

Cultural and Political Systems in the Arab World: An Overview

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Introduction

The present chapter aims to explore the notion of change in the Arab World. In particular, it will focus on the process of social change in an attempt to understand the driving force behind it, investigating inside and outside factors, exploring the cultural specificities of the political systems of that region of the world, pointing out the role of mass media, analyzing the current state of affairs in many Arab countries and forecasting the future of the social/political movements. Light will be shed on the phenomenon of the post-regime change and the threats the region and the rest of the world will have to face.

At the outset, the issue of change in the Arab World seems to be an enigma. Many a government and expert have been surprised by the speed of change in the Arab World. For this reason, the issue of change is a principal research objective.

Preliminaries

The purpose of this section is to provide the unfamiliar reader with background information on some key concepts that we will need in our analysis of the notion of change. Concepts like social change, political culture and social organization will be scrutinized. Relevant theoretical research on the topic (premises, predictions and applicability) will be covered.

Social Change: Definition

The notion of change has been a thorny issue in social sciences. Many schools have proposed different explanations of this concept. Given this situation, the unfamiliar reader is puzzled by the variety of connotations associated with this term.

For Kunczik (1991), social change refers to a change in the social order of a society. It can refer to the notion of social progress or sociocultural evolution. In other words, it is the process of transition/alteration of a traditional society (i.e., social structure) into a modern one. Social structure simply refers to the distinctive, stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together.

In sociology, social change refers to the significant alteration of mechanisms within the social structure. This process is characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behavior, political regime, social organizations, or value systems. By “significant” alteration, we mean changes resulting in *profound* social consequences. Significant

social changes may have long-term effects: the industrial revolution, the abolition of slavery, and the feminist movement.

The rationale for social change is that it considers

community-based expectations that address underlying social problems on a personal, institutional, group, national and/or international level. Social change leads to a change in attitudes, behavior patterns, laws, policies and institutions to better mirror values of integration, justice, diversity and opportunity.

Baker (2006,1).

It involves an action of individuals who are affected by the social problems relating to the development solutions that address these social issues.

Now that we have provided a definition of social change, we move to pinning down the different theoretical frameworks that have attempted to explain it.

Theories of Social Change

In general, three main views may be distinguished. These are: a) the Evolutionary Theory, b) the Functionalist Theory and c) the Conflict Theory.

Evolutionary Theory

The main idea on which Evolutionary theory is built is that society moves in specific directions. Therefore, early social evolutionists (Comte, 1856; Durkheim, 1893; Spencer, 1884) maintained that society is progressing to higher and higher levels to the point that cultural attitudes and behaviors are ahead of those of earlier societies.

Identified as the “father of sociology,” Comte advocated social evolution. He saw human societies as progressing into using scientific methods. Likewise, Durkheim, one of the founders of functionalism, saw societies as moving from simple to complex social structures. Spencer compared society to a living organism with interrelated parts moving toward a common end. In short, Comte, Durkheim, and Spencer advocated ‘monodirectional’ evolutionary theories, “which maintain that all societies pass through the same sequence of stages of evolution” (Leat, 2005).

Functionalist Theory

Functionalist sociologists emphasize what maintains society, not what alters it. In this regard, Parsons (1902–1979) considers society in its natural state as being stable and balanced. That is, society naturally gears toward a state of *homeostasis*. To Parsons, significant social problems such as union strikes are simply a scratch in the social

order. According to his **equilibrium theory**, changes in one aspect of society require adjustments in other areas. When these adjustments do not take place, equilibrium vanishes, jeopardizing social order. Although Parsons' equilibrium theory is based on the evolutionary concept of continuing progress, the controlling idea is stability and balance.

Critics (Marx, 1867) argue that functionalists minimize the effects of change because all aspects of society contribute to society's overall subsistence. They also argue that functionalists ignore the conflict between a society's powerful and weak to maintain an illusion of stability and inclusion. The powerful use force to maintain their interests and status quo.

Conflict Theory

Because a society's wealthy and powerful ensure the status quo in which social practices and institutions favorable to them continue, the advocates of conflict theory maintain that change plays a vital role in remedying social inequalities and injustices.

Although Marx was of the opinion that the evolutionary argument that societies develop along a specific direction, he did not accept that each successive stage presents an improvement over the previous stage. Marx pointed out that history proceeds in stages in which the rich always exploit the poor and weak as a class of people. Marx claims that socialist revolution led by the proletariat (working class) will take any society into its final stage of development: a class-free and communist society.

Marx's view of social change is proactive; people should not remain passive. Instead, individuals intending to take control and regain their freedom ought to struggle for their rights. Therefore, under the conflict theory, conflict is desirable and needed to initiate social change and set society free of inequality.

