis, since, in the long-run, both have different visions and interests. This is a scenario not excluded by many. Another possible scenario is a conflict between Iran and Turkey. Iran, just like Turkey, considers Syria as their portal to the region.

The situation in Syria is rather critical, since the upcoming developments will determine if the sectarian tension escalates or tumbles in the region as a whole. The Sunni-Shia'a rivalry was not what triggered the uprising in Syria, but the uprising seems to be unfurling into a fiery sectarian battle. The Syrian uprising is straying away from the framework of the Arab Spring and its call for democracy. The stakeholders are taking advantage of the Syrian uprising, and are 'playing the Sunni card' to promote their own interests in Syria. On the other hand, the so-called Sunni camp is expanding with the Syrian unrest and it has come to include many states that differ on many levels. This may cause fragmentation within the camp itself, at the expense of the Sunnis in Syria and Iraq and their bid for representation in the political scene.■



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The political economy of the Arab Spring... in a nutshell

Spyridoula-Ioanna Zochiou



The Arab Spring has been a strong call for radical reforms. Young people taking the lead of the revolts protested against corrupted regimes, holding them responsible for the political and economic plight in their countries. The reorientation of the economy through transparent means is an integral part of a stable transitional process. Yet, from a historical perspective, transition has not

always been an easy task. It presupposes good will and appropriate incentives in order that the countries concerned carry out successfully their challenging task.

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Arab Spring politics is closely bound up with economics. The political pillar is faced with numerous challenges but the same goes for the economic one. The success in political transition depends on the simultaneous entrenchment of economic stability. Arab uprisings had a clear economic stance: struggling against poverty, chronically high unemployment, corruption and cronyism. The 'most important agents of change' was unemployed youth of the middle class, striving against the power of coercion, for a lift towards freedom, development and prosperity.

Contrary to their potential, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries have not achieved the cementation of a vigorous political and economic system. Conflicts, authoritarianism and centrally planned economies contributed to the regression of the MENA region. Lacking in transparency and being notorious for unequal distribution of economic opportunities -

mostly to entrepreneurs strongly related to the state - the Arab economy has not been functioning properly. Additionally, the region as a whole has had few incentives to build robust political institutions and a strong private sector. The so-called 'curse of rents,' that is the easy money that flows in the economy from oil exports, tourism, foreign aid and remittances, has led to domestic economic inertia.¹

Competitiveness and productivity are the underpinnings of economic growth and employment creation. Most often these derive from the right allocation of investment resources, which, if sustainable, will secure employment and income for the generations to come. In the MENA region this trend was not a priority, as high added value sectors, such as agriculture and industry, were not at the epicentre of the state's economic strategy. Government and state enterprises have been the primordial actors for employment.



However, higher offer of employment, due to rapid demographic growth, could not be absorbed by a saturated public sector. In this critical moment, it is the private sector that could fill the vacuum and pave the way for economic uplift. But, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), doing business in the Arab region requires the elimination of the restrictive labour regulations, the simplification of obstructionist bureaucracy and the ensuring of the increase of access to finance.² As far as the latter is concerned, credit access and allocation of financial assets constitute a problem of cardinal importance. In fact, the, well equipped with liquidity, banks channel the credit to a few key strategic economic, mainly public, sectors crowding out the most efficient firms, depriving them of the opportunity to invest, expand and thus, create jobs.³

Furthermore, the MENA region is not a popular destination for Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) report in 2011, in North Africa FDI inflows in 2010 stood at \$16.9 billion, in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries at \$39.9 billion and in other West Asian countries at \$9.3 billion, when in East Asia, during the same period, the FDI inflows reached \$188.3 billion.⁴ There has been a lot of debate over the need for reforms that would attract foreign capital. Portfolio investment would cause further volatility comparing to FDI, which seem like a safer way to obtain variable resources.⁵ Notwithstanding the above, FDI entail political stability, political and social security, a sound entrepreneurial environment and the presence of the rule of law. As stated by UNCTAD, investments are expected to fall even more during the current period as political turmoil and unrest discourage the activity in question.

The linchpin of the upturn in economic development could be the promotion of regional integration. So far, both North-South and South-South integration

have not made substantial progress. Regarding the MENA region, it has registered low levels of deep economic cooperation. Apart from the GCC, which constitutes a monetary, energy and political force,⁶ the Levant and North Africa are characterized by unreadiness to promote a political and economic dialogue on a regional level. For instance, the Arab Maghreb Union, founded in 1989, has realized small steps towards integration, mainly because of the dispute between Morocco and Algeria over the status of Western Sahara. However, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, there have been efforts to revive the venture, an initiative that belongs to Tunisia envisioning the establishment of the 'Maghreb of Liberties,' whose citizens will be able to move and invest freely, while their governments will do their utmost to consolidate security and economic integration. In a region of 86 million people, with a total GDP of \$391 billion, a potential regional integration would bear multiple benefits for these countries, but in order to achieve that, the World Bank suggests they liberalize their commodities' trade, eliminating the tariffs and non-tariff trade barriers, create an investment-friendly environment, promote drastic reforms in the financial sector and that of transportation, communication, technology and information.⁷ A successful venture in the region would most probably give impulse for other states to jump on the bandwagon and form additional regional blocs or join the already existing ones.

