THE MODERN ARAB STATE

A Decade of Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa

Edited by Youssef Cherif

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean
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Foreword

The Arab world is pluralistic and everything but homogenous. Nevertheless, it unites a region with an incredibly rich history of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. Stretching primarily from North Africa to West Asia, Arab countries have been experiencing various evolutions, and most of their borders have been shaped by their colonial pasts. Many countries of the region experienced waves of popular uprisings that did not only unite the people, but most importantly still influences their realities today. Often referred to as the «Arab Spring», the uprisings were and are much more than a temporal concept and continue to have an impact today, spurring a new understanding between citizens and the state. While the ongoing uprisings have not led everywhere to immediate and profound reforms, they have given citizens a voice and signaled to elites that their power is limited. Transformation processes always take time, and they need time to bring about lasting inclusive change.

While the title of this book is deliberately provocative in nature, the purpose is not to assert the existence of a single Arab state in its «modern» form, but rather to take a closer look at the evolving nature of states and to provide a forward-looking understanding of the characteristics of modern Arab states. Despite the severe socio-economic challenges and the persistent autocratic nature of most states, our recent KAS PolDiMed Survey found that citizens remain positive about their economic future and that civic engagement outside of formal political structures is on the rise. Ten years after the Arab uprisings, democracy and its institutions remain fragile and often cosmetic, and yet civil societies are aspiring and a new social contract is emerging with an increasingly empowered citizenry.

It is in this context that the Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS PolDiMed) undertakes its activities to promote greater understanding for cross-national and cross-regional developments in the Mediterranean region. KAS PolDiMed cooperates closely with local partners to pursue a shared vision for human development, economic progress, and political and social stability. Our commitment to this vision of freer and more prosperous development in the wider Mediterranean will continue to be a source of inspiration for our activities in the future.

We would like to thank the distinguished academics and experts who contributed to the chapters of this book to provide various political, social and economic perspectives on the nature of a modern Arab state. We would like to thank the authors for their dedication to this project and in particular the editor, Youssef Cherif, for his invaluable contribution to the completion of this book. We believe that this volume will make a fruitful contribution to the academic and broader debate on the evolving civil-state relations in the Arab countries, and we are eager to follow and support the transformation process in the wider region.

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Introduction

Youssef Cherif

The idea for this book followed multiple discussions I had with the leadership of the Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, as the 10th anniversary of the Arab Uprisings was approaching. A new shape of the Arab state was emerging[1]; some would say that a modern Arab state was being born. A renewal of the social contract, the economic model, the political system, and the place of youth are some of many debates that have been in motion since 2011 in most Arab countries. And this is what the book aims to encapsulate. However, the sudden shock of COVID-19 delayed our plans, and it was only in the summer 2020 that we restarted working on the concept note.

In 2011, the movement that shook the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was enthusiastically dubbed the "Arab Spring." But that term gradually lost its fame and, already by the end of 2011, the Arab Spring was said to be over. By 2013, it seemed as if the MENA region was trapped between civil war, authoritarianism, and Jihadi terrorism. Most observers considered that the process was not only over but also opening a pandora box of calamities. In many accounts published since that period, titles such as the Arab or Muslim Winter replaced the then-discredited Arab Spring. The general view was that the region was either going back to its pre-2011 status quo or collapsing entirely.

But historical events are never linear and rarely deterministic. As years went by, new and unexpected changes appeared. In Tunisia, democracy did not produce the expected economic benefits, and the anger on the streets was not channeled to political parties. To the observer of Tunisian politics, the country seems to have entered a cycle of protests that kept regenerating with no end in sight. In Lebanon, a country spared by the Arab Spring arguably because of its democratic life as well as ethnic and clientelist divisions that remind the Lebanese of their civil war, social and political movements began to gain intensity in 2014, so as to become a country-wide revolutionary process by the end of the decade. Algeria and Iraq, only slightly shaken in 2011, witnessed country-wide protests that led to the resignation of governments in 2019. Sudan, which was also quiet in 2011, got its revolution in 2019 and sent its long-time dictator to jail. These examples show that while democracy does not necessarily lead to stability, the authoritarian bargain does not last forever, and the outcome of a revolution is not always chaotic.

In Morocco and Jordan, two monarchies whose leadership seemed to have received the popular message and engaged in constitutional reforms in 2011, social movements and protests were observed by the end of the 2010's and they led to an authoritarian upgrading by the regimes. As for Syria, the state proved unable to regain full control of its lands and authority, and security and economic troubles loom ahead even if the Assad regime claims to have the upper hand. Egypt, whose regime boasts of having recovered stability, is also struggling with growing economic and demographic problems and a continued insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula. Yemen is in a perpetual state of civil war and division, and Libya is fragmented and partly destroyed, situations amplified by regional and external interventions. Even Saudi Arabia, the master status-quo player, is experiencing its own changes: the ascent of Mohamed bin Salman in 2017 is transforming the monarchy's foundations, and the successive oil crashes are making it difficult for the ruling family to sustain its way of life. These examples, in turn, are a reminder that repression and war may and may not calm things down, but they do not resolve the deep rooted problems.

Hence, it is safer to talk about the Arab Uprisings over time and not of a one-time Arab Spring and to see recent events as part of an ongoing moment. At the time of printing this book, revolts continue to threaten the palaces of Arab rulers. The authors looked back at the last decade and attempted to understand the many fluctuations in power and position, from the quest for a new social contract and the birth of a modern Arab state to the political, social, and economic dimensions of the changes and the pathway for the future.

In the first chapter, Lina Khatib considers the emergence of a new political classification of regimes post-2011. While many political systems have not changed significantly since the start of the uprisings or merely witnessed cosmetic reforms, other systems have undergone notable transformations. These transformations can be broadly grouped under five categories: the failing state, the military state, the democratizing state, the autocratic state, and the mandated state. Tunisia stands apart in formulating a new post-revolutionary system that is taking the country toward democracy, but other countries have seen political regression toward autocracy. A number of countries have come to be dominated by the interests of foreign powers as they grapple with raging wars. Other countries that did not witness uprisings in 2011 have maintained their political systems in theory but in practice have undergone significant changes.

In the second chapter, Amro Ali looks at the changing nature of the state-citizen relationship post-2011 and whether a new social contract is emerging. For Ali, the protest cries of karama (dignity) in 2011 saw the emergence of a new subjectivity in the Arab world that birthed a new citizenship paradigm and elevated the citizenry as a compelling sovereign collective. Karama developed not only as a form of bottom-up universal humanism but also independently outside the confines of academia, religious-secular debates, and even human rights organizations. For many decades, karama had been reserved for the loftiness of the nation and liberation struggles, whereas karama for the individual

[1] *"Arab states" in this book refers to the members of the Arab League of States that witnessed popular uprisings from 2011 on.*

meant a moral virtue that constituted an apolitical being. In 2011, however, the understanding of karama made a phenomenal leap from the moral into the political realm and thus became a political force in its own right. Karama developed into a self-contained movement, a philosophy that people yearned to develop, encapsulating a story that expands the moral imagination and asks its protagonists to imbibe the rhythm of life with a higher temporal calling. It is the citizen's inherent worthiness and inalienable right to make the social contract.

In the third chapter, Youssef Cherif evaluates the social movements that have rocked the region since 2011 and the revolutionary state of the Arab Uprisings, portrayed as a conflict between the established Arab League postcolonial regimes and their younger populations. These regimes, themselves largely the product of youth revolutions from the first half of the 20th century, used oppressive instruments against their citizens in the name of broader causes such as Arab unity, independence, state building, and so on. Youth movements continued to emerge during the second half of the 20th century to be systematically crushed by the central governments. The year 2011 thus marked a breaking point with a new generation using both street and online activism to confront the ruling establishments and partly succeeding in toppling them. Cherif uses qualitative examples from eleven MENA countries to show that the struggle continues, a decade later. Protesters are using new techniques, have new goals, and evolve in multiple spaces of contention. The outcomes of their movements are numerous, from partial inclusion to lethal exclusion.

In the fourth chapter, Özlem Tür considers the basics of the political economy of the MENA region. She looks at the interaction between political structures and economic performance and argues that politics dominates economics in the region. As long as the Arab states continue to prioritize regime survival and reproduce the ruling coalitions, composed of security apparatuses and crony capitalists, the economic performance of these countries will continue to be negative or unimpressive.

In the fifth and final chapter, which follows the fourth thematically, Nader Kabbani looks at the international political economy of the MENA region since 2011 and gives perspectives for the future. For Kabbani, the popular protests that unfolded across the Arab region in the 2010s were a response to the Arab states' inability to keep their end of a social contract with their citizens, an authoritarian bargain in which citizens exchanged political rights for economic entitlements. Ten years on, most Arab states have opted to increase repression and authoritarian control rather than provide citizens with greater political participation, economic opportunities, and social justice. He examines the economic dimensions of the Arab social contract and analyzes how it can be amended to begin the process of designing a more inclusive society. According to Kabbani, this will require a combination of policies, including reducing reliance on the public sector; delineating specific sectors where the private sector can operate free from political interference; allowing the social sector to reclaim its role of providing services and supporting low-income communities; and engaging in an honest dialogue with citizens on the financial constraints facing their states. In the end, it will take citizens working together with the state to establish a new, truly inclusive and sustainable social contract that can form the basis of a modern Arab state.

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CHAPTER 1

What has Changed in the Arab World's Political Systems?

Lina Khatib

The 10 years since the Arab Spring uprisings have witnessed important, wide-ranging developments in the political systems of the Arab world. While many political systems have not changed significantly since the start of the uprisings or merely witnessed cosmetic reforms (e.g., in Jordan, Bahrain or Kuwait), other systems have undergone some notable transformations. The transformations can be broadly grouped under five categories: the failing state, the military state, the democratizing state, the autocratic state, and the mandated state. Tunisia stands apart in formulating a new post-revolutionary system that is taking the country toward democracy, but other countries like Egypt have seen political regression toward autocracy. Syria, Yemen, and Libya have come to be dominated by the interests of foreign powers as they grapple with raging wars. Other countries that did not witness uprisings in 2011 have maintained their political systems in theory but in practice have undergone significant changes. Saudi Arabia's autocracy has become personified in the figure of the crown prince, while Lebanon's "consociational democracy" has given way to the rise of a regime dominated by one political party with the acquiescence of others whether out of pragmatism or coercion, leading the country toward the path of a failed state. In short, the Arab world is experiencing wildly divergent political systems that challenge notions that the region's political environment is either static or overshadowed by conflict.

This chapter focuses on the major changes in the political systems of Arab countries since the 2011 uprisings. The changes are not necessarily the result of the uprisings but the result of an accumulation of factors that have been building up over time. While this chapter presents a snapshot of the region at the time of writing, it is important to note that even political systems that appear to be the most predictable carry the changes that continue to play out.

Varieties of Political Systems in the Arab World

When speaking of political systems, the chapter uses Pennock (1966) as a framework with the term "political system" to describe the political environment in a given country. This includes its institutions and organized structures as well as "the informal and semiformal political institutions that provide the means (if any) for popular participation in politics," including "elections, political parties, and semi-political organizations such as labor unions, cooperatives, religious organizations, businessmen's and producers' organizations, youth organizations, and other voluntary organizations exerting political influence" (p. 417). It also includes a country's political culture, at the heart of which the extent of respect for a citizen's individuality, rights, and duties.