At this stage we should note that conflict theorists do not always realize that social upheaval does not inevitably lead to positive or expected outcomes. The situation in the Arab world (Libya, Syria, Yemen, etc.) is a case in point.

Now that we have depicted theoretical explanations of social change, we move to pinning down theories of individual and group change as well as theories of social movements.

Individual and Group Change

Exploring social change calls for an investigation of individual and group change. In other words, as organizational change affects a whole society, this change cannot be achieved if individuals or groups of individuals do not change themselves.

Before scrutinizing the theories of individual change, it is necessary to consider variables

that are commonly present in many behavior change models. The figure below presents a summary of these;

Variable	Definition
Threat	A danger or a harmful event of which people may or may not be aware
Fear	Emotional arousal caused by perceiving a significant and personally relevant threat
Response Efficacy	Perception that a recommended response will prevent the threat from happening.
Self-Efficacy	An individual's perception of or confidence in their ability to perform a recommended response
Barriers	Something that would prevent an individual from carrying out recommended response.
Benefits	Positive consequences of performing recommended response
Subjective Norms	What an individual thinks other people think they should do
Attitudes	An individual's evaluation or beliefs about a recommended response
Intentions	An individual's plans to carry out the recommended response
Cues to Action	External or internal factors that help individuals make decisions about a response
Reactance	When an individual reacts against a recommended response

Figure 1. (source CommGap, 2009)

Now that we have provided a list of key concepts, we move to pinning down the notion of individual change.

According to Baker (2001) "behavior is more likely to change if the person forms a strong positive intention, or makes a commitment, to perform the behavior"; the environment does not impose constraints that may hinder behavior change; the person is equipped

with the skills necessary to perform the behavior; the person believes that the advantages of performing the behavior outweigh the shortcomings; he or she thinks that performance of the behavior is more commensurate with his or her self-image or that it does not violate personal standards. The normative pressures imposed by the social, political and cultural environment no longer hold. There is aspiration for more social justice.

Individual change starts by aligning one's behaviors, feelings, actions, and thoughts with newly acquired values and beliefs. Universal values of human rights, justice, equality and personal achievement have delineated the traditional society where allegiance is paid to the community and the leader.

For McClelland (1961), motivation to achieve means one has to set high standards for oneself. Success is then the reward for one's endeavors. This philosophy where the individual is more important than the group leads to a defiance of conformism. On the other hand, societies in which one abides by the group's rules and where success is measured in terms of general welfare are categorized as stagnant and traditional.

There is a close relationship between the motivation to achieve and economic growth. Kunczik (ibid, 110) argues that in America, Spain and Britain the economic growth was preceded by an increase in the motivation to achieve; the opposite is true. A falling-off in the motivation to achieve led to an economic meltdown.

Motivation to achieve is a characteristic of developed countries where the individual is the catalyst of economic, political and social change. This achievement-based culture is promoted in the educational system, mass media and laws. However, in the traditional societies, where Collectivism is the norm, there is a massive resistance to change. Means of production are in the hands of the state or of superstructures that form a lobby whose mission is to restrain any individual initiative at all levels: economic, artistic, political, etc. Examples of these superstructures include the government, economic lobbies, dominant political parties, military juntas and religious groups.

Moving from a traditional society into a modern one and fostering modernity and new values (the motivation to achieve, self-esteem, and competence) can be made possible through the adoption of the following steps proposed by McClelland (cited in Kunczik, ibid, 110-11)

1)

a- creation of an informed public opinion typified by a free press

b- emancipation of women because they are bringing up the next generation and as such transmit new values.

c- the significance of foreign educational influences for the strengthening of the motivation to achieve.

With hindsight, no one can ignore the role of mass media in enhancing the philosophy of change.

The next section sketches out the notion of political culture, a move necessary for the classification of Arab societies.

Political Culture

Political culture is a key concept in political science. It refers to the attitudes, beliefs and values that underlie the operation of a particular system (see Wood, 2002). These include knowledge and skills that shape the operation of the political system, positive and negative emotional feelings towards it, and value judgments on the system. Within a political system, regional or ethnic groups with their own values, distinctive attitudes and beliefs are considered subcultures.

