

THE ARAB UPRISINGS AND DEMOCRACY

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Introduction

The popular uprisings starting from Tunisia in December 2010 and growing like a snowball and spreading quickly to other Arab countries have produced the most dramatic changes in the region since the end of the colonial era in the middle of the 20th century. These revolts against the oppressive regimes in the Middle East have also brought the hope of social and political changes to region in the way of democracy and human rights. These unpredictable and spontaneous upheavals in the Arab World have begun with people taking to the streets to express their anger and disappointment with the status quo. Young men and women protested against injustice, abuses of power based on the oligarchy, lack of democracy and rule of law, human rights, corruption, unemployment, the pillaging of public wealth and the outlawing of civil society institutions. Protestors were fighting for more freedom, democracy, justice and jobs to live with dignity in their own countries. Some called this movement as the “Arab Spring” and some others the “Arab Awakening”, “Arab Uprising”, “Arab Upheavals” or “Arab Revolts”. Some others went even further by calling this process as “a Revolution” comparing this process with 1848 events in Europe and 1968 Prague Spring and 1989 movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Some describes this process as a revolt against the authoritarian regimes to claim more democracy and freedom. Some others consider these movements as a great power’s project or been used part of it to reshape the region².

Why did these events occur so suddenly and unexpectedly? As Pierre Vimont notes that it should be remembered that the great upheavals of history often occur without any warning, even if the most attentive observers have sometimes discerned the first signs of the underlying tectonic movements at the origin of these changes. Nevertheless, a general attitude prevailed for far too long in intellectual milieus that Arab countries were fundamentally resistant to the idea of democracy and were content with a political culture where liberty, tolerance and dialogue were lacking.³ It is necessary to ask what happened and what it means. Why the riots have spread so quickly but democracy not? What went wrong? What is the role of Islam in all these? Can we still hope democracy and freedom? Are they sufficient supports in this process for all the elements needed to build a democratic system in Middle Eastern Arab states? How might democracy arrive, embed, and survive in region? This paper aims to answer all these questions and to analyse the key opportunities and challenges for democracy and rule of law after the Arab Spring in the Muslim countries faced uprisings.

Understanding the Events

According to some commentators the “Arab Spring” is named after the “Springtime of the Peoples” took place in 1848, according some others it is named after “Prague Spring” took place in 1968. The both cases and even the fall of Berlin Wall can be source of inspiration. The first image that comes to mind is that of 1848’s “Springtime of the Peoples”, when a demonstration in the streets of Paris prompted three days of insurrection, the restoration of the Republic and, thanks to the telegraph, the railways and the rotary press, over ten days of uprisings across cities as distant as Berlin, Munich,

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² Murat Aktaş, “Arap Baharı ve Ortadoğu’da Demokrasi Sorunu”, in Murat Aktaş, (Ed.) *Arap Baharı: Ortadoğu’da Demokrasi Arayışı ve Türkiye Modeli*, Nobel Akademik Yayınları, Ankara, 2012, p. 8.

³ Pierre Vimont, Preface, in Álvaro de Vasconcelos, *Listening to unfamiliar voices – The Arab democratic wave*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2012, p. 7.

Vienna, Milan and Venice⁴. The second image that comes to mind is that of 1968's "Prague Spring" which ended not in freedom but in the Soviet invasion. There some similarities and differences between these movements.

The industrial revolution played a fundamental role in the "Springtime of Peoples" but in this globalization time the development of communications tools -such as internet, satellites, mobile phone and social medias- helped a lot for organisation of and spread of the revolts. We can see that in both cases technology played a very important role. This is the most important similarity of the movements that shows the influences of technological development on our life.