Political systems vary widely on the spectrum of autocracy versus democracy. While this chapter does not characterize different systems according to particular typologies, it is still useful to begin with a brief discussion of the characteristics of the political systems most prevalent in the Arab world. Autocracy is perhaps the most clearly visible political system in the region. It can manifest in strong and weak formal institutions, but it denies space for genuine political participation and freedom of expression and suppresses individual rights. It is a closed political space in which civil society and political oppositions are stifled. Much of the Arab world remains ruled under such a system though to varied degrees. Qatar, for example, allows a greater degree of freedom of expression than the UAE does, but both of them are absolute monarchies with little role for civil society.

Military governments are another prevalent political system in the Arab world. Jackman (1976) described the main characteristics of military governments as centered on the military, after originally coming to power through a coup, justifying its political intervention as "necessary for national reconstruction and economic growth" (p. 1078). He argued that military governments typically seek to maintain privileges for the military and the middle class even at the expense of wider social interest and to increase spending on defense but not on civilian programs, and thus

> are unlikely to engage in programs that would help mobilize the lower classes, for to do so would be to create additional contenders for power and additional demands on resources, which would constitute a threat to both the middle class and their representatives, the officer corps. (p. 1079)

Thus, although military governments do not necessarily have to be autocratic, they often result in the creation of closed political spaces similar to those seen in absolute monarchies and nonmilitary dictatorships.

Many Arab countries have relatively more open political spaces allowing for varied degrees of political participation. Wampler and Avritzer (2004) stated that "participatory publics are comprised of organized citizens who seek to overcome social and political exclusion through public deliberation, the promotion of accountability, and the implementation of their policy preferences" (p. 292). Such participation takes place in democratic settings and can help drive reform and counter political abuse by the ruling establishment. Different countries in the region experience such involvement in the political space by organized actors like political parties or unions and civil society to wildly different extents.

A central dimension of all political systems is the social contract, "the framework for state-society relations in which citizens recognize the state's right to government with certain obligations placed on the state in return" (El-Haddad, 2020, p. 1). As Amro Ali will show in his chapter, no assessment of the politics of the Arab world can be done without examining the constant process of negotiation between the citizen and the state and the tensions people face when they reject the prevailing social contract in nondemocratic settings. Rulers often try to impose social contracts that help keep their grip on power and can change the social contract for that purpose.

Prevailing Political Systems

Discussing major changes in political systems in the Arab world must be done in the context of the broader picture across different countries in the region, many of which have generally seen either little change or mere cosmetic reforms. Some countries that witnessed protests in 2011 managed to contain them by engaging in cosmetic reforms or increasing the scope of co-optation of political oppositions and civil society. Unlike in Jordan, which dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in 2020 (The New Arab, 2020), in Morocco, space was opened up for the MB-inspired Justice and Development Party (PJD) to play a central role in the government, and the constitution was amended but only by a committee appointed by the king, and behind closed doors (Sater, 2011). While crackdowns on media freedom continued, the Makhzen (i.e., the deep state) ensured that civil society organizations kept operating but only allowed those loyal to it to do so, thereby giving the impression of political diversity when all political openings were carefully curated by the ruling regime.

In Jordan, a similar process of cosmetic reform was undertaken through constitutional amendments following the protests of 2011, but power was firmly kept in the hands of the monarch. Jordan continues to witness protests mainly about the economic situation, and the political establishment often responds to them by reshuffling the government (The New Arab, 2019). Since 2011, Jordan has seen eight prime ministers in office. As in Morocco, media freedom is curtailed and civil society is also largely co-opted.

Oman also saw protests in 2011. In all three countries, although some of the protests called for the overthrow of the regime, they were mainly about economic conditions. Oman contained its protests by granting citizens more economic support and implementing anti-corruption measures but continued to curtail freedom of expression and censor the media (Aboudi, 2014). The death of Sultan Qaboos did not result in a change in the political system in Oman, and the Sultanate remains an absolute monarchy.

Qatar's media supported most of the protests of 2011, but the country itself did not witness demonstrations. Since then, Qatar has engaged in some human rights reforms partly because of international pressure and partly to win international support, especially as it was backing democratic movements in the region, but the reforms did not go very far, limited to some labor reforms with no change on the political level (Human Rights Watch, 2020a).

More recently, Sudan and Algeria witnessed large-scale protests in 2019 demanding political change. In Sudan, the protests resulted in the ousting of dictator Omar al-Bashir. Later on, Sudan's transitional government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North rebel group signed a deal effectively ending 30 years of rule under Islamic law (Alamin, 2020). It remains too early to tell if the political system in the country will change significantly as it enters a transitional period fraught with economic fragility and security concerns. In Algeria, the protests succeeded in preventing Abdelaziz Bouteflika from running for a fifth presidential term but, as in Sudan, have not been able to shake the military's hold over the political establishment (Boubekeur, 2020).

In contrast to the above, five types of countries in the Arab world today mark a distinction from the political status quo that existed before 2011. The transformations in their political systems are not necessarily a product of the 2011 uprisings. Rather, they are the result of wider domestic and external drivers. What is notable about those transformations is that even though in some of them the overall characteristics of the political systems have not changed, they present fundamental breaks with the political culture of their status quos. As such, the aim of the following sections is to reflect on the past context in each case and examine what has transformed over the past decade or so. The analysis shows that even political systems that look most predictable and continuous can still undergo significant changes whether positive or negative.

Lebanon's Failing State

Lebanon has had the same political system since its independence in 1943, when the National Pact was announced as a measure to ensure representation in key leadership positions for the country's dominant sects. Since then, according to the pact, the president has always been Christian Maronite, the prime minister a Muslim Sunni, and the speaker of the house a Muslim Shiite. Although the system was meant to enshrine power sharing, it did not safeguard Lebanon against political divisions and violence. Lebanon came to witness a short civil war in 1958 followed by 15 years of another civil war that started in 1975 during which the country's different sects fought one another and intra-sect violence was commonplace.

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The aerial view of Beirut port, which was completely destroyed on 04 August 2020 in a massive explosion that further strained the livelihoods of many Lebanese.

The Lebanese Civil War illustrated that a system based on sectarian allocation of power was no guarantee for stability; however, the end of the war did not usher in a new system to take its place. Instead, the number of seats in parliament was expanded from 99 to 128 to accommodate the new political actors who had risen during the war. Parliamentary seats were also divided equally between Muslims and Christians under this new configuration, brokered as part of the Taef Accord in 1990, which ended the civil war. Although the Taef Accord stated that Lebanon would work toward replacing its sectarian-based political model with a bicameral model where parliamentarians would not represent any sects and where an upper house would be created to accommodate sect leaders, the bicameral model was never implemented (Muhanna, 2012).

Not only did the power sharing model in Lebanon not protect the country from instability, it also contributed to weakening its state institutions. Before the country became a republic (first under a French mandate in 1920 then as an independent nation in 1943), Lebanon's sectarian leaders presented themselves as the guardians of their communities' interests. Members of their communities would go to them to settle disputes, seek employment, and acquire basic services. The sectarian-based political system that came to be enshrined in Lebanon's post-independence constitution modernized the country's politics but kept this patron-client relationship between leaders and citizens in place (Cammett, 2015). Representatives of different sects took up government positions but primarily used their roles to bolster their own personal status and deliver rents to their communities instead of prioritizing the national interest. The chaos of the civil war years intensified this dynamic, which persisted and became routinized after the civil war ended. State institutions became a means to funnel national resources to particular communities at the expense of others, thereby increasing social inequalities, and to increase the wealth of the elite.

The use of the state as a patronage "bank" kept its institutions weak and unable to deliver adequately to citizens. Sectarian representatives benefitted from this weakness to present themselves, like their predecessors had done pre-1920, as the guarantors of their communities' well-being. This dynamic lowered citizen's trust in state institutions. During elections, the same or similar faces from the ruling elites from each sect would win seats with relative ease. The civil war had paved the way for new sectarian leaders to emerge as warlords and militia heads. They, alongside the old elites, sometimes took over state functions and profited from them. For example, following Christian-Druze battles in the 1980s, the Druze Progressive Socialist Party controlled houses abandoned by Christians in the Chouf Mountains and rented them out to displaced people into the 1990s. Patronage therefore played a central role in maintaining the political system in Lebanon despite its negative impact on the social contract and the state.

Lebanon today continues to witness the dynamics described above with its political system unchanged in terms of its design. However, a major change in the past 10 years has been the de facto replacement of consensus among sectarian leaders as a key feature of this system with the dominance of one party, Hezbollah, over the country's political and security landscape (Dingel, 2013). This rise of Hezbollah has been building up gradually over decades and is partly a product of a political system in which the mechanism of power sharing is flawed. Hezbollah took advantage of the weakness of state institutions to rally its constituents, who mainly came from impoverished areas in southern and eastern Lebanon, around it as a provider of social services and security. It then used its possession of weapons, which the Lebanese state permitted on the basis that Hezbollah was playing a role in defending the country from external aggression, to intimidate its opponents and increase its political influence. In the past, no one political party was able to dominate the Lebanese political scene. As Ziad Majed wrote about Hezbollah in 2010:

> The party was able to transcend all the barriers and limits that impeded other sectarian forces before it in terms of institutionalization, ideology, rhetoric, mobilization ability, financial capacities, foreign relations, weapons and media, and the power emanating from it. Consequently, the concept of hegemony seems to genuinely prevail, at least when it comes to its role in shaping political stances, forming political blocs, and feelings of belonging and safety. (p. 12)

Despite Hezbollah's rise breaking with the country's political culture, other political parties continued to be complicit in keeping the political system alive because they benefitted from it. But with time, the accumulation of negative factors meant that Lebanon began approaching a failed state scenario. Rotberg's (2003) list of characteristics of failed states fully applies to Lebanon:

> Failed states exhibit flawed institutions . . . The judiciary is derivative of the executive rather than being independent, and citizens know that they cannot rely on the court system for significant redress or remedy, especially against the state . . . Failed states are typified by deteriorating or destroyed infrastructures . . . public facilities become increasingly decrepit and neglected . . . the privilege of making real money when everything else is deteriorating is confined to clients of the ruling elite or to especially favored external entrepreneurs. The nation-state's responsibility to maximize the well-being and personal prosperity of all of its citizens is conspicuously absent, if it ever existed . . . Corruption flourishes in many states, but in failed states it often does so on an unusually destructive scale. (pp. 6–8)

In response, Lebanese citizens began to mobilize, initially calling for political and economic reform, particularly in 2015, but then by 2019 they began demanding the end of the sectarian political system. This alarmed Lebanon's elites because it was the first time they were faced with a wide-ranging popular challenge to their authority. The authorities in turn responded by increasing crackdowns on freedom of expression, especially in relation to criticizing the state and its figures (Human Rights Watch, 2020b). This marked a shift from Lebanon's previous relative tolerance in its political space as compared to most other Arab countries. People in Lebanon began to refer to the political system in their country as a "regime."