As far as the North-South integration is concerned, it is broadly accepted that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, as envisioned in Barcelona in 1995, failed to meet its ambitious objectives. Convergence between the two rims of the Mediterranean basin has not been materialized, while discrepancies persist and the development gap widens. After seventeen years, the EuroMed has passed through multiple types of regionalism, giving the impression of a persistent need for revision of the project initially elaborated. The multilateralism pro-



moted by the Barcelona Process was complemented by the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004) regulating the contacts and cooperation on a bilateral basis, then turned to sub-regionalism following Nicolas Sarkozy's proposal for the Mediterranean Union and ended up in a form of enforced bilateralism with the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean, as it was designed according to the principle of 'variable geometry.' In fact, Europe has been accused of conducting an overlapping 'system of governance' interpreted as an enduring effort to 'export' its foreign policy to the Arab-Muslim world and adapt EuroMed's priorities to the EU's needs and demands.⁸

To prevent the demise of the aforementioned initiative it is high time the EU built trust to revamp the cooperation. Nevertheless, the MENA region's transformation evolves at a time when Europe goes through a major crisis, the evolution of which will lead either to deeper integration or dissolution. Alternatively, the outcome of the two simultaneous crises on the two shores of the Mediterranean will likely determine the form of cooperation or integration between these two regions.

What the MENA region needs now, during its transitional period, is both economic and technical assistance, as well as the know-how to build institutions and design a macro-economic governance in order to set the basis for the creation of a vibrant economy. Given the persistent 'western malaise' due to the Eurozone's debt crisis and the slow recovery of the US economy, Islamic finance receives special attention in the MENA region. So far, of the 300 Shari'a-compliant institutions that exist worldwide, mostly in south-east Asia and the Gulf, only 38 operate in Africa. However, due to the recent emergence of Islamist parties in North Africa, the finance landscape seems to change. In particular, North Africa organized its first conference on Islamic finance last July at the Maghreb Forum of Islamic Finance in Tunis. Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco are,

domestically, under legislative deliberations in order to prepare the ground for the establishment of Islamic banking.⁹ Interestingly, Islamic banks have not been seriously affected by the global financial crisis in 2008 thanks to a more conservative approach than their conventional counterparts: Islamic banks' financing activities are linked more to the real sectors of the economy, having avoided exposure to toxic financial derivative products and, contrary to their west-originated counterparts, they have kept a large proportion of liquidity.¹⁰

In the same vein, financing originating from the West was not, at least from the beginning, a priority for the governments in transition. For instance, Egypt had initially expressed its unreadiness to accept funds from international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. While Arab lenders were most welcome, the conditionality terms that the IMF imposes were thought to have a major cost, both social and political, as IMF officials remain committed to demanding measures and reforms as a prerequisite for lending money, however tarnished the Fund's reputation may have proved to be. Nevertheless, amid Egypt's fears of deterioration of the current balance of payment and a possible currency crisis, the political authorities revised their intentions and consented on an IMF loan of \$3.2 billion, whose first installment was expected to be paid before the country's first free presidential elections due on the 23rd and 24th of May. In fact, Arab nations pledged to funnel a total of \$7 billions to Egypt, but so far, only Saudi Arabia and Qatar have offered \$1 billion.

In the MENA region there is a wide disparity between oil-exporting and oil-importing countries. According to the IMF, while oil-exporters are expected to grow by 4.8% taking advantage of the elevated oil prices (expected to average \$115 per barrel), oil-importers (excluding Syria) are estimated to expand by 2.2%.¹¹ What is worsening the current image is the



fact that restrictive economic strategies to put an end to the strife and deal with current account deficits, unsustainable public finances, high inflation and investors' 'wait and see' tactic, come in confrontation with the expansive economic policies needed to tackle unemployment and economic standstill.

Lack of security, absence of job opportunities and adverse living conditions are the main 'push factors' for emigrating. As migration flows towards Europe and the GCC countries have risen significantly during the Arab Spring, however, both regional blocs have conducted ambivalent policies. As goes for Europe, the Schengen treaty is currently under threat of revision, due to the grant of 'humanitarian' permits to thousands of Tunisian immigrants by Italy, permits that allowed them to travel around Europe. As far as it concerns the Arabic Peninsula, Egypt, Yemen and Syria are the main Arab 'source countries' of the GCC. United Arab Emirates' 'closed-door policy' on Egyptian immigrants, forbidding new migration flows from January to July 2011 was com-

plemented by Saudi Arabia's changes in the labour laws, the so-called nascent 'Notaqat' system, which affected negatively the foreign employees, as it imposed constraints on companies regarding the renewal of working contracts.¹² Recently, the GCC made an overture to extend membership to the kingdoms of Jordan and Morocco, which may breed further migration flows from these countries, given the access they will be granted into the common labour market.

All in all, a new regional order is currently under development. Political and economic actors interact in order to shape the new landscape in the MENA region. Yet, external contribution is of paramount importance in order to assuage the burden of transition. North Africa, the Levant and the Gulf countries have to rethink their dynamic and strong potential, since strengthening their ties would give them, in the long-run, a strong impetus to rise as a strong player in the global affairs.■



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The Egyptian Constitution and Islam

Sofia Cheimara

In this short article the goal is not to locate the roots of Islamic movements nor the way they came into power in most of the newly 'uprisen' Arab states.¹ Political Islam² is an undeniable reality. The question that will be dealt with is how Islam can be incorporated in a constitution. Rewriting the latter may change the balances in a state and cause turmoil as easy as it can calm it. In the case of Tunisia, the constitution managed to maintain peace. But what will happen in Egypt is yet to be seen.