However, just as when considering the revolutions of 1848, we should be wary of overly generalizing interpretations that seek to describe the events of 2010-2012 as the product of a unified wave of insurrections. Aside from the trigger provided by Ben Ali's downfall, the trajectory, and consequently the shape, taken by the Egyptian, Moroccan, Bahraini, Libyan, Yemeni, and Syrian uprisings were all very different. It is only if we do not understand their respective contexts or if we are blinded by a well-meaning enthusiasm that we may collectively refer to them as the "Arab revolutions". It is too soon to tell if any of these movements can be labelled as revolutionary. The term "revolution" often associated with it could credit the idea that we are looking at a string of liberal uprisings seriously disrupting the socio-political situation of the countries concerned. Perhaps "awakening" or "uprisings" would be better terms. We will especially focus on "uprisings", a vague term which has the merit of not judging what particularly complex processes may be produced in the end. However certain Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans, Yemenis and Syrians believe that they are living through a revolution and are currently fighting to make it happen, to encourage or protect it.⁵

For example Tunisian sociologist Laroussi Amri prefers the term of "*revolution*", (for Egypt and Tunisia) in spite of some reserves. Reserves are mainly focused on the fact that what happened did not transform radically the Tunisian or the Egyptian way of life. At some of its aspects it looks like a reformist movement for it was not an earthquake which modified all the political, social and economic landscape at the collective level of national life. It did not transform the thinking and the feelings ways of such a community at its collective but also at its individual levels. In spite of these precisions he will consider the event as a revolution. He uses the term *revolution* in its minimal sense. That is to say the fall of the head of the pyramid of the system which is represented by the State (state man, its collaborators, its politics followed during decades, etc.), suddenly i.e. non predictable. A violent fall achieved by a very profound (socially) general (geographically) and popular movement, launched and released at the same time (as if there was a supra conscience) even if there was not a directional instance to guide the revolts. This meaning fit with what happened in Tunisia and Egypt⁶ notes Amri. He is not the only intellectual who considers these events as a revolution there are many others like him.

When it is related to democracy in the region, we can classify all different approaches in two main groups. There are two main dominant approaches about these movements and its relationships with democracy in the region. One of these approaches which describes this process as a "spring" reflects these movement such as an upheaval against the authoritarian regimes to claim more democracy and freedom. The second opinion considers these movements as a great power's project or

⁴ Bennani-Chraïbi Mouniaet al., "Towards sociology of revolutionary situations" Reflections on the Arab uprisings, Revue française de science politique (English), 2012/5 Vol. 62, p. 1-29.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Laroussi Amri, "Islamic Movement and Cultural Obstacles to Access To Modern Life Trough Tunisian Revolution", (in) Murat Aktas (Ed.) The Arab Uprisings and The Struggle of Soft Powers in the Middle East, Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, Ankara, 2012, p.203-204.

been used part of it (such as Greater Middle East Project) to reshape the region⁷. If these uprisings took the whole world by surprise how they can be part of great power's project? The most probable possibility is that at the beginning it was a real popular revolt but then the great powers tried to shift these uprisings to reshape the region. Especially with the intervention to Libya and non intervention to Syria this is quite clear.

Some commentators are saying that the Arab movements which appeared to be the harbinger of democracy, has brought nothing but disorder. Others go even further and argue that "Arabs, or Muslims, are so trapped in sectarianism and intolerance that they are incapable of democracy and freedom". Many of those who took part in the protests tree years ago are deeply disillusioned. Their lives are no better, and in many cases worse, especially in Egypt. But despite all these reserves, although the Arab Uprisings could not bring democracy yet, at least, it has deeply shaken the roots of authoritarian regimes and have brought the hope of change to the region.

The Major Obstacles to Democratization

The Arab world needs to overcome many challenges before it can successfully democratize. The colonial legacy and the influence of superpowers, military elite and autocracy, the geo-strategy of the region and oil, fundamentalism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, socio-economic factors and leak of a real civil society, are all major obstacles to democratization. But here we focus on six main topics that have been illuminated by the events of the Arab Uprisings: 1) The colonial legacy and the influence of superpowers; 2) role of the army and the lack of democracy in the Middle East; 3) the relationship between Islam and democracy 4) fundamentalism; 5) civil society and women's rights and democracy; 6) the oil and socio-economic factors and its implications for transitions to democracy.