In political literature, there are several ways of classifying existing political cultures. According to Almond & Powell (1966) political culture exists at three levels:

2)

a-Political system

b-Political processes and the elaboration of policies

c- Expectation of politics

Political System

How do citizens accept the government and politics in the country in general? Are they satisfied and acceptive of their leaders' decisions? Any political system must guarantee a certain level of legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. Indeed, an important part of the political culture is legitimacy-the belief that government's authority is legal and should generally be respected. In this context, countries with a long national history (e.g., Morocco) generally have an advantage over the more recently founded nations (e.g., Algeria), which must convince their citizens to develop new political loyalties. However, a long history can be filled by ethnic or religious conflicts (as in Bahrain and Yemen), which in turn can promote legitimacy problems. Whatever the challenge, governments tend to work better if citizens believe in the legitimacy of the political system.

The second criterion in the selection and acceptance of a political regime is the tradition. In this political culture, citizens can accept a government based on heredity, so that when

the king dies, the heir is his son or relative (in some cases the girl.).

The third factor that governs the political system is ideology. A political ideology is a set of beliefs that establishes a vision in place for a better society. Ideologies generally criticize the old order (or ideologies of opposition), assess their problems and define solutions, and try to build public support for their new direction. For example, Marxism criticized capitalism and predicted disaster if capitalism continued and planned a whole new order based on the elimination of private property.

The fourth criterion relates to competitive elections and constitutions. Most modern democracies base their legitimacy on fair and competitive elections, in which citizens have a real choice among candidates. These elections, as well as other political processes, are defined by law. In many countries, a formal constitution establishes a plan that reflects the political beliefs and values of the political culture. Because a democracy is based on the value that people should participate in government, the constitution must include some channels that link citizens to policymakers. In doing so, the constitution must be accepted as a basis of legitimacy.

Political Processes and the Elaboration of Policies

A second level of political culture involves citizens' expectations of how government should operate, how political leaders should behave, and how they themselves should participate. In some countries, people expect to participate actively and are regularly consulted on matters of government, and if they are not, they may decide to throw their leaders, and perhaps to question the legitimacy of the political system. In other countries, citizens are subjects passively obeying the law, but do not get involved in the affairs of government (Algeria under the reign of military junta and Libya under Qaddafi's reign). Instead, they leave political decisions to political leaders. In other countries, citizens can have no knowledge of the government and its policies because they have never had contact with political leaders.

Expectations of Politics

What do people expect from their governments? These expectations impact on the ability of decision makers to formulate and successfully implement a certain policy. How should the government respond to the needs of its citizens? Such questions are the third component of political culture.

For example, in some countries most people believe that the government should ensure that everyone is protected from the need (egalitarian society). Other political cultures require that individuals are primarily responsible for their own well-being (individualistic society). These fundamental differences in political beliefs will surely influence the

tolerance of citizens vis-à-vis high taxes, subsidies for the unemployed and old age pensions. As a case in point, Swedish citizens generally tolerate high taxes, in order to enjoy a prosperous retirement, but the political culture of the United States informs the retirees that social security cannot fund a comfortable lifestyle.

Types of Political Culture

It is important to evaluate the major influences of political culture in a given political system; this task is difficult because the values and beliefs vary between citizens of the same nation. For example, some people in a country may believe that religion should play an important role in the development of policy decisions, while many others may believe in a strict separation of religion and state. The number and depth of disagreements between citizens in a society is the basis of the division of political cultures in two types: consensual and confrontational.

Consensual political culture: Although people may have differing views on certain political processes or policies, they generally tend to agree on how decisions are made, the issues that must be addressed, and how problems should be solved. For example, citizens recognize that elections aim to choose leaders, and they accept the election winners as their leaders. Once leaders take in power, the problems they address are considered by most people as appropriate for the government to manage. In general, a consensual political culture accepts both the legitimacy of the regime and the proposed solutions to solve problems.

Confrontational political culture: Citizens in a confrontational political culture are deeply divided, often both on the legitimacy of the regime and solutions to major problems. For example, if people disagree on something as fundamental as military state and civilian state, conflict will certainly be difficult to avoid. However, if religious differences are as pronounced as the followers of a religion do not accept an elected leader of another religion, these differences undermine the legitimacy and threaten to overthrow the regime. When a country is deeply divided in political beliefs and values over a long period of time, political subcultures can develop and become so entrenched divisions that the government finds it difficult to govern effectively (the case of Lebanon)

Social Organization: Developing Country vs. Modern Society

As we mentioned before, social change refers to an alteration in the social order of a society. It can refer to the notion of social progress or socio-cultural evolution. In other words, it is a process of transition from a traditional society into a modern society. However, it is necessary to specify the characteristics of each type of society in order to further classify the Arab societies and identify the stage of development of these.