In order for the rest to be understood, the constitution as a core concept needs to be defined.³ It is a set of fundamental rules and principles of law according to which the state itself is governed. It consists of simple rules, among which the most important ones are those dealing with the form of the government and the different powers within the state (legislative, executive, and judiciary). It also sets the limits of power within the state. It serves both in defining each branch of government and setting its limits. These rules are the skeleton on which the whole state is built upon. In the case of a Muslim state the articles dealing with the religion and its relationship with the state are the most important ones. A fundamental provision of all the constitutions is that they cannot be amended, but only in accordance with a special procedure, or after a coup d'état. Hence, a constitution can easily become a tool in the hands of the ones entrusted with its amendment



towards pacifying the contradicting tendencies. That was the case in Tunisia. It remains to be seen how the amendment will work in the environment of Turkey and Egypt, both of which face problems regarding the relationship between state and religion. Turkey has to prove its so-called secularism, while Egypt has to choose what form the relationship between the two will take.



Tunisia⁴ is a country that could easily be set as an example of how a constitution could engage Islam without losing its political predominance. Rashid al-Ghannouchi, the leader of the Islamic Party, instead of promoting a one-sided constitutional change after having won the elections, did indeed engage in dialogue with the other leaders. The new constitution, which is going to be finalised by the end of the year, is not altering the first part of the previous one. When it comes to Islam it proclaims that “Tunisia is a free and independent state and Islam is its religion and Arabic is its language and its form of government is a republic.” The state is thus defined as secular, and it only remains to be seen how this proclamation will actually work, after the first elections to take place under the new constitution take effect probably around March 2013.

After helping in the revolution, the Tunisian army also helped in resolving the problem between Islam and secularism. Already back in early 2011, shortly after Ben Ali stepped down, Rashid Amar, the Chief of Staff of the Tunisian Army declared publicly, addressing protesters, that the Tunisian army would be the guarantor of the revolution, which is exactly what happened as far as the constitution is concerned. The Army secured that post-revolution Tunisia could be a forum convenient not only for the production of a constitution, but for the production of a secular one, not mentioning Shari'a as a source of law. In this way the Tunisian Army managed to alter the status quo in Tunisia; the army had been excluded from national politics and, subsequently, marginalised. For the time being, it seems that it has returned to the barracks and it remains to be seen how this philo-democratic attitude towards securing the stability will be enshrined in the final drafting of the new constitution.

In Egypt⁵ the debate about the constitution has almost caused a crisis on several occasions. The reasoning is simple. It has been annotated by Bruce Rutherford⁶ that there are three schools of constitutional law, each one of which deals differently with the issue of religious affiliation. The first one is ‘the liberal school of thought’ which allows room for religion, while asking the army to act as a safeguard of freedoms. Second is Islamic constitutionalism, which argues for an assembly of religious scholars to be the ones deciding and drafting the constitutions. Last but not least there is the Salafi, hard-core Islamic, constitutionalism. In the recent annual conference hosted by the Institute for Middle East Studies on April 17th, Abu Ramman concluded that “while the Salafists have decided to accept the tools of democracy, they reject the principles of it.”⁷

Article 2 of the existing Egyptian constitution deals with the relationship between the state and religion. As expected, it has been brought into the limelight and different opinions arise at how it should be rewritten. As for now, it rules that: “Islam is the Religion of the state. Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence [Shari'a].” But it has not always been so absolute. When the constitution was firstly introduced, in 1923, it did not deal with the sources of legislation. Later on, in 1971, it was amended so as to include Shari'a as a source of jurisprudence, while the contemporary article is Mubarak's creation and dates back to 1981.

Some thoughts regarding article 2 must be given. The difficulties of using Shari'a as a source of legislation have been apparent in several occasions. Shari'a⁸ is the divine law given by Allah to the people.



It is a set of rules governing everyday life, more or less like a divine moral code. It deals with crime and punishment along with other more personal matters such as hygiene. For a law to be qualified as such it should always be clear and easily applicable to everyone irrespective of their religion, age or sex; Shari'a does not possess these characteristics. Moreover, Shari'a, as a source of legislation, brings up problems regarding the possible defense of the accused. While it is possible for one to claim innocent not having committed the crime, it is not possible for one to oppose it, given that it is the will of Allah. Thus, if one answers to a claim put up against him, for example, then one is faced with the inability to oppose the will of Allah, arguing *intra alia* that the specific law cannot be applied in his case, because he had the right to do that pursuant to a Human Rights Convention, for example. If he does say that, he is not a 'good Muslim' and the Court should judge him for disobedience as well.

Up until now the judiciary consists of two chambers, Egypt's People's Assembly' the lower part of Parliament, and the Shura Council (that can be translated into 'consultative council'), the upper part of it, with far less legislative power. In the elections for Egypt's People's Assembly, a trend towards Islamist parties has been shown. More than 75% of the total seats are now held by Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood's FJP and the Salafis. The same happened in the elections for the Shura Council. As shown in their manifesto, the Brotherhood has the goal of bringing Islam to the limelight and giving it power and prestige. This trend will, beyond any doubt, be shown in the drafting of the constitution. However, the pluralism along the circles of constitutional law might result in a less conservative constitution, which proclaims Islam as the religion but does not refer to Shari'a as a source, at least not the principle source of Law.