The Colonial Legacy and the Influence of Superpowers

The Arab countries faced riots during the Arab Spring, gained their independence in the twentieth century but they could not establish a real democratic system and rule of law. They could not escape from the influence of western countries until now. In these countries in which settled repressive authoritarian administrations, a small minority owned all the business by exploiting the countries' resources in collaboration with their previous colonials and enriching themselves and living a life of luxury.

On the one hand during the colonial era, the European imperial powers failed to create viable democratic institutions in their Arab possessions. To maintain their grip on this strategically important region, they relied on the leaders, while neglecting the majority of the people. As a result, many newly independent Arab states had to develop their own political culture before laying the foundation for successful democratic institutions. In some cases, colonial powers also neglected to delimit the borders between the countries they ruled, thus implanting the root cause of border conflicts in the Gulf region and North Africa.⁸

On the other hand, while the colonial powers left the Middle East they left also the Arab-Israeli problem to intervene easily when they want. The Arab-Israeli problem, one of the longest and bitterly emotional conflicts of the twentieth century -and now of the new century- not only influenced the process of democratization but has had a serious impact on the development of the entire region. Successive Arab-Israeli wars resulted in the rise of military regimes. National security became a primary concern, often at the expense of democratization. While democratization alone will not put an

⁷ Murat Aktaş, "Arap Baharı ve Ortadoğu'da Demokrasi Sorunu", in Murat Aktaş, (Ed.) *Arap Baharı: Ortadoğu'da Demokrasi Arayışı ve Türkiye Modeli*, Nobel Akademik Yayınları, Ankara, 2012, p. 8.

⁸ Hussein A. Hassouna, Arab Democracy: The Hope, World Policy Journal, Fall, 2001, p. 49-54.

end to that conflict, a just and lasting solution will obviously have a significant impact on the successful democratization of the Arab world⁹.

The Arab Uprisings and democratic wave is also part of a much broader global shift toward a post-Western world in which the global agenda is no longer defined by the West alone. As US hegemony fades, the Western monopoly on the democratic debate will end, and other ‘unfamiliar’ voices will be heard. They tell us that democracy and human rights are not Western but universal values. It is no longer credible to counter pose Asian, Islamic and Western values; there is a growing global belief that democracy brings greater freedom, protects basic rights better, increases the chances for development with dignity, and that it is a better system to affirm different identities and to promote peaceful international solutions to the world’s problems¹⁰.

The Army and the Lack of Democracy in the Middle East

It is not by chance that the military elite is the most effective power and is the most important elite in the Middle East. Because in the Ottoman Empire time the modernization started in the army and since then, the army is the first group having the modern education and meeting the western values and life style. As many militaries had education in Europe they made also friends and connections and they thought that they are the most intelligent groups to govern the people. Indeed for long time the army was the most modern and effective group in these countries in the Middle East and Nord Africa. In many countries the army had the government by coup d’état or we have seen “revolution” made by army. It would take time to neutralize the role of the military in politics and minimize the space it occupies in the public sphere in the region. This would not be an easy task; the military controls important industries, and provide social services as well. The military recruits thousands of personnel every year, and provides them with prospect for social mobility.

According to Sorenson, the primary barriers to democratization are the resistance of regimes and their entrenched economic, political, and military elites. Administration supporters who draw considerable benefits from autocratic rulers may resist political transition unless they can shape it. These elites contribute to state constructions that are designed more to facilitate central rule than to provide essential public services, including a large state security network, expensive housing compounds, private schools and tutors for the wealthy, and hospitals run by soldiers that cater to wealthy foreign medical tourists. They also include hefty militaries and military budgets, which not only provide national security but also military support for the regime that signs the checks. Thus, even if elections were to occur in the Arab world, the “deep state” structures would remain as impediments to democratic growth.¹¹

In Tunisia the leader of the national independent movement Habib Burgiba become also the first president of the country for decades. The second one was Zeynel Abidin Bin Ali -from security service- who ruled the country until the Arab Spring. In Egypt Jamal Abdel Nasir (was again a soldier) took the administration of the country from King Farouk (by a coup d’état) than Enver Sedat and Husni Mubarak again both of them soldiers. In Libya Colonel Muammar Qaddafi and in Syria Hafez Esad do not change this rule.