The starting point is to begin with ‘dichotomous classifications’. One of the opposed pairs relates to notions of community and society (Tönnies, 1935). The community is the apotheosis of these forms of social life in which the emotional ties between members create the essential situation. There is agreement on the basic feeling about things as there was in the village life, governed by the customs and traditions. For cons, society is characterized by the *rational lifestyle* of industrialized societies. The society members are bound by predefined contracts (e.g., employment contract, electoral platform).

Shapes the community may take include family life, tribe, village and town. For urban societal forms, we can cite life in large cities and national life (political affairs in a given country). In addition, to better understand the differences between the two groups, we appeal to the concept of ‘pattern variables ‘ König (1967, 96).

3)

Community	Society
affectivity	Affective neutrality
particularism	universalism
ascription	achievement
diffuseness	specificity

The features outlined above shed light on the structural differences that characterize evolution. For example, the dichotomy ascription/ achievement refers to the economic roles played by members of each group. Thus, in the caste system in India the role depends on which caste one belongs to. The untouchables can never dream to become a manager of a firm. In the Arab world, one can cite the case of Bahrain where the politico-economic positions are allocated to Sunnis.

On the other hand, the dichotomy particularism/universalism refers to the application of a standard only to members of a minority or to each member of the society. In this context, the notion of equality is an example of universalism. Finally, for the dichotomy diffuseness/specificity we can cite the case of the traditional farmer in a developing country who cultivates his land, builds his house and weaves his clothes. However, in the modern society, where in the economic sector roles are specific, work is divided among different employees (cf. the notion of bureaucracy in Weber, 1968).

The transition from a traditional society to a modern society (i.e., modernization) shows that the model for developing countries is the Western model. In this context, Parsons (1971) argues that “elites in traditional societies accept the values of modernity, especially in the areas of economics, education, political independence and democracy” (adoption of liberal policy/ privatization in Morocco).

Modernization is a process of social change closely related to the rationalization of

society and the individual. It englobes a set of social processes that include technologies, the proliferation of a state educational system, urbanization, secularization, increased political rights and the introduction of mass media. A salient and thorny aspect of modernization is that it variously affects key specific sectors (political, economic and informational). In this regard, Lange (1984, cited in Kunczik, *ibid.* 78-79) argues that “development is like a giraffe, difficult to describe but easy to recognize”. The features of the three sectors mentioned above are as follows:

- 4)
 - a) political Development (multiparty democracy, tutelary democracy, dictatorship)
 - b) economic development (GDP per capita)
 - c) informational development (number of newspapers per 1,000 people and/or pieces of mail entering country per 1000 people and/or number of telephones per 1000 persons).

(Cf. Kunczik, *ibid.* 78-79)

At this stage of the discussion, it should be noted that traditional society does not mean that it is static and that modern society is dynamic. To have such an idea is simply to believe in a fiction (see Malinowski, 1945; Kunczik, 1991).

Another illusion that one should get rid of is the fact that social change is mainly due to the importation of a Western model. There are many causes specific to the society itself. Traditional society is very dynamic. This explains the tendency of these societies to resist all that is foreign / western.

In the literature, many researchers portray traditional societies as agrarian societies ruled over by landlords who form the elites. In some societies this economic power is backed up by religious supremacy or cronyism.

According to Rummel (1963) ‘society is a mixture of different, overlapping and nested structures where a multiple of balances of power intersect’. A traditional society may be classified as authoritative since it is governed by traditional norms, mores, and principles. In short, it is the field of custom which defines duties, privileges, and status. It is the field of authoritative customary laws. Sometimes, it is believed that the ruler is genetically different from the rest of citizens. This distinction is due to the family lineage of the ruler (e.g., king, sheik, religious gurus). Examples of authoritative socio-cultural systems would include Arab Nations like Saudi Arabia. Such authoritative society is what Sorokin (1957) calls ‘ideational supercultural system’.

Truth is prescribed by authorities, transmitted to generations, or supported by special books, such as the Koran or the Bible. As a case in point, religious decrees that confer legitimacy on the regime are issued by special bodies like the ‘Council of Shoura’ or in Medieval Europe by the ‘Church’.

The individual who challenges tradition or who does not abide by norms, or who questions the legitimacy of the ruler will be considered an outcast of society, will be banished, and perhaps will be sentenced to death for their ideas and behavior. History is fraught with examples: “A Lutheran in a Catholic nation, a republican in an Arab Kingdom and an atheist in a religious society have all felt the power of such tradition” (Kunczik , op-cit., 88).

To conclude this section, we can say that the notion of ‘pattern variables’ is relevant to the description of the traditional Arab societies and to the understanding the changes affecting these.