A last point regarding the constitutional reformation in Egypt is the role of the army. On many occasions after the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood has seemed to make a kind of 'alliance' with the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, asking for the latter to limit any further demonstrations that could destabilise the situation internally. After the resignation, the power was handed to the army and has not been returned ever since. In 21 February 2012, a court decision declared the elections invalid. If the Muslim Brotherhood goes against the will of the army, trying to limit their power while drafting the constitution, it remains to be seen how this card will be played against Islamists.

There are many parameters to be considered before a conclusion can be drawn. The view of how a constitution should be varies greatly from the one group to the other, and most importantly from one Islamic movement to another. In Tunisia, the decision to disentangle the constitution from Islam and not engage in discussions about which rules of Islam should be incorporated into the fundamental rules of the state managed to unify Tunisians. Islam is announced to be the religion of the state, but Islamic Law is deliberately avoided as a source of legislation. That way distance is kept between political Islam and Shari'a. The constitution resembles that of France, balancing the powers in national politics, and Tunisia can easily be set as an example of how dialogue can help constitutional reformation. In that way the constitution manages to become a 'social contract' both internally and externally. Egypt has yet to show how it will transform the uprising into a social contract. ■



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The Maghreb, the Arab Spring and a *dilemma*

Elisavet Paraskeva-Gkizi

Could Algeria and Morocco be next? One year after the start of what has become popularly known as the Arab spring a clear answer is difficult to come by. Both countries experienced shifts in their political realities brought on by popular demonstrations. However, does either experience share quite the same magnitude of those of their regional neighbours?



With unemployment levels rising to 30% for under 25 year old and 14% for the population overall, the unavoidable necessity for stronger economic and strategic relations rippled across the Maghreb region. On the 18th of February 2012, in an effort to revive the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) which was first lunched unsuccessfully in 1989, representatives from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Libya met in Rabat, to discuss the easing of cross border trade and lower inter-regional shipping costs.¹

With recent change in Tunisia and Libya's political landscape, and within the uncertain financial environment in Europe and the Maghreb, the economic integration of the Maghreb countries through the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), emerged in the context of a new era in the region, as highlighted by the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI and the president of Algeria

Abdelaziz Bouteflika.² The strong political will for a free trade zone in the Maghreb forced the Algerian and Moroccan authorities (the main members of the AMU) to reconsider their regional strategy and their long standing dispute over the sovereignty of Western Sahara.³

Recently, on March 14th 2012, after repeated calls from Morocco, the Algerian Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, agreed to reopen the country's borders with Morocco, which have been closed since 1994. Many politicians such as Bouguerra Soltani, leader of the Algerian moderate Islamist party 'Movement of Society for Peace,' consider the opening of the borders to be a matter of great political importance. The opening of the borders could assist Maghreb countries in strengthening regional border management, which would assist in limiting access of



terror groups, such as the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and help combat drugs and arms trafficking that has flourished in the Saharawi refugee camps, as well as stemming illegal immigration.⁴

The Algerian decision to boost bilateral relations with Morocco was taken within the context of building a regional environment with less tension. It is important for Algeria not to be left behind, but to cooperate with the new governments of Tunisia, Libya and Morocco and so assume a pivotal role in the economy of the region as a whole.

Algeria's 'secular' political system, with relative press freedom, has been inaccessible to the general upheaval of the Arab spring. Algerians, due to their recent history of upheaval and political violence are concerned about the reaction of 'le Pouvoir' (the Algerian military-backed regime with unlimited authority), in the event of a potential sociopolitical crisis. Back in the 1990's the country's democratisation process failed under the reaction of the conservative elite to the 'Islamic threat,' leading to a decennial civil war, which caused the death of over 200.000 people. The terror of such recent violence remains fresh in people's memory, and this acts as a significantly suppressive factor for rebellious movements.⁵

After the overthrow of the Egyptian and Tunisian regimes, thousands of Algerians marched through Algiers in January and February 2011, driven by the dissatisfaction of the country's socio-economic policies and poor living standards. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's government tried to appease Algerians in order to stem the potential escalation to a revolution. Bouteflika used revenues from the energy sector to raise civil servant salaries and reduce the cost of basic food products (Algeria has the largest oil and gas company in Africa, the 'Sonatrach.'). Furthermore, he lifted a 20-year old state of emergency law and promised political reforms, the elimination of the state's corruption as well as revision of the electoral

law for better political representation.⁶

Although the protests diminished with the announcement of the measures, it is doubtful they would have reached the intensity of protests seen in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. The lack of organisational structure among the protesters is indicative of a general absence of organised activism and collective action among Algerian society. This is evident when considering oppositional parties, many of which have been compromised by the government. The aging political representatives fall far short of being able to deliver the voice of a young Algerian population and are thus unsurprisingly not in a position to voice strong opposition to the regime.⁷

In recent years 'le Pouvoir' has become an important regional pillar for western powers, who consider it a notable ally in limiting the operations of Al Qaeda's wing in the region. In addition, Algeria's stability is economically important for the West due to its position as an important supplier of the natural gas (Algeria is Europe's third largest supplier). Despite promises of inclusive and fair elections that would see greater participation of Islamist parties, European election observers and an electoral commission, which were scheduled for May 10th, hope for a substantial political power shift lacks in Algeria. Many analysts predict that the Algerian political scene will possibly change but the regime is likely to continue its grip on power, mimicking recent developments in Morocco.