Persistent rule became a known characteristic of many Arab regimes: the al-Saud family has governed Saudi Arabia since 1932, Sultan Qaboos ruled Oman since 1971, the Alouite family reigned in Morocco since 1956, the Assad family controlled Syria since 1970, Muammar Qaddafi ruled Libya

⁹ Hussein A. Hassouna, Arab Democracy: The Hope, World Policy Journal, Fall, 2001, p. 49-54.

¹⁰ Álvaro de Vasconcelos, Listening to unfamiliar voices – The Arab democratic wave, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2012, p.19-20.

¹¹ David Sorenson, Transitions in the Arab World Spring or Fall? Strategic Studies Quarterly, 2011, p.27,28.

since 1969, and Ali Abdullah Saleh first served as president of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1978 and then became president of unified Yemen in 1990, to name just a few Arab longevity cases. These and other long-serving Arab leaders could claim to have brought political stability and security to their countries as they not only quashed leftist and Islamist movements but also negotiated to keep the military from launching periodic coups by buying off soldiers with powerful positions in the government and the economy. They did the same for powerful tribal and family leaders, as patronage kept many Arab leaders afloat. In these cases strong Arab rulers prolonged their stay in power by capturing existing institutions or creating new ones to serve the interests of themselves and their parties, usually to distribute patronage to regime supporters. However, when the “strong man” leaves, an institution often withers away, not independent enough to stand on its own. Without viable political structures, a country is thus often vulnerable to yet another strong man who can rule in the absence of independent organizations. He steps in to fill a vacuum because the mechanisms tying him to public consent are lacking. He can demand such consent after arrival and then continue to “ask” for it through periodic staged “elections.” Partly because of these patronage and Potemkin village–like electoral structures, the kinds of political institutions upon which democracy must be constructed are lacking, such as independent judiciaries, civil societies that are independent from the old regimes, and electoral mechanisms designed to facilitate elections instead of stealing them.¹²

Is Islam a Barrier to Democratization?

Many westerners continuously question the prospect of democratization in the Arab world and Africa. The Arab world is perceived as basically “undemocratic,” unable to adapt to the global challenges of the democratic process. Though this view is even shared by Arab intellectuals, it overlooks the root causes of the present situation and the significant evolution that is taking place. Even so, some political scientists, notably Samuel P. Huntington, suggest that Islam is not hospitable to democracy.

The Arab revolts surprised many observers, yet they should not have been surprising. With the growth of global media, popular pressures grew over the years against other unaccountable governments in most parts of the world. The refrain was the same: we want democracy, and, along with it, economic progress. Given its conditions in 2011, the Arab region seemed more vulnerable than anywhere else in the world to mass public outcries. While democracy may be on the march in other parts of the globe, 2011 Freedom House rankings showed no Arab countries rated as “free” (Israel was the only Middle Eastern country so ranked), three considered “partly free,” and 14 ranked “not free.” The organization considers Western Sahara a separate country ranked as not free, while Morocco, which claims Western Sahara, is ranked as partly free. Of the total population of the Middle East and North Africa, 78 percent live in countries rated as not free compared to 35 percent of sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the march to democracy in the Arab world was moving backwards, as the 2009 Freedom House ratings carried seven Arab countries as partly free, but Bahrain, the Palestinian Territories, Yemen, and Jordan moved from partly free to not free in the 2010 report¹³.