The Political Structure of Arab Countries

An analysis of the current state of affairs in the Arab world requires that we review the major concepts made use of in sociology and political science. This has been the main objective of chapter one. A scrutinization of key concepts like social change, political structure and political system is a prerequisite for an investigation of the katzenjammer-like situation the Arab world is in.

This section aims to shed light on the political organization of Arab countries. In doing so, we intend to deconstruct the dominant political structures and the type of political culture characterizing these countries. Also, we will point out the relationship between these and the issue of development towards more modern and democratic nations.

Political Systems in the Arab Countries

The Origin of the Arabs: A Historical Sketch

An understanding of the current state of affairs in the Arab world necessitates a review of the circumstances that have led to the establishment of these nations. The reason for doing so is that history is a continuum, where one stage leads to another.

The Arabs are those who speak Arabic. One should not confuse the Arab world with the Middle East, for the latter comprises other non-Arab nations such as Israel, Turkey, Afghanistan, etc. Nor should one take the Arab World to mean the Muslim World, as the largest Muslim communities originate from non- Arab countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, etc.

As far as geography is concerned, the Arab World extends from the Atlantic coast in the West to the Persian Gulf in the East. From North to the South, the Arab World extends from Syria to Sudan. According to Tamari (1999, 1) “today 250, 000 million people live in 17 independent countries that make up the Arab World”.

Religious diversity is another characteristic of this part of the world. In fact, the three celestial religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) co-exist. At this stage it should also be noted that the Arab World comprises other ethnic groups who do not identify themselves with Arabic: Berbers in North Africa, Copts in Egypt, Jews in Morocco, to cite but a few.

Before the rise of Arab nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, most Arabs identify themselves as members of some closed community or tribe. The notion of tribe as a societal and political structure is a key concept for an understanding of the functioning of Arab societies in modern times and a way to understand the problems many Arab nations face today.

In a nutshell, the Arab World is characterized by diversity: ethnic, linguistic, political and cultural. The starting point to decipher the mystery of the Arab World is to focus on tribal identity, a point we turn to in the next section.

Tribe and Tribalism

Given the geographical variations and the changes the tribal system has undergone in recent years, to define the term tribe is a hazardous move. Still, a tribe can be defined as a societal system based on “collective liability and defense of honor” (FCO Research Analysts and Stabilization Unit, 2012, 1); most of the time, membership is based on consanguinity.

Power inside the tribe is based on consensus and the sheikhly office is passed on from parents to heirs (sons). This office plays an important role in solving conflicts among members by resorting to customary law. The latter is known as ‘l3orf’ in Arabic and ‘Azerf’ in Berber.

In most Arab countries, the customary law is considered an alternative means of arbitration. It is a surrogate for state courts. Therefore, we can say that the coexistence of tribal law and state law reflects the ambivalence that characterizes the Arab states. The same ambivalence is a feature of the political systems in these countries.

In their effort to modernize their societies, many Arab states have tried to eradicate tribal identity and build a national one. In general, many strategies have been adopted. For example, Morocco has forbidden the establishment of political parties claiming a racial, linguistic or religious identity; it has also dismantled tribal identity by implementing

administrative division, in an attempt to prevent tribes from exercising pressure on the choice of candidates in times of elections. It has also institutionalized access to political and social positions that were hereditary under the tribal system. This also called for a reinforcement of national identity in school curricula.

However, despite all these efforts, tribal identity seems to be strong in some countries and even inside some regions of the same country. In Morocco tribal identity seems to be a challenge to national identity in the southern provinces. The same is true for a country like Yemen where “the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was unable to eradicate tribal structures. Regional and tribal affiliations were drawn upon to build support during the power struggles within the PDRY regime” (FCO, *ibid*, 1).

The theory of ‘Pattern Variables’ sketched out above shows that the tribal system is characterized by affectivity, particularism, ascription and diffuseness. Members hold strong feelings towards their tribe and their world view is shaped by the canons of their clan. They tend to view the interests of their tribe as primordial. The roles of each member are contingent on the power they enjoy inside the tribal system.

The construction of a modern state is a challenge to the existence of tribes. However, it is very hard to get rid of tribalism. In fact, even if the Arab states have adopted the western model of democracy (the establishment of political parties, parliament, institutions, etc.), members of these political structures pay allegiance to the leaders the same way members of a tribe do with their sheikhs. In other words, modern political structures have been emptied and have emphasized the same political culture specific to a tribe.

In the next section we move to pinning down the idiosyncrasies of political regimes in Arab countries.

Political Regimes in the Arab Countries

Political regimes in the Arab countries are miscellaneous. Out of the 22 Arab states eight are monarchies and fourteen republics. This division is essential to an understanding of the functioning of different states.