The protests were mainly informal, but they also witnessed some formal mobilization. Labor movements and trade unions had been co-opted or decimated by ruling parties, but some like the Lawyers Syndicate began to mobilize from 2019, for reasons including to safeguard freedom of expression and association in Lebanon (Bou Khater, 2020). Some independent civil society groups also emerged in 2015 and 2019, but civil society does not currently have the capacity to change the existing political system (AbiYaghi et al., 2019). Since 2015, there have been attempts at creating new independent political parties, but they have been met with strong resistance from the political establishment. In the 2018 parliamentary elections, only one independent candidate managed to win a parliamentary seat among reports of civil society accusations of electoral fraud (France24, 2018).

The political establishment continued to rely on patronage to appease their followers, who were taking to the streets, but with the rulers' growing greed and lack of viable economic policies for the country, by 2019 the Lebanese economy had been devastated, which meant that patrons had access to fewer resources, including resources acquired through state institutions, to grant their followers. At present, Lebanon is grappling with rising popular anger and further economic devastation, especially with the coronavirus pandemic and the Beirut port explosion of August 4, 2020, further eroding the country's economic stability and any remaining confidence in the state. With the political establishment's stubbornness in the face of this popular anger, the sectarian political system continues. This illustrates the limitation of the Taef Agreement that Bennett (2013) described: "What resulted was not an elimination of confessionalism but a reproduction of confessionalism under a new, albeit more balanced, formula, which perpetuated competition among religious groups and left the door open to further divisions and are lapse into conflict" (p. 8).

In the aftermath of the 2015 protests, Lebanon experienced a period of deadlock as politicians disagreed over the formation of a new cabinet following the resignation of the existing one in response to the protests. Gade (2016) commented at the time that "The deadlock in the representative institutions has given additional power to the main sectarian leaders, who negotiate informal arrangements amongst themselves instead of returning to constitutional politics" (p. 3). Five years later, following the new wave of protests that began in 2019, the country faced another deadlock, but this time the dynamic was different as one party sought to impose its way on others. The rise of Hezbollah as Lebanon's most powerful party highlights how the balance of power between ruling elites, which the system is meant to support, has been shaken. The days of the system being one of no winners or losers are over.

Egypt's Military State

The short-lived presidency of Mohammad Morsi, a civilian, has proven to be the exception in Egypt since becoming a republic at the hands of Mohamed Naguib in 1953 and then Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954. A military officer, Nasser had presented himself as the socialist rescuer of the country's poor from the inequalities that the monarchy in Egypt had instilled since Sultan Fuad declared himself King of Egypt in 1922, which came on top of existing inequalities resulting from feudalism and colonialism first under the Ottomans and then the British. Nasser's two presidential successors, Anwar al-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, were also from the military establishment. During their decades of rule, the Egyptian military's role exceeded national defense to exert significant influence over the economy and operate without public or political scrutiny (Kurtzer & Svenstrup, 2012).

The Octagon is the new headquarters of the Egyptian Ministry of Defense and is set to become the largest in the Middle East. It is located in the new administrative capital in Greater Cairo.

Officially, Egypt was a republic, but its political system was autocratic. Under Egypt's longest-serving president, Hosni Mubarak, Egypt witnessed crackdowns on freedom of expression and political opposition, but there was still some room for manoeuvers for the country's civil society, media, artists, and opposition politicians, who found oblique ways of engaging in public critique. However, the country's ruling political party, the National Democratic Party, and the militia as well as their cronies in the business community, contributed to the continuation of a gap between the elite and Egypt's poor, who constituted a significant part of the population. The socialist values of fairness that military rule was meant to safeguard were shown to be no more than a façade to justify the control of the military establishment.

The military became Egypt's primary development actor. The military came to dominate state institutions like the Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI), Ministry of Military Production (MoMP), and National Service Projects Organization (under the Ministry of Defense). In the 2000s, the military also acquired public sector enterprises, some of which were sold to businesses owned by military officers. As Abul-Magd et al. (2020) wrote:

> No single law establishes a foundation or regulatory structure to govern the economic enterprises of the Egyptian military. Rather, each entity or group of entities traces its creation to a separate law or decree issued by the president, minister of defense, or minister of military production. (p. 12)

This gave the military a wide space in which to grow its economic influence without accountability or transparency.

In addition to the army's economic power, Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) came into prominence as a counter-revolutionary force in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising that deposed Mubarak, whom the SCAF forced to hand over power. Although Mohammad Morsi won the first presidential election after Mubarak, it became clear during his time in office that the SCAF was not going to tolerate his presence in power for long. The election of another officer, Abd el-Fattah el-Sisi, as president in 2014 was presented by the SCAF as the result of a national referendum in response to popular demand. In reality, it was a move orchestrated by the military, often described as a "popular coup" blending popular protest with a military coup.

El-Sisi had courted popular support on the basis that he would rescue Egypt from the transgressions of Mohammad Morsi, who had, in December 2012, issued a presidential decree that put him above the law. However, following a brief period of hope during the rule of the SCAF and Morsi that had seen some of Egypt's civil society actors and activists elected to parliament or launched independent political and media initiatives, Egypt under el-Sisi regressed to an autocracy at a level greater than what was the case even under Mubarak. The Egyptian military has come to be perceived as the country's deep state. One could therefore describe Egypt as a military state masquerading as a republic.

A key feature of Egypt's existing political system is that it secures power for the military by entrenching its new political privileges in the law. This was most vividly seen in the constitutional amendments that were ratified in April 2019. Article 200 gave the military the right to "preserve the constitution and democracy, protect the basic principles of the state and its civil nature, and protect the people's rights and freedoms" (Hassan, 2019, para. 5). This is a huge departure from the past, when, as Mustafa (2019) wrote, all previous constitutions since 1882 limited the military's role to "protecting the country and preserving its security and territorial integrity" (para. 5). Under this new system, the army can block a civilian from becoming president and arrest protesters in the name of protecting the national interest. The amendments also allow el-Sisi to remain in power until 2030. In addition, the presidential decree of October 27, 2014 categorized almost all public institutions as military installations, which means that "all crimes committed there can be prosecuted before military courts (including retroactively)" (Grimm, 2015, p. 3).

The political system in Egypt today is closed with no space for the opposition's political parties or freedom of expression. Under el-Sisi's rule, the government cracked down hard on the MB, listing it as a terrorist organization in 2013. The crackdown resulted in the splintering of the MB and the elimination of any political role it can play under the current regime as its Freedom and Justice

Party has been banned. Crackdowns also reach wider segments of society, including secular activists and social media influencers. Amnesty International (2018) described the system as an "open-air prison for critics" where the "security services have been ruthless in clamping down on any remaining political, social, or even cultural independent spaces" (para. 2).

Freedom House's 2020 report also painted a grim picture of political rights and civil liberties in Egypt, highlighting the nonexistence of opposition political parties, tight control of the electoral process to prevent challenge to the status quo, and the arrests of people involved in political movements criticizing the government. Such arrests were widely seen following limited popular protests against corruption in September 2019. The report also references how the law is used to control press freedom. Two laws ratified in 2018 show that Egypt is witnessing what can be termed "rule by law" as opposed to "rule of law."

According to Freedom House (2020b):

> The Media Regulation Law prescribes prison sentences for journalists who "incite violence" and permit censorship without judicial approval, among other provisions. The Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law is ostensibly intended to combat extremism and terrorism, but it allows authorities to block any website considered to be a threat to national security, a broad stipulation that is vulnerable to abuse. (para. 26)

In this closed space, civil society is co-opted. As Mansour (2017) described, "The current regime wants to limit civil society to philanthropic activities and provision of services and to have state agencies closely watch CSOs [Civil Society Organization]" (p. 20). This negates one of the fundamental roles for civil society as a space for citizen association and mobilization. As with other cases described above, the regime uses the law to control civil society activity. The protest law passed in 2013:

> limits the right to strike and the freedom of assembly on pain of severe penalties. It subjects all collective action to prior police authorization, specifying that the organizers of any demonstration must present themselves at the responsible police station with their itinerary, the number of participants, and the names of those in charge seven days in advance. (Grimm, 2015, p. 3)

The law has also been applied retroactively, leading to the arrest of some activists who had taken part in the 2011 protests.

Egypt's political system is also supported by securitization, where the regime uses national security to tighten its grip on power. Counterterrorism operations in Sinai and elsewhere in Egypt are used by the military and security services to cultivate legitimacy for their wider actions, especially that foreign countries like the United Kingdom and the United States have granted Egypt military assistance under the banner of stabilization. This assistance is also because of Egypt's provision of security for Israel's western borders. Counterterrorism has also become a political tool to prevent political mobilization. In 2015, Egypt passed a new terrorism law that allows "criminalizing private, ineffectual incitement" and that defined terrorism as including "using force or threats to "disrupt general order" or "harm national unity," which could conceivably include civil disobedience" (Human Rights Watch, 2015, para. 19).

Egypt's closed political system leaves citizens with few, rather precarious, avenues to express a sense of agency. There are few remaining independent media organizations, like Mada Masr, but their staff are subjected to recurring harassment. Another avenue is local community governance initiatives, but these have been subjected to crackdowns as well as co-optation by the military as the "new regime has attempted to recentralize authority under the army's patronage" (El-Meehy, 2017, p. 6). Facing these avenues is a military state that has become one of the most repressive across the Arab world.

The Democratizing State in Tunisia

Tunisia stands in stark contrast to the rest of the Arab world in being the only Arab country witnessing a continuing democratic transition. Tunisia's transition—as democratic transitions always are—is neither linear nor easy. The country is still struggling with a weak economy (World Bank, 2019), with unemployment reaching 18% in 2020 (Trading Economics, 2020) and economic growth projected to contract to -8% by the end of 2020 because of the impact of the coronavirus crisis (Williams, 2020). Tunisia continues to suffer from inadequate rural development, with ongoing debate about decentralization as a potential reform yet without consensus on the issue. This has often ended up increasing social and political tensions around inequalities rather than easing them off (International Crisis Group, 2019). Both the state of the economy and of development as well political tensions have contributed to a downward trajectory in voter participation in elections—down from 67.72% in the parliamentary elections of 2014 to 41.7% in 2019 (Election Guide, 2020).

After the revolution of 2011, Tunisia witnessed the proliferation of political parties, but the vast majority of them lack experience or clear platforms and strategies, which has seen many parties disappear after one electoral round, further contributing to lessening citizen trust in the political process. These factors, among others, like continued corruption and successive governments unable to provide rapid solutions to Tunisia's problems, have often led to government reshuffles as a way to respond to citizen demands for reform and economic recovery; eleven cabinets have been formed since 2011. Such frequent reshuffling has made it difficult for Tunisia to formulate and implement policies that

would aid its long-term recovery and growth or to instill seamless cooperation between the country's different state institutions. One of the consequences of this has been weakness in the security sector due to lack of full sharing of information between different security agencies (Wehrey, 2020). Particularly from 2015–2018, such competition among the agencies—a legacy of the "coup-proofing" model under the ousted regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali—contributed to preventing the detection of planned terrorist activity in the country.