Iliya Harik notes that relatively undemocratic Kuwait and relatively democratic Turkey hold the same score (partly free), and that some sub-Saharan African nations with severe democratic challenges rank higher than do most Arab countries. He says, “The argument here is not that Arab countries have a stellar record of democratization, as indeed they do not. It is a matter of whether FH’s

¹² Ibid., p.,28-29.

¹³ Freedom House issues an annual map of freedom, http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fiw/FIW2011_MENA_Map_1st%20draft.pdf.

quantitative measurement of democratization across the board is reliable at all¹⁴. Limited freedoms in some Arab countries vanished as regimes increasingly feared the rising tides of discontent fed by stagnant economies, growing corruption, regime misbehaviour (lavish spousal gifts and nepotism got special attention), and the rise of Islamist movements that increasingly wanted to enter the political system through popular elections. Unaccountable Arab regimes dreaded that street protests enabled by a growing adoption of social communications media would quickly spread to their own countries. Paradoxically, some Arab governments reflexively rolled their limited democracy back, censoring or suspending news media, banning Islamists from parliament, and jailing those whose political activism went beyond regime redlines, thus setting the stage for the very revolts that pushed for the ousting of those same regimes¹⁵.

But how you can explain undemocratic regimes in non Muslim countries (for example: in South America or in Russia)? Actually the contradiction between Islam and democracy cannot explain that fact. In fact Muslims consider Islam to be the oldest form of democracy. The Koran asserts the concept of Shura, or consultation, signifying that the leader must consult his followers and rule with their consent. This is a basic tenet of Islam and a major element of democracy. Muslim leaders have not always respected this tenet, but that does not derogate the principle itself. In reality, there is no contradiction between the Islamic system of government and the Western system. Finally, when examining the question of democracy, we must bear in mind that there is no uniformity among Arab states. Egypt has 7,000 years of recorded history. Iraq, Syria, and Yemen were centers of great civilizations in the past. But most other Arab countries are relatively new, having become sovereign states only after the Second World War. When the League of Arab States was created in 1945, there were 7 independent member states; there are now 22. Some Arab countries are monarchies, while others are republics with established parliaments. Some were colonized by the French, others by the British or the Italians. And although Arabs are tied by common affinities of culture and heritage, there are also many differences among them, which reflect their level of democratization.¹⁶

Fundamentalism

Although the word “democracy” means different things to different audiences, polls suggest that the generic concept is quite popular in the Arab world, as befits a region that knows firsthand how brutal autocracy can be. A 2010 Zogby poll found that a majority of Egyptians favoured democracy, and a 2006 survey by the scholars John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed found that 93 percent of Egyptians favoured a constitution that guaranteed freedom of speech. At the same time, however, Esposito and Mogahed found that a majority wanted Islamic law to be the only source of legislation. In contrast, al Qaeda believes that democracy is blasphemous, arguing that it places man’s word above God’s. So if Tunisia’s emerging democratic movement does not soon hand power over to clerics that implement an Islamic state, then according to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) “the duty upon Muslims in Tunisia is to be ready and not lay down their weapons.” Al Qaeda’s message is clear: secular democracy is as abhorrent as secular dictatorship¹⁷.

The Arab Spring has been a considerable setback for Al-Qaida, exposing its ineffectiveness as an agent for political change; although the movement’s decline is not necessarily terminal, and if the

¹⁴ Iliya Harik, “Democracy, ‘Arab Exceptionalism’ and Social Science,” *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 664–84.

¹⁵ David Sorenson, Transitions in the Arab World Spring or Fall? Strategic Studies Quarterly, 2011, p. 25.

¹⁶ Hussein A. Hassouna, Arab Democracy: The Hope, World Policy Journal, Fall, 2001, p. 49-50.

¹⁷ Daniel Byman, “Terrorism After the Revolutions How Secular Uprisings Could Help (or Hurt) Jihadists”, Foreign Affairs, May/June 2011. (369, 370).