During the Arab Spring, Morocco gained a new constitution and a new Islamist government. The King of Morocco Mohammed VI responded immediately to the demands of the youth-based 'February 20th' movement (after the mass demonstrations, which started on 20th February 2011 in more than 50 cities in Morocco) for significant changes to the country's political and judicial system. On March 9th 2011, King Mohammed VI promised a chain of constitutional



reforms and on June 18th he signed the new constitution.

The new constitution included the King's amendments for the selection of the Prime Minister by the people rather than the King. King Mohammed VI gave assurances for freedom of speech and promised to strengthen the power of the Prime Minister and the parliament. However, the King was to remain ruler of security, military and religious fields, with an unquestionable immunity under Moroccan law. Through the referendum of July 1st, after a huge state propaganda campaign, the new constitution was approved by the majority of Moroccan voters (98.49%), and the King's position was enforced.⁸

Nevertheless, thousands of protesters denounced the reformed constitution, as an effort to curtail rather than promote change in the country's political system. Protesters demanded a real political and economic change, the end of corruption which is rife among the Makhzen elite, a group largely represented in the palace court and both politically and economically favoured. Although the protesters demanded fundamental reforms they never called for the overthrow of the King, as was the case among other popular uprisings across the region. In Morocco the role of the king is widely believed to guarantee the country's political stability and cohesion. Moroccans have accepted the monarchy, which has been reigning in Morocco for 1200 years, as consubstantial with their identity, which may be considered an explanatory factor, in regards to why a revolution did not occur. Monarchists represent a large percentage in Moroccan society, even among the 'February 20th' youth movement who demand a "king who reigns, but does not rule."⁹

Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane of the newly elected Islamist-led government was expected to rule the country and implement significant reforms to

combat poverty and corruption. Since his election to the new post PM Benkirane has softened his once strong criticism of the Monarch, believed to be by some as a result of his very limited executive power. He is dependent on the king's will to ratify laws passed by parliament and has therefore adopted a more gradualist approach, avoiding confrontation with the regime. In addition, the government's pre-election promises are notably impeded by the hard economic reality they face, (reduction of exports to Europe because of the crisis, rising prices because of a drought, reduction of tourism income, decline of remittances of three million Moroccans working abroad and slow growth 3.0%, compared to 4.8% for 2011.¹⁰ In this context, King Mohammed welcomed the invitation to apply for membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC aims to expand its partnerships, in order to defend the monarchical regimes against internal (uprisings) or external threats (e.g. Iran). Morocco's membership in GCC is expected to be followed by diplomatic, political and economic aid, and by an assurance for King Mohammed's throne (the GCC intervened in Bahrain by giving money to appease protesters).¹¹

One year after the Arab Spring, high unemployment rate and the growing inequality between rich and poor in combination with the limited press freedoms and human rights violations helped to grow indignation among Moroccans. Until now, the almost total devotion to the King, the divisions among the 'February 20th' youth movement, the new constitution, and the fear of Libya's and Syria's aggression, have halted Moroccans from proceeding to a revolution. Today, Moroccans' patience is being tested with a growing number of strikes and demonstration in the streets, an indication that the need for real change threatens Morocco's stability.¹² Testament to these growing frustrations could not have been made clear-



er than the events of January 18th of this year showed, when five Moroccans set themselves alight in Rabat, as an act of desperation to highlight the growing problem of unemployment and its accompanying chronic and crippling poverty.

The Arab Spring posed a dilemma to many

Algerians and Moroccans as to whether they should continue to be attached to the past or move away and try to find new social and political frames. Nonetheless, until now, authoritarianism dominates both countries' politics and a clear break from the past has not yet been achieved.■

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Western Reactions to the *Arab Spring*:

The *Cases* of Egypt, Libya and Syria

Εἰσαγωγή ἰστορίας σπουδῶν

Evangelos Diamantopoulos

The spreading fires of revolution across the Middle East took the so-called West by surprise. Both the USA and Europe responded late and rather cautiously to the local people's demand for change. The Arab Spring revealed the double standards which were used by Western powers according to their interests and forecasts. Indeed, the cases of Egypt, Libya and Syria provide clear examples of the hesitant and ambiguous reactions of the Western Hemisphere to these pressing issues. Hence, from the early support towards Mubarak, to the military intervention in Libya and the current uncertainty concerning Syria, the West has appeared inconsistent towards the recent revolutions.

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It was not that difficult for most Western leaders, except from the French government, to turn their backs on their weakened old friend, Ben Ali and support the Tunisian revolution while giving weighty speeches about freedom, democracy and human rights. However, their attitude was different when the situation got out of hand in Egypt. As its geostrategic importance has always been significant and Mubarak was thought to be able to maintain stability and serve their interests for a long time, much more were at stake. It was only when it was made clear that Mubarak's days were counted that the great powers of the West,



one by one, increasingly supported the Egyptian revolution. Their decision was much quicker concerning their old enemy, and lately bitter friend, Colonel Qaddafi. An American, European and Middle Eastern joint military force intervened in Libya and assisted the local revolutionaries to overthrow, and murder, the “mad dog of the Middle East,” as Ronald Reagan used to call him. Following these developments, the Syrian regime now faces one of the latest revolts in the region. This case is, however, much more complicated and leaves little space for impressive Western actions. Having witnessed the electoral victories of Islamists in ‘democratized’ Tunisia and Egypt as well as their post-war empowerment in Libya, and taking Syria’s fragile geostrategic position into account, the American and French leaders might have had enough for an electoral year, while Germany and the European South seem busy struggling to manage the economic crisis.