Regardless of all these challenges, Tunisia still stands out from the rest of the Arab world by having a new political system in place that replaced the autocracy of pre-2011 with a participatory model. In this system, political parties, civil society and labor unions play central roles. Civil society in Tunisia has space to be independent and is able to operate outside of elite co-optation. Civil society has played an important role in national dialogue, which contributed to the brokering of the "historic compromise" between the Islamist party Ennahda and secularists in the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution. This cooperation is credited for staving off potential violence resulting from tensions over power. There is also a degree of cooperation between state institutions and civil society, with the latter playing a role in holding the government accountable. For example, the civil society organization (CSO) al-Bawsala set up a project to monitor municipalities, and the CSO Mourakiboun engages in election monitoring. As such, civil society contributes to state resilience and democratic transition in the country (Kerrou, 2017).

Tunisian unions play a central role in policy as influencers and government watchdogs. In 2013, a group of four associations, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), the bar association (Tunisian Order of Lawyers) and the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) formed the National Dialogue Quartet that worked on bringing together different political groups to draft a new constitution (Ben-Hassine, 2018). Among these, the UGTT remains the most powerful actor in influencing politics and policy. For example, new cabinet formations usually have to have UGTT blessing. And the UGTT has organized nationwide strikes to protest government policies, such as a strike in 2018 to demand higher wages.

Unlike Iraq after 2003 and Libya after 2011, Tunisia has not implemented a political isolation law that would exclude "ancient regime" figures from the political process. Instead, Tunisia banned some former officials from running for election for 5 years in the aftermath of the revolution but allowed those who have not been tried or convicted to do so. Also, "Tunisians have emphasized a targeted process of transitional justice, prosecuting on an individual basis; otherwise, they are resolute that only the ballot box should exclude these figures from public life" (Sharqiyeh, 2015, p. 65). This approach based on ope-

In 2014, Tunisia signed a progressive Constitution that was hailed as a compromise between identity and modernity.

ning up the political space to old regime figures contributed to the brokering of the "historic compromise" between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes, particularly as neither side had played a leading role in the 2011 Revolution. When the revolution began, most Ennahda leaders were in exile outside Tunisia, and some figures who later formed Nidaa Tounes were still affiliated with Ben Ali's party the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (RCD) (Boubekeur, 2016). In addition to the avoidance of a form of "deBaathification" encouraging such political bargaining, it has allowed the retention of people with technical expertise in the civil service and public offices. This has prevented state institutions from being hollowed out like what happened in Iraq and Libya, which contributed to conflicts in those countries following the removal of their old regimes.

Tunisia's political system is also distinguished by the presence of political parties that have come to engage in political processes like elections on the basis of pragmatism overriding ideology. Ennahda is a prime example of an Islamist party transforming into a pragmatic one. Although Ennahda initially tried to influence the drafting of the constitution after 2011 to have the law in Tunisia be based on sharia, it abandoned this goal after intense pushback from the country's secularists (Meddeb, 2019). It also became mindful of how many ministerial and other public office positions its members occupied because it did not want to be seen as dominating the political scene. By 2014, it came to choose parliamentary candidates who had technocratic expertise, mindful of the importance of presenting an electoral platform that addressed the country's economic and societal needs (Boubekeur, 2016). It also entered an alliance with its former political opponent the secular party Nidaa Tounes that allowed the two to share power in parliament. There are dozens of other political parties in Tunisia that operate freely as the law does not constrain formal political participation.

Elections in Tunisia are also fair and free, as confirmed by international election observers who have been observing the elections there since the 2011 Revolution. This author acted as one such observer with the Carter Center in the 2014 parliamentary elections, when it was notable how the military, municipalities, civil society, and political parties worked together to ensure the electoral process was safe, transparent, and fair. The approval of having international observers throughout the process (Szmolka, 2015) is in itself not a common feature of elections in the Arab world, while having a political milieu that is open rather than closed is also rare in the region.

Although Tunisia's transition has not yet consolidated democracy in the country, and despite the political and socioeconomic challenges it is facing, it possesses essential ingredients for a nascent democratic political system in the Arab world.

Autocratic State in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been an absolute monarchy since its founding in 1932. The country was created by a sole founder whose name it has taken, and since the death of this founder, Abdulaziz Al Saud, in 1953, the kingdom has been run by the same ruling family, with the position of king taken by one of Saud's sons, passed from one brother to another. At the time of writing, King Salman is one of the last remaining brothers to assume the position of monarch.

Saudi Arabia's political system came to be dominated by the conservative religious ideology of Wahhabism, especially after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, which Saudi Arabia saw as a threat to its own dominance in the Islamic world and sparked competition between the two countries to spread their own Islamic ideologies across the Middle East and further afield in a bid to secure foreign influence. With Wahhabism being a key component of Saudi Arabia's projection of power abroad as well as domestically, clerics came to rise in influence in the country. An already conservative society became even more so, with cinemas closed, segregation of the sexes tightly imposed, and social freedoms more restricted.

Although the country is composed of tribes, modern Saudi Arabia prioritized the national identity over tribal identity, and tribes have not played a direct political role in the kingdom as they have in other countries in the Gulf such as in Qatar or Yemen (Maisel, 2014). However, Saudi Arabia's political system came to be informally based on consensus, mainly between members of the royal family but also including the sheikhs of major tribes and clerics, with tribal leaders accepting the social contract based on rentierism. As Ben Hubbard (2020) described, "family respect for seniority shaped how the kingdom was ruled . . . Under the king, the country was run by senior princes who shared the main portfolios: internal security, the military, the National Guard, and foreign affairs. They made major decisions by consensus" (para. 60). Government positions were carefully distributed to maintain balance between different branches of the royal family. For example, Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz, from the Sudairi branch of the family, headed the Ministry of Interior till his death in 2012, while Prince Saud Al-Faisal, from another branch, was foreign minister till his death in 2015 (Carey, 2020). The formal political sphere was and continues to be severely restricted. Political parties are banned, civil society is not recognized, and there are no elections for national bodies (only local elections). The king is also the prime minister (and the crown prince is the deputy prime minister) and, as an absolute monarch, performs legislative, executive, and judicial functions.

A member of the Saudi forces stands to attention during a visit by Yemeni Prime Minister Khaled Bahah at the Saudi-led coalition military base in Yemen's southern embattled city of Aden.

Although Saudi Arabia's political system officially remains as described above, the way power is projected in Saudi Arabia and how governance plays out have changed with the rise of Mohammed bin Salman as Crown Prince. This rise saw the ambitious prince change the system to centralize power in his hands using institutional means. Centralizing power in this way strips other royals of political privileges, which is important as under Saudi Arabia's informal constitution (the country does not have a formal written constitution), the king "can be removed if a majority of the royal family calls for his ouster" (Library of Congress, 2006, p. 19).

At the direction of the crown prince, the royal court (headed by the king) has expanded its mandate to sometimes override those of other public bodies, such as the Royal Court absorbing the prosecution service. Since 2017, the royal court has also been controlling the Saudi National Guard. A new entity, the Presidency of State Security, now contains the General Directorate of Investigation domestic intelligence agency and the special counterterrorism forces, which used to be overseen by the Ministry of Interior (Human Rights Watch, 2020c).

The rule of law nominally became another tool for the crown prince to increase his hold on power. In 2017, the crown prince used anti-corruption accusations to both present himself to his people and the international community as a reformist as well as to suppress political challengers. The world was stunned as prominent figures in Saudi Arabia were detained in the Ritz hotel in Riyadh in 2017 or thrown in jail, with many reportedly forced to hand over large sums of money to the state after being accused of accumulating this wealth through corruption. Among those who were detained are Head of National Guard Prince Miteb bin Abdullah, billionaire investor Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, former Riyadh governor Prince Turki bin Abdullah, ousted economy minister Adel Fakieh, and former chief of the royal court, Khalid al-Tuwaijri (Kalin, 2019).

Transparency International described the purge as targeting "members of the royal family, prominent businessmen, former Saudi officials, senior clerics, public intellectuals, academics, and human rights and women's rights activists" (Rahman, 2020, p. 9), pointing out that the process of selection and detention was done without formal investigations, charges, or trials. In 2019, the crown prince justified the purge to the New York Times by saying that corruption drained 10% of government spending and that Saudi Arabia could not sustain its position in the G20 under such circumstances (Friedman, 2017). However, corruption was not the only accusation hurled at the detainees. Among them were former Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and King Salman's full brother Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who were both detained on the grounds of plotting a coup (Carey, 2020).

But while Thomas Friedman described the change in Saudi Arabia as the country's "Arab Spring," huge distinctions exist between what was going on in Saudi Arabia and what other Arab countries had witnessed in 2011. Perhaps the most major distinction is that while the Arab uprisings of 2011 were all about citizens taking to the streets to demand change in the system, in Saudi Arabia the system remained and changes within it were led by the crown prince not by the people. Not only that, the crown prince persecuted people who had been demanding some of the same reforms he implemented. Women's rights is a key example. Women in Saudi Arabia had for decades been campaigning for rights such as the removal of male guardianship and being permitted to drive (see Cherif's chapter on youth). The kingdom eventually implemented some of these reforms like the right to drive (the male guardianship system largely remains) but arrested many of the women who had been asking for these rights (Human Rights Watch, 2020c). The arrests came on the basis of accusations that some of these women posed "a threat to state security for their 'contact with foreign entities with the aim of undermining the country's stability and social fabric' (Amnesty International, 2018, para. 6). This scenario can be read as a message from the ruler that the reforms were not granted because of pressure from below, and therefore were to discourage further social mobilization. Allam (2019) added that this is also an illustration of the "model of state feminism, a feminism minus the feminists. Under this model, the crown prince offers limited advancements in women's rights to appeal to the Western audience and to consolidate his power amid a shifting economic and political landscape" (para. 6).

Economic concerns about the long-term viability of a country almost completely dependent on a depleting resource, oil, led to the launch of Saudi Vision 2030, an ambitious program of social and economic initiatives meant to transform the country's future and secure its competitiveness in the international market. Mindful of the need for a skilled Saudi workforce to bring this vision into fruition, Saudi Arabia embarked on a process of rapid social reforms that would make the country an attractive home for this workforce, such as in the domain of entertainment. But such a process is completely co-opted by the state. Only state institutions are allowed to lead the process of social opening up in the country. As such, clerics, who had hitherto enjoyed significant influence over Saudi Arabia's social policies, came to be side-lined.

Overseen by the newly created General Entertainment Authority, concert venues and cinemas began to open, the latter through a public-private partnership with the government's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund, which makes cinemas a profit-generating source for the state (Kinninmont, 2018). The reduction in the role of clerics and appeal to the youth demographic through entertainment that:

> terminates the social contract system while narrowing the space for critiquing domestic policies and providing no new political freedoms. For now, the state views the dissemination of nationalism through various outlets, including the entertainment sector, as central to rallying support from young people. (Alhussein, 2019, p. 7)

The social contract has also changed in relation to princes and tribes. Key government positions have come to be filled with figures loyal to the crown prince rather than powerful princes. Patronage based on personality continues in relation to engagement with tribes, but they no longer have the voice they used to have. The National Guard, for example, used to be a major avenue for incorporating the tribes into the system, with units organized by tribal affiliation. The takeover of the National Guard by the crown prince means that the tribes have less room for negotiating with the ruler than before. The planned megacity NEOM has not only put some tribes at risk of displacement from the site of the city, its design also features a "parallel legal system reporting directly to the king," which eliminates any voice for tribes altogether (Michaelson, 2020, para. 10).