Arab Spring proves a chimera it could gain renewed strength. The events in the Arab world are also a reminder of the inherent structural weaknesses of autocracies, with implications across the world¹⁸.

It is important to understand that Islamism is in its way a profoundly 'modern' movement, concerned to chart an Islamically-based path of progress for Muslim societies. While concerned to resist the West, its leaders have been influenced by Western knowledge. Sayyid Qutub, who took over the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood from Hasan al Banna, was much influenced by the French fascist thinker, Alexis Carrell, and a visit to America. Ali Shariati, ideologue of the Iranian revolution, was much influenced by Sartre, Fanon and Louis Massignon. Erbakan, the leading Turkish Islamist politician was an engineer. Bazargan and Bani-Sadr, early leaders of the Iranian revolution were an engineer and an economist. The followers of Islamist movements are the displaced. More often than not they have moved from countryside to city and look for medical, educational and psychological support, often in areas where the state is failing. Anthropological studies have shown that Islamism and its organisations often provide the means by which both men and women can come to participate in the modern economy and state. Classically, the prime concern of Islamist groups has always been to effect change in their own societies, to seize power if possible. The one exception to this rule has been a concern from the beginning with the fate of Palestine. However, Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network contains members of former Islamist groups and is in contact with Islamist groups throughout the world. This network, moreover, seems to have been that which, from the early 1990s, has consistently waged war on US targets in West Asia and the US itself. We need to know why this change has taken place. Is there, for instance, a new strand of Islamism which sees the struggle for power in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt as one which can only be won by assaults on America? Or are we dealing with the personal vendetta of an evil genius brilliantly able to make the anger and hunger for justice in the Islamic world serve his purpose?¹⁹

Civil Society and the Rights of Women

One of the most important elements of democracy is participation. Beside voting participation can also involve campaigning for a political party or candidate, standing as a candidate for political office, debating public issues, attending community meetings and membership civic meetings. A vital form of participation comes through active membership in independent, non-governmental organizations, what we call "civil society." These organizations represent a variety of interests and beliefs: farmers, workers, doctors, teachers, business owners, religious believers, women, students, human rights activists.

Following the global trend, there are an increasing number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that are beginning to have an effect on Arab civil society. Modern associations have existed in the Arab world since the late nineteenth century, although civil society as a rule is still fragile. Most early associations focused on providing education and healthcare to the needy. While many local NGOs retain this traditional focus, there are increasing numbers of associations concerned with non-traditional issues. In Egypt, the Association for the Protection of the Environment in Heliopolis was organized as a result of a local council's inadequacies. The intifada has stimulated Palestinian associations devoted to human rights. Across the Arab world one finds women's rights groups, organizations defending the rights of minorities, and associations whose purpose it is to raise people's

¹⁸ The Economist Intelligence 2011.

¹⁹ Francis Robinson, (2002), "Islam and the west: clash of civilisations?", Asian Affairs, 33:3, 307-320, DOI: 10.1080/714041480.

civic consciousness. It must be said that most of these organizations are relatively new, fragile, and sometimes subject to government supervision.²⁰

It is not a secret that in many Arab countries women have many problems to participate in politics and civil society. It is important that women participate fully both in politics and in civil society. This requires efforts by civil society organizations to educate women about their democratic rights and responsibilities, improve their political skills, represent their common interests, and involve them in political life.