Concerning Egypt, it took some time for the US to decide their stance towards the last Pharaoh when the “Spring” knocked the door of the “heart of the Arab world.” The United States considered Mubarak as a good ally and a stability guaranty for the region and found it hard to call for his resignation. In the beginning of the Egyptian revolution the US administration had adopted a ‘wait and see’ stance while characterizing the regime as “stable.” US Vice President Biden refused to call Mubarak a “dictator” but as the revolution was spreading throughout the country and the increasing number of massive protests was met by bloody crackdowns by the security forces, the US advised its close ally to respond to its people’s demands and take some reforms instead of using violence.¹ Even when Mubarak stepped down, the Obama administration backed Omar Suleiman and the Egyptian regime’s transition plan. The military became a “responsible and patriotic” power that the USA could count on. That the Egyptian army relied heavily on the annual US support, offering the US government a minimum assurance of cooperation, certainly influenced the US decision.

On its part, the EU had requested the Egyptian authorities to let their people manifest their aspirations, start an honest dialogue and take the necessary reforms. They failed, however, to directly ask for Mubarak’s resignation as well. Just a couple of days after Mubarak’s promise not to run for re-election a joint statement signed by the leaders of Europe’s most influential countries, namely Germany, France, UK, Italy and Spain, called for an orderly transition process to a broad based government and castigated ‘all those’ who used violence.² Individual reactions of European governments varied from Denmark’s call for Mubarak’s resignation to Italy’s wish for stability and continuation of government. The German and British Foreign Ministries requested the involved parties to show restraint and respect for human as well as civil rights. Meanwhile, the French government had to face a new scandal just a few months after its Foreign Minister, Michèle Alliot-Marie, had admitted that she went for vacations in Tunisia while in revolution. François Fillon, the country’s PM, revealed that he was Mubarak’s guest and took his Christmas holiday in Egypt just days before the local uprising began. However, after Mubarak’s fall all Western governments seemed content and relieved because Egypt would become democratic. In fact, when PM Berlusconi said that the US and Europe considered Mubarak the wisest man and a reference point in the Middle East,³ he probably talked the plain truth.



Western powers were much quicker in condemning and taking action against Qaddafi's regime when the Libyan protesters faced its security forces' brutality. France led the way in this case throughout the Libyan civil war in a probable attempt to improve its international profile as well as President Sarkozy's declining poll numbers. It was the first country to recognize the National Transitional Council, formed by the Libyan revolutionaries, despite its European counterparts' early hesitancy on that matter.⁴ Moreover, President Sarkozy led the calls for an imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya in an effort to prevent the Colonel from bombarding his own people. Despite early doubts on whether Russia and China would allow such an agreement to be reached at the Security Council, the UN finally approved the operation on March 17th 2011. A short time later, the French fighter jets were the first to hit Qaddafi's forces, which had previously attacked the rebels of Benghazi. Thus, the French government sought to form tight relations with the new ruling elite of Libya since pressing matters such as energy and illegal migration affect those nations' bilateral affairs.

The Obama administration decided to pull back a little bit in the Libyan case and put on the front-line of any action against Qaddafi its European allies, although many European countries did not show the same rapid enthusiasm as France in toppling the Colonel. Unlike the Egyptian case, American officials warned the Libyan regime to cease its violent operations against civilians from the beginning of the local turmoil. Within a few days, the American President himself, after a conversation with the German Chancellor over the phone, requested Qaddafi to step down. The US and most of the European countries froze all assets linked to Qaddafi, refused to issue visas for his close circle and cancelled any military trade agreements, aiming to put pressure on the crumbling regime. The early general calls for restraint and calm by the EU could be explained by its member-states' fear for the safety of their nationals residing in Libya, until at least they had the chance to evacuate them. Furthermore, Libya has been one of the main North African oil suppliers of Europe and a disruption of that trade could cause various problems to Europe. Even though it was not admitted clearly, except from the British and the Italians, Europeans were also terrified by the collapse of Qaddafi's anti-irregular emigration policy towards Europe.⁵ Italy kept a skeptic stance towards the growing anti-Qaddafi sentiments out of the fear of increasing waves of immigrants at its shores, while the Czech Republic promoted European neutrality.⁶ Finally, events exceeded any hesitations and by the end of the summer most of the 'Western World' recognized the Transitional Council as Libya's sole legitimate representative.

In the beginning of the Syrian revolt, the US and the EU condemned the use of violence against peaceful protestors and demanded their voices to be heard by the Syrian government. The French and the British Foreign Ministries as well as the American President used strong language against the security forces' brutality and signaled the arrival of the 'Arab Awakening' in Syria. However, Hilary Clinton tried to separate the Syrian and the Libyan cases and avoided to call for Bassar al-Assad's resignation since, as she revealed, many Congressmen thought that he actually was a reformer.⁷ It was not before the middle of August, five months after the beginning of the turmoil, that Western leaders, one after another, requested from the Syrian President to step down; first was President Obama, followed by a joint state-



ment of the Canadian PM Harper, the High Representative of the EU, and then PM, Cameron, President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel.⁸ Even though the West appears united and more determined in ousting al-Assad than in Mubarak's case, they have already spent their diplomatic cards on bringing down Qaddafi and they also face the Chinese – Russian front against a more direct intervention in Syria.