All these changes show that while the political system in Saudi Arabia officially remains the same as it used to be a decade ago, the reality today is very different. The absolute monarchy is even more autocratic than ever as the country operates firmly under one-man rule.

Mandated State in Syria, Libya, and Yemen

A new phenomenon currently taking place in the Arab world is the rise of the mandated state. Of course, the region used to be controlled by European colonizers for decades, and before them the Ottomans, and even after independence, many countries came to be heavily influenced by international actors, in what has been termed "quasi-states," where

> the legal façade of sovereignty, of formal independence, persists and is actively promoted by the international community and local elites, while other recognizable attributes of sovereignty—popular legitimacy and effective institutions, alongside territorial integrity and respect for the principle of non-intervention—are weak or non-existent, giving rise to the claims of fictional sovereignty or quasi-state status. (Fawcett, 2017, p. 799)

Examples include Lebanon (under current heavy influence by Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States, France, and Syria) and Iraq (under heavy influence by the United States and Iran). However, the situation today in three Arab countries in particular (Libya, Syria, and Yemen) goes beyond the quasi-state status. In all of them, any kind of sovereignty is compromised as the future of their political systems is largely determined by foreign powers.

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The Turkish army intervened in Syria alongside the Free Syrian Army.
This picture was taken on February 23, 2018 in Afrin, Syria.

Listing the various foreign interventions in those countries brings up several actors: Turkey, UAE, Egypt, Russia, and France in Libya, with Italy, Qatar, and the UK also playing a role; Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States (among others) in Syria; Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran in Yemen. Each of the three countries had a different political system in place before 2011, ranging from a so-called Jamahiriya in Libya to a republic infused with tribal rivalries in Yemen to a Baath regime in Syria. All three countries witnessed uprisings in 2011 calling for the fall of the regime. And all three countries have since then descended into conflict. Although conflict dynamics vary across the countries, and although the political systems that are, in theory, currently in place in the three countries also differ, the three have a number of characteristics in common. What used to be a case of being countries ruled through the "individual agency" (Fawcett, 2017) of one ruler (and his elites)—Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and Ali Abdallah Saleh in Yemen—is now a case of countries whose future will be determined according to the interests of competing foreign powers who are steering the conflicts in those countries. Though not under formal foreign mandates, the state in those countries is a mandated state.

Even when there is a figurehead at the helm of power who has survived attempts to remove him (Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in Yemen), power is no longer solely in the hands of the figurehead. Assad's longevity as president is dependent on Russia's wishes. This external control has a direct impact on state institutions. For example, Russia is shaping Syria's military institutions to be loyal to it, and UAE is cultivating military leader Khalifa Haftar in Libya as its strongman on the ground. Political institutions are determined by the wishes of foreign powers. Saudi Arabia has installed and kept Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi as president in Yemen despite him having little de facto power.

With these countries' becoming playgrounds for proxy wars, their civil society becomes suppressed, weak, or absent, with active civil society groups and individuals often driven into exile. In Libya, nascent civil society organizations that had been created after the removal of Gaddafi had to leave the country because of the security situation. In Syria too, the majority of major civil society activity is taking place in the diaspora, with only limited local initiatives on the ground. In non-regime-controlled areas, some CSOs are still able to operate, but in areas controlled by the Assad regime, most CSOs are under regime oversight (Daher, 2019). In Yemen, increased violence has weakened the capacity of civil society organizations (Al-Shami, 2015). With little space for citizen association, it has become difficult for independent political parties to be formed in those countries, and more difficult to reassert domestic agency.

What adds to the three countries' woes is that none of the international peace processes meant to end their conflicts have achieved tangible results so far mainly because of the intransigence of the dominant foreign actors. Russia has never taken the United Nations (UN)-led Geneva Process seriously, stalling the process in the hope that the international community would eventually normalize relations with the Assad regime. The Stockholm Agreement failed to generate a peace deal for Yemen, especially considering that Saudi Arabia cannot afford to lose face were it to be seen to be caving in to demands by Iran-backed Houthis. The interests of Libya's several external stakeholders clash so much that the UN Special Mission in Libya has not managed to find common ground to bring their different proxies together. All these factors further halt the prospects of having accountable political systems in place in those countries. Instead, the countries have become what Fawcett calls "state shells," where the "territorial unit may survive in a formal legal sense, while the integrity of borders, along with sources of internal authority, become contested or fragmented . . . A key feature is the incapacity to project state power, to assert authority within borders" (2017, pp. 794–5).

Conclusion

This chapter sought to give an overview of the major changes in the political systems in the Arab world over the past 10 years. There are some trends that have persisted since before 2011, such as the resilience of autocracy, and other trends which have intensified, such as weak governance. These trends are likely to continue in the region for the foreseeable future because they are part of systemic challenges that are not easy to reverse in a short period of time. But there are other trends that exist today to a greater degree than before, such as the rise of foreign influence to form de facto mandates in conflict-ridden Libya, Syria, and Yemen. It is uncertain how long the mandates of the existing major dominant forces in these countries will be. For example, Libya is witnessing a tug-of-war between Turkey and the UAE, but any peace deal that ends the conflict there may be to the benefit of one side not the other. Both Turkey and the UAE have sought to consolidate their influence over state institutions in Libya to support long-term influence there, but the future prospects for each in the country are unclear. What is clear, however, is that Libya, Yemen, and Syria have lost their sovereignty and that their fate is largely determined by foreign interests. In contrast, Tunisia's democratic transition has so far continued despite multiple challenges. The country's democratic path has predictably been far from linear, but it remains the only Arab country that has managed to set its political system on a reformist path with significant input from civil society and unions, as opposed to the kind of top-down reform seen in other Arab states, especially Jordan and Morocco. Between these polar opposites on the spectrum of sovereignty are cases in which political systems that used to feature at least a degree of consensus between domestic stakeholders or a narrow margin of openness have become more closed and dominated by one actor. Here, Saudi Arabia stands out as an absolute monarchy whose trajectory over the past 10 years was not foreseen by watchers adopting the angle of "enduring authoritarianism." Authoritarianism has endured in the kingdom, but its configuration has fundamentally changed.

The different trajectories taken by different countries in the region show that there is no one political system to characterizes the Arab world because even autocracy in a given country can play out in varied ways over time. The chapter's discussion also highlights the limitation of taking any political system in place for granted as being durable. Whether mainly through domestic or external factors or a combination of the two, various countries current situations do not guarantee where they will be, for better or worse, in another decade's time.

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CHAPTER 2

Kinetic Karama: Bargaining for Dignity in the Pursuit of a New Arab Social Contract

Amro Ali

"The more the drive toward life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive toward destruction; the more life is realized, the less is the strength of destructiveness. Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life."—Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom

As the train gradually accelerated along the Alexandria to Cairo tracks in the early morning of September 6, 2017, an aging inspector walked toward a young plain-clothed passenger and asked for his ticket. The passenger replied he does not have one to which he was told he would have to buy a ticket on the spot. The passenger replied, "I'm an officer in the army."

The inspector remained polite and offered him a discounted ticket. The officer gave an incredulous stare when his supposed authority made no dent.

"I'm not paying for any ticket!" he retorted.

"Yes, you will," said the inspector with a confidence that signaled experience with entitled junior officers and passengers of all stripes.

The passenger said something to the effect that he paid his taxes, repeated that he was in the military, and threatened the inspector with reporting him to the officer's superiors.

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The railroad station of Alexandria, one of the largest cities in Egypt. Alexandria is also the most important seaport in Egypt and a major industrial center.

The inspector shouted "I don't care if you're the son of a government minister! You will buy a ticket like everyone else!"

After 15 minutes of heated back-and-forth altercation, the flustered inspector walked back through all the carriages, gathering up a number of his train staff colleagues, returning to the officer as one mighty gray-coated posse. The staff pulled the unruly passenger to the side, to the in-between carriages, yelling at him and collectively countering his intimidation attempts.

A seated, casually dressed military officer felt embarrassed and approached the suspect to talk him into paying saying he should not abuse his privileges. The same officer chipped in with others to help pay for his ticket. The situation was defused by the end of the 3-hour journey.

This animated incident is a common occurrence across the Arab world that gets lost in the noise of history; perhaps the only surprise in this case is that justice wins. The event encapsulates everything wrong with a broken social contract that threw rights, expectations, and boundaries into a big blur. Social contracts set the rights and obligations between citizens and government through formal and informal agreements with each other. The citizen surrenders some freedoms to the powers that be in exchange for having their rights protected, services provided, and social order maintained. The social contract infuses state-society interactions with a promise to each party that helps to stabilize the future and make it more predictable. The soldier was clearly in the role of a citizen receiving a service for which he was obliged to pay for. While the inspector performed the role of the state by providing him with that service, pending payment. Yet the absence of a semblance of a social contract deepened the haze in which, for example, both men saw themselves in some capacity as representing the ministries of defense and transport, as well as the soldier's appealing to the amorphous prestige of the state, while the inspector rightfully appealed to the law and equality.

When I commended the inspector for his stance, he responded: "If he said he did not have money, then I could have found a workaround. It is not like I was going to kill him because he could not pay. He needs to know that he will not get special treatment because of who he is." Yet the subtext of his overall grievance was that the passenger had inadvertently undermined his position and showed a lack of etiquette toward an older person. Here was the blind spot of the social contract: "karama," the Arabic word for "dignity." The inspector was salvaging his dignity as someone disrespected him and did not give him the reverence of an older person. This was an echo to the karama paradigm born in the 2011 Arab revolutions and uprisings.

The protest cries of karama in 2011 were a new subjectivity in the Arab world as they carried modern notions of human rights, respect, and recognition of the "citizenry as a sovereign collective" (Khosrokhavar, 2019, p. 99). In effect, dignity was tied to a "new citizenship paradigm among Arab youth" (Khosrokhavar, 2019). This was a marked shift from the traditional concept of *sharaf* (honor) that had strong motifs of patriarchy, sex, shame, "honor killings," and a fragile identity that can only be reasserted by resort to violence (Khosrokhavar, 2019). Dignity has rarely been considered a political matter and hence why it rarely featured in the world's protest movements, long crowded out by familiar demands of unity, freedom, justice, bread, and jobs. While the term had long been reserved for the loftiness of the nation and liberation struggles, dignity for the individual meant a moral virtue that constituted an apolitical being. Its Arabic counterpart, however, made a phenomenal leap, like a rare beneficial cross-species transmission, karama jumped from the moral into the political realm and thus becoming a political force in its own right.