Monarchies

A monarchy is a government that has a hereditary chief of state with life tenure and prerogatives ranging from nominal to absolute. Power and leadership are inherited. These regimes are considered legitimate by the citizens of these kingdoms. Barany (2012, 13) argues that “an independent 2009 Moroccan poll found that over 90 % of the respondents approved of King Mohammed VI’s rule”. In contrast, some monarchs may not be themselves popular, but the subjects seem to approve of the monarchy as a regime (the cases of Jordan and Bahrain).

There are at least three reasons for the legitimacy of these monarchies: religious authority, economic prosperity and politico-cultural benefits (Barany, *ibid*, 13). Still, the eight kingdoms draw differently from the three sources of legitimacy.

Religion is of paramount importance in the Arab Kingdoms. It is the source of divine power bestowed on monarchs. The latter have imbued their status with religious significance. The Saudi Arabian king's popularity is not due to oil-wealth, but to his being the custodian of the two holiest cities in the Islamic world. In addition, the king of Morocco, who is a direct descendent of the Prophet Mohammed, is also the Commander of the Faithful (*Amir Al Muminin*), a title that goes back to early days of Islamic empire. As for King Abdullah of Jordan, his religious power stems from his lineage: he is the descendent of the Hashemite Family.

Economic prosperity is another pillar of legitimacy. The oil-rich Gulf States are the most prosperous countries since in 2010 GDP per capita (purchasing power parity), for example, amounts to 179,000 dollars in Qatar. However, it should be pointed out that economic prosperity has led to the establishment of a rentier state. Citizens rely on their respective governments to distribute income accrued from oil revenue in the form of food subsidies, employment opportunities, health care, and all the basic necessities of living. Still, the luxury of not working is traded for a complacent population with little representation, a lack of government, little accountability and mediocre performance. This is reminiscent of the feature ascription mentioned above.

The same situation seems to be the norm even in poor monarchies (Morocco under Hassan II's reign and Jordan). In these two countries the governments have for long bestowed privileges on a handful of networks of families in exchange of stability. On the contrary, the living conditions of large portions of the population are either on average or below the threshold of poverty.

The third fount of legitimacy in Arab monarchies is political in nature. It is believed that monarchies in the Arab World are a warranty of political stability. Kings and ruling emirs, have extra legitimacy, due to their intimate relationship with their subjects. In this vein, (Rabi, 2013) argues that:

“This intimacy is an extension of the tribal relationship of chiefs to their people; the king is the “head chief,” the “father of the nation.” In various ways, kings claim tribal, dynastic, and religious legitimacy simultaneously, enabling them to place themselves above their countries' social and political divisions.” For example, the concluding phrase of the Moroccan national anthem, “God, Fatherland, King” (Allah, al-Watan, al-Malik) highlights the efforts of the Moroccan monarchy to present itself as the unifying symbol at the center of the state and therefore as an irreplaceable part of the state's political and social identity.”

Now that we have shed light on some aspects of monarchies, we move to pinning down the distinctive features of Arab republics.

Arab Republics

At the beginning, Arab republicanism was thought of as a modernizing and democratizing force. It was the instrument used in the overthrowing of monarchies in many Arab states (Egypt, Libya). It raised expectations for a new era in the newly-founded Arab republics. Its legitimacy was based on establishing “modernization, secularization, and welfarism” (Sadiki, Ibid). However, this seems to be a mere subterfuge.

The reason for this is that Arab “republicanism”, which was the result of military coups (Egypt, Algeria, Libya) or the effect of what is called the ‘contagion effect’ (Anderson, 2012), seems to suffer from the absence of authentic republicans with the ideology that can promote popular government and constitutional rule.

In most Arab ‘republics’ military juntas hold power. “Instead of ruling democratically and promoting democracy, and representing a critical juncture in the history of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the republican leaders reproduced the same tribal hierarchical structures. The immediate result was the lack of ‘open, egalitarian, and meritocratic standards of public office and public-spiritedness’, argues Sottilotta (2013).

Algeria is a good example of a state run by the military. Any president who dares to exert his powers is either eliminated or discredited.

In a nutshell, nepotism, cronyism and dictatorship are all attributes of republican regimes in the Arab World. These qualities have turned these regimes into what Sadiki (2013) names ‘dynastic republicanism’ or ‘monarchical presidency’. Arab

“republics” have lost much of their legitimacy as presidential power is increasingly being delegated from father to son”. This was the case in Syria in 2000.

Political Culture in the Arab World

Although regimes in the Arab countries are either monarchies or republics, it seems that they share many features. Still, one should not run into generalities, since many countries seem to have introduced many reforms.