The rights of women are a source of contention in many Arab countries as Islamists gain electoral power. Some opponents contend that such rights are a Western imposition, at odds with Islam or Arab culture. International human rights law does not prevent women from leading a conservative or religious lifestyle if they wish. But too often governments impose restrictions on women who seek equality or autonomy. Calling such rights a Western imposition does nothing to disguise the domestic oppression, compelling women to assume a subservient role.²¹

In a democracy, participation in civic groups should be voluntary. However, no one should support a political party because he is pressured or threatened by others. In a democracy, citizens are free to choose which party to support. Democracy depends on citizen participation in all these ways. But participation must be peaceful, respectful of the law, and tolerant of the different views of other groups and individuals. Political participation and democratic transition are tightly linked. Not only is a viable transition dependent on viable political participation, the way forward for political participation is also dependent to a great extent on the trajectory that democratic transition takes. There are three key models through which processes of democratic transition have been understood by political scientists. The simplest is Dankwart Rustow's four-phase linear model of democratic transition, which states that countries go through the following phases in their journey towards democracy: 1) National unity within a given territory 2) Inconclusive political struggle, which often results in the emergence of one strong group, which hinders democracy 3) Transition, which does not necessarily lead to democratic consolidation 4) Habituation, which is the consolidation of liberal democracy. Applying this model, one can argue that post-revolutionary Arab countries are currently in the third phase. The Arab Spring has brought about a fundamental change in the dynamics of political participation in the Arab world. Under the authoritarian systems in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and other Arab countries, formal political participation was largely restricted to regime-affiliated party activity, co-opted civil society participation, or voting in non-transparent and often fraudulent elections. Informal political participation, through social networks, underground political movements, and social movements, was often the only way for citizens to challenge their regimes.²² Although the Arab Spring did not completely reverse this trend across Arab countries, it has brought, at an astonishing speed, a number of key improvements that facilitate formal political participation, particularly in Tunisia. But there are also a number of important challenges, old and new, facing formal political participation in the Arab world in this era of democratic transition.²³

In a democracy people are free to criticize their elected leaders and representatives, and to observe how they conduct the business of government. There is freedom and pluralism in the mass media. You have the right to associate with other people, and to form and join organizations of your

²⁰ Hussein A. Hassouna, Arab Democracy: The Hope, World Policy Journal, Fall, 2001, p. 49-54.

²¹ World Report 2013: Challenges for Rights After Arab Spring, How to Build Rights-Respecting Democracies After the Dictator Falls February 1, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/01/31/world-report-2013-challenges-rights-after-arab-spring>.

²² Amaney Jamal, Actors, Public Opinion, and Participation, in *The Middle East 193*, 231–37 (Ellen Lust ed., 12th ed. 2011).

²³ Lina Khatib, Political Participation and Democratic Transition in the Arab World,

own choice, including trade unions. You have the right to assemble freely, and to protest government actions. But in these Arab countries any kind of opposition and critics against ruling elite were ending in prison, exile or even in a graveyard.

Oil and Socio-economic Factors

Of course socio-economic factors are also important to democratization. The majority of Arab states are developing countries in which illiteracy rates -especially between women- remain very high, so that a large segment of the population cannot truly participate in any meaningful political debate. Illiteracy, poverty, and unemployment have led to despair and frustration. Education is therefore a top priority, and the reform of educational systems is seriously underway in most Arab countries. Food and water shortages are also major problems. In their struggle to deal with these pressing economic concerns, Arab countries often neglect the development of democratic institutions²⁴.

Beside this entire reason we can also say that the economic gap usually linked to oil incomes, insufficient education the intervention of big powers such as USA, Russia and EU as barriers to democratization in the Arab countries. "Other barriers to democratization include mechanisms for "rent distribution." This was likely the case in countries such as Venezuela and Russia, which wandered from a path to democracy. States sell their raw material resources to foreign consumers, and the accrued rents go directly back to the state, which distributes the proceeds through an enlarged state capacity system to buy off the opposition rather than having to face it in electoral competition. These so-called rentier states do not levy personal income taxes on their populations, thus removing a key measure of political accountability²⁵. However, as Charles Tilly posits, state capacity may either impede or facilitate democratization, particularly when it is lubricated by petroleum sales. "International sales of such resources as oil often promoted de-democratization."²⁶ Additionally, because rentier states depend on raw material prices to sustain their rulers, sharp fluctuations in such prices can lead to popular discontent because the flow of rewards plunges during price downturns. Oil prices alone have gyrated dramatically since 1973, enriching on the upswing and stoking hopes of good fortune, yet plunging downward several years later and angering those who had dreamed of better economic futures."²⁷