Karama originates from the root "krm" in various verses of the Quran, and it essentially means "to venerate," "to treat with deference," "to like better" or "to give preference to" (Maróth, 2014, p. 156). Although karama means dignity, it goes deeper as it partners with *'izz* (prestige), *jāh* (repute), *ihtirām* (respect), *hurma* (sanctity), *manzila* (inherent status and rank), and *qīma* (one's inalienable worth; Shah, 2017, p. 108). What was perhaps surprising, with Tunisia the first to demonstrate, was that karama emerged not only as a form of bottom-up universal humanism, but independently and outside the confines of academia, religious-secular debates, and even human rights organizations (Marzouki, 2011, pp. 150–151). Despite the despair and misery in the following decade of the Arab Spring, the karama paradigm is arguably one of the enduring legacies of 2011 that purport the citizen's inherent worthiness and inalienable right to make the system, even if that reality is still mostly far off. Illuminating the citizen leads to a different interpretation of the MENA region and the social contract. After all, many of the changes in the state are a result of indignant citizen pressures. A descent from the colossal state to the citizen as agent and subject of the state can help one "look at the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, passive and active citizenship, depoliticization and politicization, and mobilization and demobilization" (Meijer, 2014, p. 10). When dignity is factored in, it moves the social contract from self-interest to one of obligations requiring respect for each individual. On its own, dignity is not sufficient to solve problems in the absence of legal frameworks and norms. However, it is a guiding principle that has two advantages, "it helps define what humanity is and gives us the opportunity of a discussion on the limits of human power" (Byky, 2014, p. 364). It does not implement the legal aspects of the social contract as much as it animates it.

Ilan Pappé referred to the Arab Spring as the "second phase of decolonization" and the collective "assertion of self-dignity in the Arab world" (Schroeder & Şadr, 2017, p. 5). This came after decades of brutalization of Arabs that exacerbated their sense of worthlessness that produced what Rashid Khalidi described as an "internalized and . . . pervasive self-loathing and an ulcerous social malaise" (Khalidi, 2011). Arab countries had come a long way since the old populist authoritarian social contracts that unraveled by the 1980s, only to be replaced with the post-populist social contracts that severed the state from the citizen's welfare as neoliberal reforms enriched the close-knit patronage networks of presidents and kings (see the following chapters by Nader Kabbani and Özlem Tür). The 2011 revolutions ripped the threadbare social contracts apart. The revolts and the following political journeys spawned different social contracts that included the participatory social contract (Tunisia), repressive social contract or protection pact (Egypt), eroded social contract (Lebanon), pseudo-reconstructed social contract (Jordan, Morocco) (Loewe et al., 2020, p. 12), security pacts (Gulf countries) and state failure (Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria). While it is too early to comprehensively examine the evolving social contracts for Algeria and Sudan, given their political orders were only recently and severely disrupted.

The hope for an East European-style transition has long been abandoned as the rot in the Arab state has shown itself to be worse than what analysts have predicted over the years. Think tanks at times seek to sound a note of hope by making comparisons to Indochina in the 1960s and the 1970s, and the Balkans in the 1990s to say that perpetual conflict is not always inevitable. Indeed, every conflict has a possible resolution, yet the Middle East is no ordinary place, and its problems are a confluence of social, political, and geopolitical interactions amplified by nihilist values, attacks on pluralism, and zero-sum game power struggles, with each party backed by a different regional power. In light of this, it is not only important to flesh out the social contracts that are developing, or not, but to unpack the karama paradigm that was birthed in 2011 to great academic and activist fanfare, but tapered off from erudite spaces over the years under the weight of endless catastrophic events. While it did make a reappearance in 2019 following the uprisings in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, and Lebanon, it became clear that global conversations of dignity in the Arab world were tied around political events of a theatrical nature rather than the reverberation of dignity after the event. This is understandable as political events surface ideas and practices which help us to examine them better. However, an absence from discussion does not equate with an absence from reality. A political idea introduced into the world does not die. It takes a detour.

On account of the events since 2011, perhaps we can speak of the active dignity, or kinetic karama, that finds resonance in Erich Fromm's (1941) "Freedom to" more than "freedom from" (p. 26). The latter is a negative type of

freedom that deals with emancipation from restrictions while "freedom to" engages with the creative use of freedom to create something new. Contrary to the widespread view, the Arab protest movements were never just locked in a "freedom from" frame. There were thousands of initiatives bubbling in the squares and streets geared toward "reconstructing" the future; the protest movements sought a utopia in their respective civic and national localities where the future would be envisioned by enacting it in the present. Karama re-rooted itself in praxis, or action, the human capacity to build a public world that is not given. The Arab Spring was to enable a civic utopia to be fabricated through human will in which karama would be the foundation for spaces of conciliation, communication, community, education, and civic duty.

Could a supra-national social contract (similar to the EU) be the growing discourse and logical end of an active dignity paradigm? It could be one built on the idea of the Arab public sphere and space that not only formed a "shifting frontier between state forces and ordinary citizens" (Tripp, 2013, p. 131), but commenced in 2011 as a "single, unified narrative of protest with shared heroes and villains, common stakes, and a deeply felt sense of shared destiny" (Lynch, 2012, p. 8). This phenomenon internalized a "new kind of pan-Arabist identity" while not contradicting the protest energies directed toward domestic change (Lynch, 2012, p. 8). The idea of a supra-national pact may seem remote, and it is, but this is partly because the frame of analysis is looked at through the state. Rather, transnational citizen engagements can provide more answers when we consider structural and agency forces that may facilitate this. This could include, among others, the decline of oil rents, youth values that stubbornly refuses to be tamed, rise of new Arab voices, role of the digital sphere, Tunisia as a relative success story, exile communities reimagining political visions and practices, and the bankruptcy of state legitimacy that leaves a door open for new narratives.

Any social contract needs a legitimizing narrative, karama was reborn not simply as a theoretical concept or an enhanced individual virtue, but a self-contained movement, a philosophy yearning to be developed, encapsulating a story that expands the moral imagination and asks its protagonists to imbibe the rhythm of life with a higher temporal calling than biological and work cycles. The reason why the Arab Spring is still noteworthy is not only because of the colossal events that unfolded, but it was able to crystallize karama then and for a decade onwards through a chorus of political imaginaries, relationships, art, versatile use of emerging technologies, and the maximalist exertion of the role of state and citizen. The political and karama were brought into alignment and sharper focus that would not have been possible nor perhaps even understood to previous generations reared on a dignity that was cornered by officialdom only to be dispatched through predictable state tropes.

Salvaging Dignity in the Shadow of the "Coldest of Cold Monsters"

The Arab state with its impersonal scale and long reach to make its overbearing presence felt on the citizen's skin is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche's chilling attack, perhaps in all of political philosophy, on the state in his 1882 seminal novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra:*

> The state? What is that? Well then! Now open your ears for me, for now I say to you my word about the death of peoples.
>
> State is the name for the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it tells lies; and this lie crawls out of its mouth: "I, the state, am the people. . . .'
>
> But the state lies in all the tongues of good and evil; and whatever it talks about, it lies—and whatever it has, it has stolen.
>
> Everything about it is false; it bites with stolen teeth, and it snarls. Even its very entrails are false.
>
> Confusion of the language of good and evil: this sign I give you as a sign of the state. Verily, the will to death is what this sign signifies! Verily, it beckons to the preachers of death! . .
>
> All things it will give you, if you worship it, the new idol: thus it buys itself the luster of your virtue and the glance of your proud eyes. . . .
>
> State I call it where all are poison-drinkers, the good and the base: state, where all can lose themselves, the good and the base: state, where the slow suicide of all—is called "life." (p. 28)

Nietzsche's prophetic take on the state would materialize in the later dystopias of European fascism and totalitarianism that would leave dark traces for the Arab world to embark upon when it belatedly ventured into the political discourse and treacherous terrain of the modern state. Western liberal democracies have largely outgrown this particular monster, albeit now overtaken by the "consuming monster" (Moore, 2004, p. 93) and the "corporate Global Golem," (p. 92) are able to with relative success galvanize civil society, social movements, and political publics to tirelessly keep the state accountable. But it is the individual in the Arab world that mostly finds life usurped within Nietzsche's bloodcurdling parable. A human being largely disenfranchised from a meaningful social contract and incapacitated from keeping the state in check.

This malady is widely reflected in contemporary Arab poetry, novels, art, films, theatre, and cultural productions that paint a picture of smallness in the face of shapeless crushing bureaucracies, armies, and security forces. “Every man is from dust and unto dust he shall return, except the Arab. The Arab is from the secret police, and unto the secret police he shall return” (Tramontini & Milich, 2014–2015, p. 114), wrote Syrian poet Muhammad al-Maghut

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Mass protests in the so-called Hirak led to the fall of President Bouteflika. The picture was taken on March 22, 2019 in Algiers, Algeria.

(1934–2006). If one evades the secret police, they would still have to confront the modern technical-bureaucratic monster that devours and chews the citizen through a nightmare bureaucracy, as noted by French philosopher Georges Sorel and Italian economist Vilfredo Paret, that has no face in which one can present grievances and to exercise some aspects of the social contract. In effect you have a “tyranny without a tyrant” (Arendt, 1972, p. 178). The overall crisis is captured by al-Maghut in one simple line, “We lack nothing, but dignity” (El Bernoussi, 2015, p. 374). It is no wonder that karama became the uniting theme across the Arab world in 2011, with al-Maghut’s homeland declaring the first Friday protest of the Syrian revolution as the “Friday of Dignity.”

The story of dignity is the story of shifting worldviews. Prior to the 20th century, a Moroccan that relocated to Egypt would be considered by the inhabitants in their newly adopted home as different, not foreign. Colonial powers and the accompanying emerging state canonized smaller subsets of nationalities that included the stateless, refugee, foreigner, and minority. Individual identity was traditionally reserved for one’s name, occupation, place of origin, religion, and physical description, historically hardwired markers of dignity (Ali, 2017). The state’s imposition of nationality disguised “colonialism’s will to categorize populations and its pervasive expressions of power through small mechanisms and technologies and its modernity” (Hanley, 2017, p. 7). Even the notion of human rights has been inherent with tension in the quest to acquire them, as Hannah Arendt (1968) argued, as it presupposed membership in a nation or political community “in the new secularized and emancipated society, men were no longer sure of these social and human rights which until then had been outside the political order and guaranteed not by government and constitution, but by social, spiritual, and religious forces” (p. 291). Yet even for citizens in Arab countries, the local elites adopted the statist mantle in order to wield “the resources of the state in their own interest” and to follow through that “nationalism expanded along the stolid avenue of self-interest” (Hanley, 2017, p. 288). In other words, the social contract was long geared to deprive the citizen of certain rights. Karama transcends these segmental cleavages and political flannel as it recognizes inalienable rights and worthiness as being divinely sanctioned and therefore it does not make sense for dignity to be left to the mercy of universal declarations and regional agreements. Essentially, dignity was part of the humanizing arsenal employed to resolve inherited problems produced by the state. Individual dignity in particular was a suspect in the lineup of political questions that the Arab state felt uncomfortable in addressing.