The joint Arab – Western military intervention in Libya had an important impact on the Syrian crisis as the Chinese and the Russians tried to block the increasing western sanctions against Assad's regime in order to avoid a repetition of the Libyan scenario. The most impressive diplomatic move was their veto of the UN Security Council resolutions, aiming to support the Arab League's anti – Assad decisions. While Turkey and Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have become increasingly hostile towards the Syrian government, NATO appears less willing in taking direct military action against the regime after its campaign in Libya. A Western military operation might not only be costly in financial terms but in human lives as well, and could also influence the 2012 American elections. Hence, indirect financing and arming of the opposition by regional powers supplement the economic and diplomatic sanctions, which seem inadequate to depose Assad on their own. However, both Western and Israeli policy makers are still divided on whether a regime change in Syria is a desirable event for their interests or not. On the one hand Assad belongs to the anti-Western, anti-Israeli, Iranian axis, but on the other hand, a regime change might lead to further chaos, such as the one in post-war Iraq or Libya, since Islamists in Syria are very active. Actually, it was this important factor which has led the US to ignore the Syrian rebels' requests for advanced armory⁹ up to this day.

The West had not predicted the Arab uprisings, which shook the MENA region and has kept a case by case stance towards them.¹⁰ In the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, Ben Ali and Mubarak were loyal allies, whose loss worried Washington and the European capitals. Therefore, the western stance was highly controversial. However, in the Libyan case, Qaddafi had been annoying the West for many years and the Arab Spring was a great opportunity of getting rid of him. The dust of the conflict in Syria has to settle more in order for the Western Powers to take any probable impressive action. Hence, it should be noted that while the Western Powers claim to support political reform in the MENA region, they have actually followed their national interests for pragmatic reasons.¹¹ The promotion of national interest by the government of a country is more than understandable. The wrapping of foreign policy decisions, however, with moral values, which do not seem to apply to every single case, could attract just criticism and might be evaluated as opportunism or even hypocrisy.¹² ■



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Arab Spring and Women:

Will History Repeat Itself?

Athena Jebrin



As history indicates, women traditionally have had a pivotal role in revolutions. From the French to the Islamic Revolution of Iran, women have also been the victims of the revolution's aftermath and the changes that they bring about. With the Arab Revolution history seems to be repeating itself towards women.



Arab Uprisings, Arab Revolution, or Arab Spring; these are the three most prominent terms to describe the events that took over the Arab world in the past year, with the last one being the most controversial. Say, however, that we use this last term, Arab Spring. One could argue that there is something paradoxical about it: although the 'Spring' might not have come without the contribution of women, it has not so far shown its intention to pay them back for this help. But let's take the story from the beginning.

From the first days of the uprisings, in Tunisia initially, when Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire, the women's reactions to the protests was immediate. This was not something unexpected, as Tunisia has a long record of relatively active female participation in the public sphere and recognizes women's rights. It dates back to the 1956 Code of Personal Status which recognized the equality of the two genders, but also to the first years of Ben Ali's administration, when according to the journalist Nabila Radmani, "promoting women's rights was a cynical way for Ben Ali to make himself more palatable to the West."¹

When the protests started in Tunisia in January 2011, women were there along with the men, demanding jobs and democracy. They were there as protesters, as journalists, nurses or any other capacity that was necessary. Of course their presence on the streets was not always welcome. Lina Ben Mhenni, the famous Tunisian blogger, takes us with her descriptions to the moments when individuals disrupted the protests and attacked those women, verbally or even physically: "Go back to your kitchens, you whores. What more do you want, you bitches? Do you want to become men?"¹²

But sure enough the violence towards female demonstrators was not limited to this, as it was also practiced by the police, members of which "were grabbing protesting women between their legs or by their breasts in order to force them to turn back."¹³

And just as the Arab Spring had a domino effect in the region of the Middle East and North Africa, the same happened with the participation of women in it. Soon, as the revolution spread in other countries, women in Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen participated in the struggle. Their role was vital, with some of them actively taking part in the protests, others cooking for the men on the frontline, hiding fighters, informing the journalists or even smuggling weapons.

Besides, it is worth mentioning that in the case of Egypt it was a young woman, Asma Mahfouz, who mobilized the Egyptian people to demonstrate, through the motivational videos that she was uploading on YouTube. The massive feminist participation in the Egyptian uprising can be characterised as a breakthrough, due to the patriarchal structure of the Egyptian society. Especially, given the fact that during the last years feminism seems to subside and reframe within an Islamic context. Again, there are more than a few cases of men who opposed the female action, by attacking them both verbally and physically. Still, it was the reaction of the Egyptian army that shocked the international community when the images of



the ‘blue bra girl,’ along with the confessions of women who got arrested, beaten up, given electric shocks and were even sexually harassed for their participation were shown around the world. The army went further by submitting detainees to virginity tests, a practice that is considered extremely humiliating and has already been condemned by Amnesty International.⁴

The case of Libya was similar, with many women participating in their own way to the uprising, and the forces of Qaddafi brutally responding to them. Much has been written about the violence exercised by the army on women protesters, with the accusations about rape being the most heinous. They had as a result many women fleeing the country, as rape in Libya is traditionally a taboo, considered the most humiliating practice for both the victim and her family.