In spite of all difficulties uprisings sent an alert to most non democratic regimes in the region to adopt new policies including relative openness, co-opting opposition, economic development, and suppressing military autonomy. But the future of the democratic map of the region cannot be easily drawn; and the complexity of geopolitics and the multiplicity of intervening variables do not allow scholars to develop solid predictions and generalizations. Nevertheless, we can conclude that the

²⁴ Hussein A. Hassouna, Arab Democracy: The Hope, World Policy Journal, Fall, 2001, p. 49-50

²⁵ Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" World Politics 53, no. 3 (April 2001): 325–61. Rentier states derive wealth from raw material rents, which often prop up authoritarian regimes because proceeds from them are used to buy off potential opposition and because income flows mitigate the need for personal income taxes, one primary means of accountability between the citizenry and government. See Gwenn Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States," Comparative Politics 31, no. 3 (April 1999): 296–97; Donald L. Losman, "The Rentier State and National Oil Companies: An Economic and Political Perspective," Middle East Journal 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 427–45; Steffen Hertog, "The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems: Societies of Intermediaries," Comparative Studies in Society & History 52, no. 2 (April 2010): 282–318; and Jay Ulfelder, "Natural Resource Wealth and the Survival of Autocracy," Comparative Political Studies 40, no. 8 (August 2007): 995–1018.

²⁶ Charles Tilly, Democracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 200. Studies vary on exactly how much of a barrier rentier states pose for democracy, though. Michael Herb argues that while rent-seeking states do have an impact on democratization, other factors like income distribution and the percent of the population that is Muslim also impact on levels of democracy. Herb, "No Representation without Taxation: Rents, Development, and Democracy," Comparative Politics 37, no. 3 (April 2005): 297–316.

²⁷ David Sorenson, Transitions in the Arab World Spring or Fall? Strategic Studies Quarterly, 2011, p.30.

coherence of incumbent elite and its control over military power, strong change in US policies towards the region, real democratic changes in the region's three political pillars, mainly Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt are crucial factors for true democratic transformation²⁸. Despite all the obstacles in the region there is still an important fight and progress for democracy and rule of law in the Arab world.

Conclusion

The Middle East has been the centre of oppressive autocratic or non democratic regimes and conflicts and wars since the First World War. The lack of a democratic system and the existence of a repressive policing administration, corruption, injustice and human rights violations did not allow citizens to live in dignity in these countries. Meanwhile, thanks to the development of communication tools, Arabic people have raised up against oppressive authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria and some others countries to establish a real democratic system. Building a democracy out of the ruins of a brutal military dictatorship requires great courage, effort, and patience on the part of ordinary people. There is a genuine possibility for the Middle East to find peace and for its people to focus their energy and knowledge on building better lives for themselves. But the coming stage in the region struggle for democracy depends on the persistence of protestors, political arrangements between political actors, especially Islamists and others, and to get the military out of the political scene.

In the Arab countries facing uprisings, illegal political participation, through social networks, underground political and social movements, was often the only way for citizens to challenge their regimes. There was election but the elections were never been fair and free. They were no alternative to ruling family. Although these uprisings could not completely reverse this trend across Arab countries, it has brought at least the hope of some improvements for formal political participation and establishment of democracy. Even EU's countries have created EU found the peace after the fatigue that they had following two world wars. It seems that the Middle Eastern people too need to create a union like EU to insure the democracy and peace in the region. Even though the foundation of democracy in the region is not easy and it takes a long time it is habitants that can bring it not Americans, Russians and Europeans. Occident must recognise that the West does not have a monopoly on democracy and human rights -including the rights of women- and that these are universal aspirations, so it must accept that their appropriation by Arab citizens is a basic condition for the affirmation of their cultural and religious identity.²⁹

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