An Elusive Arab Social Contract

In March 1954, a group of academics at Alexandria University took the lead in opposing martial law and the emerging military regime; to which the recklessly ambitious Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser denounced the university as an enemy of the revolution. The coastal city’s academy was quick to remind him that it was the first institution to support the 1952 revolution and “its teachers were the only group in the country to have refused to meet the deposed King . . . the university supported the ends of the Revolution and not its means since the university believed strongly in freedom, democracy and individual dignity” (Abdalla, 1985, p. 120). The mention of individual dignity (*karama fardiyya*) must have been alien to Nasser as it did not square with the zeitgeist that reserved dignity for the nation and national struggles. The tiny social groups who mostly supported this conception of individual dignity in the Arab world were “intellectuals and some members of educated classes as minorities” (Khosrokhavar, 2019, p. 99). In the early 1940s, the then-young

Army Lieutenant Nasser wrote, "Until now the officers only talked of how to enjoy themselves; now they are speaking of sacrificing their lives for their honor. It has taught them that there is something called dignity which has to be defended" (Nutting, 1972, p. 20). Nasser not only accurately separates honor from dignity, but ominously marks the former for the individual and the latter for Egypt.

This "minor" semantic shift would have tremendous consequence for the development of political rights in Arab social contracts. Frantz Fanon (2004) justified the de-prioritization of individual dignity in this manner:

> For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with the dignity of the human individual: for that human individual has never heard tell of it. All that the native has seen in his country is that they can freely arrest him, beat him, starve him: and no professor of ethics, no priest has ever come to be beaten in his place, nor to share their bread with him. (p. 44)

Fanon did not necessarily dismiss individual dignity as evidenced by his earlier work. Ziauddin Sardar explains in the forward to Fanon's *Black Skin, White masks:*

> Dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's way of being, doing and knowing. It is about being true to one's Self. (Fanon, 1986, p. vii)

It was, however, the conception of dignity in Wretched of the Earth that reflected the temper of the times in which to speak of individual dignity was misconstrued as betraying the greater cause, unlike the vortex of the 2011 uprisings that engendered individual dignity and swept it up into an aggregate force of collective dignity. For Fanon, the "western notion of human dignity that is essentially linked with an individualist system of ethics does not suit the objectives of the colonized mass" (Vivaldi, 2007, p. 32). Nasser set the tone for the new era of Arab social contracts when he, one of countless measures against society, executed a purge of Alexandria University by arresting, dismissing or co-opting staff and student activists. Arab leaders increasingly followed a similar framing of dignity with the limited exception of Tunisia's Habib Bourguiba. The nationalist leader, influenced by the "romantic strain of French nationalism" and the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Victor Hugo, was rhetorically nuanced and spoke glowingly of individual dignity yet in reality paid it lip service in light of his regime's trampling on Tunisian rights and freedoms (Moore, 1965, p. 43).

The Arab regimes' skewing of dignity enabled social and economic rights to be expanded at the expense of civil and political rights. The freedom of expression, freedom of association, right to assemble, and fair trials were, even if constitutionally sanctioned, all but dismantled to nurture the depoliticized individual who would be rewarded for their loyalty to the state with access to education, medical care, public sector employment, and housing. The authoritarian bargain was founded on "performance-based forms of legitimation" (Loewe et al., 2020, p. 9.), while "citizenship was sacrificed on the altar of welfare" (Santini, 2018, p. 9). Yet despite the differences that characterized each Arab country, they all followed a similar rentier path, be it oil revenue flowing to the Gulf monarchies or Suez Canal fees and foreign aid to Egypt, that enabled the rise of the "Arab social contract" in the literature of political economies on the Arab world (see the following chapters of Nader Kabbani and Özlem Tür). It was to be understood as a "particular configuration of political and economic arrangements dominant in core Arab countries after their independence . . . the Arab social contract is a historically specific form of regulation between the social, political, and economic spheres of society" (Benner, 2019, p. 13).

The post-colonial social contracts gradually came undone when Arab leaderships could no longer keep up with rapidly growing populations, particularly after the fall in world energy prices in 1985 caused rent and remittances to decline. Financially stricken Arab governments embarked on neoliberal restructuring that saw economic liberalization divorced from political liberalization. The welfare state was largely dismantled giving rise to the post-populist "unsocial" contracts (Loewe, 2020, p. 10). Deteriorating services, diminishing subsidies, shrinking middle class, endemic corruption, wasta (favoritism), and human rights abuses became the order of the day.

Meanwhile, dignity and honor grew into two strands of ethical logic that came into tension with one another. Arab dictatorships, officialdom, state media, and national movements, were seasoned at mobilizing "a sense of threatened honor in order to deny dignity to their citizens" (Khosrokhavar, 2019, p. 99). Honor lubricated the language of conspiracies as new crusaders, imperialists, Israel, the US, and the West in general were paraded as the villains (real or imagined) that enabled Arab regimes to evade accountability. Moreover, honor nurtured an obsession with public image and a stable order. A frequent line told to women in Cairo's streets when they attempt to voice their grievances was, "You should not complain about sexual harassment because it makes our country look bad." This took no regard of their dignity that confers inherent worth independent of any context and perceptions. Dignity is a moral equalizer, a matter that honor struggles to attain. As Khosrokhavar (2019) succinctly puts it:

> In the logic of dignity, both parties to a dispute are understood to share equal rights and responsibilities. But in the logic of traditional honor, there is no such mutual regard, no possibility of negotiation or compromise: wounded honor demands nothing less than total satisfaction, either through death or some other socially-accepted compensation. (p. 99)

The deprivation of dignity to the citizen and an honor under siege contributed to, or perhaps was caused by, the conceptual muddle up that long became apparent in the way an Arab head of state responded to questions about the lack of democracy and human rights in their respective countries. When Talal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, a reformist Saudi prince, asked Crown Prince Faisal in 1960 to consider democratic reforms for the kingdom, the soon-to-be king gave a warm but half-baked reply: "If anyone feels wrongly treated, he has only himself to blame for not telling me. What higher democracy can there be?" (Weston, 2008, p. 183). Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak would frequently deflect questions from western reporters on human rights, suggesting there were more important human rights issues than political ones, such as food prices and affordable housing (and even that he still performed quite badly).

The 2000s gave a clue to the seeds of the karama paradigm amidst the rising challenges to the collapsing social contract. Up until then, the academic literature displayed scant use of karama, or confused it with honor, in regard to individual dignity except for a modest set of writings on Palestinians under occupation. In Arab public discourse, it still largely remained in circulation for national motifs, which included, ironically, the neo-Nasserist Al-Karama Party set up in Cairo in 1997. The word soon mushroomed as an organizational naming device to signal the welfare of individual beings as primacy: Al-Karama for Human Rights, set up in Switzerland by Algerian and Qatari human rights activists in 2004; Karama for Women's Rights, established in Cairo in 2009; and the Karama Human Rights Film Festival, an annual 6-day film festival held in Amman, Jordan, since 2010.

Satellite TV and growing internet access rewired the transnational Arab public sphere which reconceptualized karama along the terrain of regional politics (Sakr, 2007, p. 3). The events of the first decade of the century were instrumental in this rewiring process that was sparked off with the Israeli murder of Mohamed al-Durrah in Gaza and the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000), Iraq war (2003), Israeli assault on Lebanon (2006), and Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza (2008-2009). The powerful effects of satellite TV were on display through massive demonstrations in Arab cities in the early 2000s over the actions of the warring actors, Israel and the United States, in Palestine and Iraq, as satellite TV, particularly al-Jazeera, "almost single-handedly united these disparate protests into a single coherent narrative of regional rage" (Lynch, 2012, p. 18).

Additionally, the insights into each other's anti-government struggles in distant cities nurtured a "decade-long, media-narrative of change . . . [and] why Arabs immediately recognized each national protest as part of their own struggle" (Lynch, 2012, p. 49). Meanwhile, the idea of karama was no longer an abstract projected onto nations and imagined communities but now applied to lifting harm off individuals with names and biographies.

The late economist Galal Amin made a piercing observation about the function of karama in Egypt's economic trajectory:

> It's true that the pre-1952 poor were in an abject state and in some senses much worse off than the poor of today. But there are many kinds of poverty and deprivation, and the torment they give rise to is also of various types. Could it be that being deprived of enough food is sometimes less painful than, say, the inability to pay for private lessons for one's children? (Amin, 2011, p. 68)

The pre-1952 poor can also include, relatively, the 1950s and 1960s poor in an otherwise pertinent question that reflects a nuanced understanding that GDP, employment statistics, increased literacy, among others, do not account holistically for the intimate status of dignity, or the lack of it.

2011 Rupture: Tearing Down Old Social Contracts

A woman in Egypt recently voiced, "You can go to the private clinic and lose all your money, or go to the public clinic and lose your life" (Devarajan, 2015). The preservation of dignity should be at the heart of a vibrant social contract which obliges sovereign governments to provide the three Ps: protection that maintains human security and preserves life from criminal, political, and external threats; provision of basic services, that may include social services, sound infrastructure, and utilities; and participation, a democratic plurality that opens the space for citizens to engage with the political processes on different levels (Loewe, 2020, p. 6). Our woman in Egypt could barely find meaningful refuge in any of these three categories, and her grievance and dilemma can be heard across the Arab world. Her story is the end-point of millions living in Arab countries who feel alienated from the state, and are a relative and significant departure from the early lived experiences of their parents and grandparents in which the authoritarian bargain of the 1950s and 1960s provided, at the very least, provision of substantial basic services, albeit with limited protection, and almost no participation.

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Crowds with Egyptian flags in Tahrir Square on February 4, 2011, during the Egyptian revolution that led to the resignation of President Mubarak a few days later.

Unlike the elite-led liberation struggles and mass rallies at the twilight of the colonial era that built social contract narratives and legitimacy on the back of military iconography and dead nationalists, the struggles leading up to the Arab Spring birthed a pantheon of citizen martyrs focused on the loss of individual dignity following their brutal deaths: Palestine's al-Durah (2000), Egypt's Khaled Said (2010), Tunisia's Mohamed Bouazizi (2010), and Syria's Hamza Ali al-Khateeb (2011), among many galvanizing icons then and in subsequent years. In Tunisia, the constriction and hollowing out of the public space left the "moralization of bodily behavior" as an "essential practice whereby individuals could recover some sense of dignity" (Marzouki, 2011, p. 154). When Bouazizi set his body ablaze on December 17, 2010, the messaging was clearly understood by Arab publics, that this was the absolute tragic conclusion to the long story of indignity. As Fukuyama (2012) noted in an editorial:

> The basic issue was one of dignity, or the lack thereof, the feeling of worth or self-esteem that all of us seek. But dignity is not felt unless it is recognized by other people; it is an inherently social and, indeed, political phenomenon. The Tunisian police were treating Bouazizi as a nonperson, someone not worthy of the basic courtesy of a reply or explanation when the government took away his modest means of livelihood. (Fukuyama, 2012, para. 2)

The slogans from Morocco to Bahrain radiated similar themes: bread, freedom, social justice, and dignity. Of course, they were not in unison. Sometimes employment was added to the mix. Yet dignity alone could suffice to embrace them all. The rise of religious currents in the public sphere in preceding years would see karama's origins in the Quran transmit to secular and civil realms. One of many verses that sets a sort of baseline for human dignity reads, "And We bestowed dignity on the children of Adam and provided them with rides on the land and in the sea, and provided them with a variety of good things and made them much superior to many of those whom We have created" (Usman, 2019, p. 34). Shorn of religious, cultural, and tribal affiliation, it is not difficult to see dignity's leap to a universal humanism. Even Moroccan Islamists would assert that dignity is "the bridge between democracy and the Islamic tradition," meaning that "human dignity is only possible in a democratic order" (Ahmad, 2019, p. 61). A once-apolitical term reborn in the political milieu:

> This appeal to dignity posits an agency, maps an unfolding morality, and reclaims the term 'Arab' from years and generations of abuse. As a non-political term entering the political domain, 'dignity' has a catalytic power, an inaugural audacity, announcing the self-conscious start of a world-historic event that was about to discover a world of its own making: announced by the Arab Spring. (Dabashi, 2012, p. 127)

The protests in 2011 built up on Hannah Arendt's view that being human is to be free in the public space, where speech and acts are witnessed and merit a response, therefore affirming dignity and accentuating present-day political existence (Arendt, 1998). This was accompanied with public freedom in which individuals enter a space to disclose a unique biography through words and deeds in the presence of a plurality of actors. All acknowledging each other's equality and distinction in the pursuit of animating and securing the political public in order to begin something new, invoking novelty that can potentially change the course of events (Arendt, 1973). It is the attainment of affirming individual dignity through collective realization of public freedom (Arendt, 1973) - all geared toward more than just the will to co-exist, but also the desire for citizens to acknowledge their own and others' dignity and the ingredients of a new social contract by speaking out in public, and be witnessed and heard by others.