Regimes in the Arab world, monarchical and republican alike, have always been described as authoritarian states. The majority of works in the literature on political systems in the MENA region emphasized the ‘absence of democracy’ in the Arab societies of the region.

Many efforts have been made by these states to modernize *à l'occidental* their respective societies. However, it seems that modernization has affected the economic structure and the outward structure of the political system. To illustrate, these states have borrowed the concepts of economic liberalization and political liberalization. Still, one cannot see a real change inside political structure.

Many Arab regimes (Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia) adopted the process of economic liberalization in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Göksel (2013) argues that this strategy actually helped the authoritarian regimes to alter their state apparatus. Sometimes, this was done under duress from international organizations (World Bank's and the International Monetary Fund's recommendations for Morocco to privatize the economy) Thus, economic liberalization helped transmogrify 'the old authoritarian regimes' into more incumbent 'new authoritarian regimes', to use King's (2009) expression.

In this regard, King explains that

'...the privatization of state assets provided rulers with the patronage resources to form a new ruling coalition that would be pivotal in any capitalist economy: private-sector capitalists, landed elites, the military officer corps, and top state officials, many of whom moved into the private sector and took substantial state assets with them' (pp. 4-5).

The concept of 'ruling coalition' is seen as the source of mass support and the means to gain legitimacy for the autocratic regimes.

Moving from a traditional society where all wealth is in the hands of the state to a capitalist state has not improved the economic situation in the Arab countries. In the literature (Levins, 2013), all Arab states are described as being 'rentier states', where "a small portion of society generates the majority of the wealth; the remainder being only engaged in the distribution and utilization of the wealth created" (388).

As far as political liberalization is concerned, many Arab countries have carried out reforms, but the reforms have been directed at modernizing the outward structures specific to democracies, but not at redistributing power in the political system. There have been some political changes: For example, more political parties exist today in most Arab countries than twenty years ago, and more countries hold elections of varying transparency. Access to information and the quality of political debate have increased in many countries as well. Power, however, is still in the hands of kings and presidents.

Before we consider reforms adopted in by Arab countries, we provide a sketch of three models of reforms that will act as platforms to evaluate the changes carried out by every country. However, we should admit that some countries have excelled at changing

the political structures, enhancing human rights, fighting economic graft, boosting development and empowering the poor.

As a case in point, Morocco is often stated as the Par Excellence example in the region. When Mohammed VI became king, he introduced ‘the new concept of power’. This amounts to enhancing transparency of elections, the establishment of a new elections code and constitution, and delegating many of his powers to the Prime Minister’s office. Last but not least, an Islamic party is now in power, something that was and is unacceptable in many other Arab countries (we further discuss this point below).

In addition, under his reign Morocco is committed to protecting human rights throughout the Kingdom. In fact, Morocco has undertaken a number of initiatives to promote citizenship and protect the human rights of all its citizens. Through recent reforms to improve human rights, Morocco is making great strides and has become a leader in the Arab world on human rights and women’s rights issues. It is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. Morocco also established the Moroccan Truth and Reconciliation Commission (IER) which was the first truth and reconciliation commission to be established in the Arab world. The Commission works to advance compensation work initiated by the Advisory Council on Human Rights (CCDH). It is an independent investigative body established to shed light on past human rights violations that took place in Morocco from 1956 to 1999.

Given the multifaceted and pluralistic identity of Morocco, the new constitution has strived to recognize the linguistic and cultural rights of many social groups: Amazigh for Berbers, Hebrew for Jews and Hassani for Sahraouis.

Morocco singles itself out in the area of human development. The new approach to development centered on the eradication of many forms of poverty. The advantage of this new approach stems from the fact that the purpose of economic progress is the realization of the welfare of citizens through the satisfaction of their needs in their social and /or natural environment.

The nearby Algeria, although an oil-rich state, seems to resist all political changes. Even though the Algerian government opened the political system overnight in response to riots that had taken place in October, 1989, it is still a one-party government (the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, FLN). Under President Boutefliqa (who is 80 and the FLN candidate for the fourth time for the 2014 presidential elections) the country has experienced a build-up of resentment at what Algerians call “contempt”, the brutal disregard for citizens exhibited by officials at all levels of government. “This

discontent was and remains central to the crisis in the relationship between the Algerian state and society”, claims Tlemçani (2008).