When it comes to Syria, one could assume that the role of women in the uprisings was less dynamic compared to other countries, judging by the rarity of articles focusing on it. However, again the levels of women’s action, with female-led protests, flash mobs and important contribution in organizational tasks were higher than expected, like in Yemen and Bahrain.

The Faces of the Revolution

The contribution of certain women in unfolding and sustaining the Arab Spring is indisputable; women who have become role models for many young girls in the Middle East, proving wrong the stereotypes of the indoors, voiceless Arab females.

Asma Mahfouz: For some internet users in Egypt, Asma was known even before the Revolution. For the rest of the world Asma Mahfouz is the girl who sparked the Egyptian Revolution. As mentioned above, her web-action is considered pivotal to the beginning of the uprisings, making her one of the leaders of the Revolution. At the age of 27, Asma Mahfouz has been awarded the ‘Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought’ for

her contribution to historic changes in the Arab World.⁵

Lina Ben Mhenni: She became well known by her blog *A Tunisian Girl*, which was operating before the Revolution, and had been censored under the Ben Ali regime, since it was attacking the corruption of the country. The posts on her blog and on social networks about the atrocities during the Revolution were one of the main local sources of information for the international community. Lina, who apart from blogger and activist is also a university professor, was a Nobel Prize nominee.

Tawakkul Karman: The ‘Iron Woman’ or ‘The Mother of the Revolution,’ Tawakkul Karman was undoubtedly the face of the



Yemeni Revolution. At the age of 33 she became the first Arab woman to win a Nobel Prize.⁶ Tawakkul, who is a journalist, human right activist and politician, emerged as a symbol after her imprisonments by the regime, due to her active role in organizing the demonstrations.

Fadwa Suleiman: The 39-year-old actress became an icon of the Syrian revolution, when she engaged actively in the resistance movement. Her speeches on the internet

and Al Jazeera, where she expressed her disappointment about the regime and the route of the uprisings are memorable.

The 'Blue Bra Girl': Nobody knows her name, but everyone remembers the young veiled girl who while being beaten by the police in Tahrir square, her clothes ripped, revealing her blue underwear. The 'blue bra girl' as she has been dubbed, became the symbol of the oppressive regime.

With the wave of the uprisings in the Middle East having abated for the most part, we had the rise of a new trend, namely, political Islam. For few this was a positive development, while for the others a menace, threatening any secular progress that had taken place in the region. This development combined with the more powerful role that women had during the uprisings, inflamed debates about the rights and the position of women in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

Tunisia was the first country to overthrow the old regime, which resulted in the rise of the Islamist party Al-Nahda to power. It was the first sign of the new trend, but it did not seem threatening, as before the elections the party leader was assuring that he did not intend to change anything in regard to women's rights. April 2011 brought a very promising development, the adoption of a law which made mandatory the equal representation of the two sexes in the electoral lists, being a world first.⁷ In October of the same year the elections were held and gave similar rate of seats to women as in earlier elections. So far the freedoms of women have not been touched in the country, but references to the Shari'a law by Al-Nahda, make advocates of women's rights feel insecure.

More discouraging seems to be the case of Egypt, with the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brothers questioning some laws of the former regime concerning women. The future status of women in the country was challenged in February 2012, when the Party opposed the proposition of SCAF, which aimed at restructuring the National Council for Women in order to enhance its effectiveness.⁸ Many attach the recognition of women's rights with the Mubarak era, as they were relatively promoted by his spouse, and therefore reforms on this field can be seen as detachment from the past. Similarly, the quota that ensured 64 seats in the parliament for women have been withdrawn, resulting in only 8 seats (less



than 2%) acquired by women.⁹

In Libya efforts are made by NGOs to enforce the participation of women in the transition. However, the new law passed by the National Transitional Council does not include quota for the presence of women in the electoral lists, while only two of the 24 ministers of the current government are women.¹⁰

Though the crisis in Syria is ongoing, some already believe that the aftermath of the revolution with the Ba'ath toppled would bring negative consequences to women. This is not the case, according to Rime Allaf, a Syrian researcher who believes that even under Assad, the regime did not secure women's rights, pointing out that: "there wasn't a liberal set of laws that a new government would undo."¹¹

History seems to repeat itself when examining the aftermath of the revolutions and the way women are affected. At least the cases of the French Revolution, the Algerian War of Independence and the Islamic Revolution of Iran verify this hypothesis. Although one could expect that the women of 1789 who fought for equality and for their right to education would be more liberated after the end of the Revolution, the opposite happened. The aftermath of the French Revolution found women confined, in a rather patriarchal structure.¹² Similarly, the Algerian mujahidat (women combatants) who fought from 1954-1962 to win their independence from France, were found after the Revolution excluded from the public life, with most men believing that "women would find satisfaction in Arabo-Islamic values." In the case of the Iranian Revolution, the Islamic regime restricted many of the rights of the women, who had actively participated in the revolution which toppled the Shah.

Bringing changes is easy, but establishing changes or integrating new values in a society takes a lot of time. Such seems to be the case in the post-revolutionary scenery of the Arab states, because laws can be easily amended, but deep-rooted social structures and mentalities can't. ■



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