Experts categorize Algeria as a rentier state. The political regime has favored an economy of rent where the Military Institution has permeated all sectors of activity, promoting that feeling of resentment; In fact, Joffé (2002:1) sums up this situation when he states that:

“Algeria’s economic crisis parallels and is an intrinsic part of its political crisis over the past decade. It consists, furthermore, of an interrelated crisis over control of the economic rent and the activities of an informal parallel economy originally based on smuggling and now sustained through violence which is legitimised by Islamist rhetoric. Economic reform, therefore, cannot be meaningfully achieved until appropriate institutions are constructed and a dysfunctional state has been successfully reformed.”

All in all, most Arab countries are in the process of democratization. Consolidation of social, economic and political rights is a popular demand that is sometimes diverted by political actors who seek to protect their own interests. Therefore, is change in the Arab World attainable or is it an illusion?

Change in the Arab World: Reality or illusion

The Arab World has witnessed many turmoils since 2011. Most protests have taken place in Arab republics (Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Lybia, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon). Few Kingdoms witnessed temporary protests (Morocco, Bahrein, and Saudi Arabia).

Protesters call for a more egalitarian state, where universal principles of human rights, equality and freedom reign.

Republican regimes can be described as closed systems that lack assimilative channels. Thus, they tend to face more radical and confrontational social movements. On the other hand, monarchies, as mentioned above, have shown more stability for the simple reason that they have more legitimacy due to the monarchs’ religious position (Morocco and Jordan) or to economic prosperity (Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia).

In autocratic Republican regimes protesters have to make more efforts if they want to threaten the future economic well-being of the élites (Koopmans, 2004, p. 35). autocracies remain relatively weak as their usual resort to repression in cases of conflict makes them fail to contain mass movements, while monarchies have many containment tactics that help them avoid confrontation in most cases of contention. The result of this disparity is that monarchies that can be easily threatened, have the ability to contain protests eventually, while autocracies, that are relatively hard to defy at the beginning, face a huge damage as soon as their challengers “gain visibility” (Koopmans, 2004, p. 39).

Let us think of the Algerian case. The military junta has been accused of staging a coup d'état in 1992 to prevent the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) from winning the second round of what would have been the country's first democratic elections and of falsifying the 2019 elections and of appointing the president. The low participation in elections witnesses the failure of the regime to persuade Algerians of the validity of the regime. The *hirak*, Algerian social movement, insists on radical changes in the state's structures. This *hirak* has been oppressed as the élite has not joined in.

Protesters need to find what Koopmans (2004) calls the 'ripe moment'. This happens

when elites are divided among themselves, factions among them may choose to mobilize popular support in order to strengthen their position vis-a-vis rival elites, either by directly sponsoring or even initiating protest campaigns, or by encouraging dissent in more subtle ways.

(Koopmans, 2004, p. 24)

In Algeria, reports have revealed that there are problems among the ruling élite. Protesters are reorganizing themselves. Regional movements claim autonomy: Kabylia in the North, Tuareg in the South, Shawiya and Mozabite. With hindsight, Algeria is likely to become like Syria. Cronyism, changing alliances and economic constraints are factors that have instigated riots in this gas-rich country. The ripe moment has come.

Moreover, protesters' commitment to change is great. Motivation to achieve has increased. Mobilization of efforts, boosted by an increased well-informed public opinion about the threats the society is facing, are all important factors that will lead to the toppling of the regime.

Algerians have come to the conclusion that they are no longer subjects. They claim full citizenship. Roles assigned by the regime do not hold anymore. The repetitive failures of the regime in handling the internal economic and social situation are no longer accepted by the people.

This shift from a consensual political culture to a confrontational one is very salient in the case of Algeria. Many questions concerning legitimacy of the political and economic system have been posed. The people aspire for a more egalitarian society.

Lebanon is a good example of a republic where ethnic identity is the cause of political, economic and social crisis. Politicization of sectarian identity has reached a high pitch. Violent political acts have led to the eruption of a quasi-civil war, leaving the country without a government for months. Sectarian identity is likely to lead to the dismantling

of political system.

On the other hand, the protests in Morocco have been contained because the government responded to the claims of the protesters, changed the constitution and boosted civil rights. The democratic process has been respected. The Islamic party PJD was allowed to govern for 10 years.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, under the reign of King Salman and the leadership of the Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, has strived to boost civil rights for women and to modernize the country. The Saudi governance system has been undergoing a radical restructuring. A combination of procedural shifts, personnel changes, bureaucratic restructurings, and changes in jurisdiction are revolutionizing public life. Saudi Arabia needs to reshuffle and to redesign its political structures, to allow for the creation of political parties, a parliament and the enhancement of civil rights.

To sum up, social and political change is likely to take place in Arab Republics. This change is a popular claim. On the other hand, Monarchies claim the change themselves and align their visions with the claims of the people.

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