New Social Contracts

Since 2011, the word "social contract" has been in widespread, if not over, use. In fact, a search through news outlets and social media feeds show the wording "we need a new social contract," or to that effect, to be a frequent appeal. That is understandable. State failure in various degrees has gripped Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, all beset by conflicts that will not be resolved until the relevant parties, both stakeholders and spoilers, have agreed on or started to work on the basics of a social contract. Most of the other MENA countries have pushed along various undesirable trajectories, with some key distinctions, many overlaps, and considerable core elements inherited from the old political and economic configurations since independence.

The participatory social contract has produced arguably one candidate, Tunisia. As late as 2013, it was never clear if Tunisia would slide back into authoritarianism, but enough years have passed to suggest that a liberal social contract has developed that involves more citizens in the political sphere, and businesses and trade unions in economic policy (Loewe, 2020, p. 11). This does not necessarily translate into citizen trust in its institutions. In Tunis in 2018, I had spoken with a modest cross-section of society that included middle class activists, students, artists, tram conductors, shop keepers, among others. Many expressed indifferences to the positive changes and saw corruption, stagnation, and unemployment as entrenched, with a growing number dreaming of emigration. One activist cautioned me not to mention Bouazizi's name because many Tunisians viewed him as the cause of their present difficulties. However, the country is still impressive to create a new constitutional order that accommodates secular and religious forces while providing the citizenry with an accessible public space that covers a wide spectrum of discussions from economic grievances to identity questions (Cammack et al., 2017, p. 11). The country took dignity to the heart of its post-revolutionary project with the Truth and Dignity Commission that examined human rights violations and corruption going back as far as 1955, 62,000 submissions were made and 11,000 people gave oral testimonies (Aboueldahab, 2017, p. 61). Yet Tunisia faces internal challenges such as a relatively repressive police apparatus, sluggish bureaucratic apparatus, and the interest-driven rentier elites. This is further compounded by the country's external threats that comes with being in a turbulent neighborhood, from terrorism to ideological movements that can torpedo gains made by Tunisian politics.

On the other end of the scale, Egypt's social contract has mutated into what Rutherford (2018) argued is a "protection pact" (p. 185). This sees a coalition of elites, despite their entrenched differences, unite to confront shared threats that may arise from political and revolutionary movements or vocal public discontent. This is a marked departure from Mubarak's "provision pact," which was grounded in an "extensive patronage network" that bought the loyalty of elites through the distribution of benefits such as state contracts and subsidized raw materials (Rutherford, 2018, pp. 185–186). This required a complex party machinery to manage the provisional pact. In the new era of the protection pact, no party or messy provision pact is needed as the securitized logic is simpler: the executive, military, interior ministry, judiciary, business tycoons, will not tolerate public protests or any harm to their interests. This perception means that elites see the danger to their privileges as endemic and politically unmanageable, treating dissent as one of an amorphous nature that allows for little distinction and discrimination between levels of threats. Accordingly, this leads to the expansion of the state's security apparatus (Rutherford, 2018, pp. 186–187). The problem for the regime is that the protection pact is not consolidated as the primary threat that was brandished, namely political Islam, failed to convince some elites to offer their full backing. It naturally goes that the karama paradigm is crushed under the weight of the political class that sees only cities, bridges, and towers, but no people. It thrives on representations of Egyptians as a living phantom. A homogenous citizenry that blur into one another. The Beirut blast of August 4, 2020 accelerated what was already an eroded social contract. Lebanon has been a laboratory in the making and unmaking of dignity through its colorful civil society currents up against a broken state. The explosion was assessed to have the "weight of a civil war that wasn't fought," a sort of "Lebanon's Chernobyl" with the hope that it will be "Lebanon's new chance to attempt a new socio-political contract" (Parasiliti, 2020, para. 5). Using the popular metaphor of the phoenix, Lebanese writers painted a grim picture, such as, "We have been constantly told since the civil war that Lebanon is a phoenix rising from the ashes, but in reality, we have just soared above the flames that are still there. And sometimes that means you get burnt" (East, 2020, para. 8). Novelist Araboghlian (2020) also pointed to a disappointing picture albeit with an element of hope:

> The Lebanon I know can only be reconstructed in dreams and memories. The Lebanon I know no longer wants to be reconstructed because it is unable to. The phoenix can only rise from the ashes so many times.
>
> And in those ashes, there is another Lebanon:
>
> The Lebanon I know stands in line to donate blood, less than half an hour after the shambles.
>
> The Lebanon I know selflessly helps the wounded.
>
> The Lebanon I know creates donation links and shares tweets and Instagram stories and Facebook posts, asking the diaspora—and the world—for assistance. (pp. 12-15)

Yet a basic reconstruction of the social contract or for another Lebanon to emerge over the political quagmire will be difficult not only because institutions are unable to reform, but also because change is immensely difficult given the entrenched regional powers, sectarian militias, business monopolies, and compromised elites that repeatedly turn Lebanon into a playground for dystopian proxy conflicts and dumping ground for economic human waste.

The security pact has increasingly dominated the GCC countries comprising of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in which, as Emirati columnist Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi (2016) noted, the new social contract might be "taxation in exchange for ensuring the security of citizens in an increasingly dangerous neighborhood" (para. 8). This is a partial marked departure from the predictable rentier model over the decades: provi-

de economic benefits in exchange for acquiescence from citizens. Even when their populations become increasingly disgruntled and demand some form of political participation, then bribe them a bit more with the country's wealth (Al-Kuwari, 2019, p. 45). Yet with declining oil prices, the "no taxation without representation" position will not be given leverage. However, these security pacts are difficult to accept in the long term for they not only refute meaningful participation, it is deepening the repressive apparatus with political arrests on a continual increase. One form of legitimation has been to resume work or rouse the national identity that has been practically stillborn since the time of independence as cohesion relied primarily on wealth distribution and welfare as a facilitator while keeping the peace through a tribal confederation. This could pose a serious threat given the lack of experience with managing identity politics. After all, flirting with nationalist tropes would surface tribal grievances that may have long been underestimated. Diversification away from hydrocarbon has been the central discussion, and with Saudi Arabia driving this matter, a Carnegie report raises an interesting question:

> Will the Saudi Vision 2030 lead to genuine institution building that promotes accountability, justice, and transparency—including for members of a royal family often regarded as being above the state? Or will it follow the standard playbook, whereby a few showcase projects are developed whose economic benefits are captured by royal family members or used as favors for well-connected political elites? (Cammack et al., 2017, p. 78)

This report came out a year before Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's excesses became apparent through the extrajudicial arrests and imprisoning of elites at the Ritz Carlton, murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and political arrests of activists all in the midst of the long, bloody war in Yemen. The kingdom has proclaimed a new era by breaking with the old contract and now asserting that "citizens must contribute to the good of the country, as opposed to simply receiving benefits as their forebears did" (Alhussein, 2019, para. 13). This was expected when the country eventually had to look "beyond oil," however, the peril arises because of a very familiar regional script in which the kingdom "terminates the social contract system while narrowing the space for critiquing domestic policies and providing no new political freedoms" (Alhussein, 2019, para. 15).

Jordan and Morocco arguably come under the umbrella of pseudo-reconstructed social contracts. The regimes have staved off revolutions by offering reforms but at a modest pace, more frustrating for citizens is the vagueness to the roadmap and commitment levels (Loewe, 2020, p. 5). This was shown with the 2011 political reforms in Morocco that quickly revealed limits in absorbing widespread discontent (Haddad, 2019). At times, it is not simply a matter of bad faith on the part of the state but the desire to salvage the welfare aspects of the old social contract are restrained by "budgetary constraints imposed by international financial institutions" (Loewe et al., 2020, p. 12). Jordan has seen popular demonstrations, in part, against tax increases which reflects a frustration with the little improvement in public services. The pseudo-reconstructed social contract betrays good intentions and falls into a toxic circular logic because of key underlying problems such as, in Jordan's case, tribes filling in the role of primary political actors instead of political parties, with elections used as means to access privileges which only reinforces "rentierism, patronage and clientelism" (Ajlouni, 2018, para. 11).

Algeria and Sudan are arguably caught between "transition" and a politically stillborn situation that hampers the crystallization of the type of evolving social contracts, not aided by the fact that the overthrow of the country's dictators and the disruption of the political order was only recent. What can be said with certainty is that Algeria's *Hirak* (Arabic for movement) successfully unsettled the "post-civil war social contract" that was built on the tacit agreement of stability (ending the horrific terrorist attacks of the 1990s) in exchange for a "depoliticised representative process" (Boubekeur, 2020, para. 35). No longer is the polarizing binary of Islamists versus military a compelling narrative for the latter to maintain. *Hirak* has been effective in building a parallel narrative and legitimacy outside the institutional and ideological structures of power while also undermining the regime's ability to rebuild through formal channels. In effect, *Hirak* cornered the system that now "lacks the tools to reinvent itself after Bouteflika or negotiate a new social contract with the people" (Boubekeur, 2020, para. 3). In Sudan's case, the old social contract was the implicit classic bargain: "acceptance of autocracy in exchange for economic stability" (Hassan & Kodouda, 2019, para. 34) that came undone in 2018 and 2019. Similar to Algeria, the Transitional Military Council is setting the tone for Sudan's transition, but with ominous elements such as the revival of parts of the old regime, including a resurgent security apparatus, an unwillingness to step down, and worse, the ability and equipment to cling to power, which it can justify with a pretext such as deterioration of economic conditions that cannot be resolved by a civilian government (Hassan & Kodouda, 2019, para. 5).

It is not so simple to pinpoint the role of karama in the evolving social contracts; however, perhaps as a harbinger, it is quite telling that the Arab state in seeking to re-appropriate karama would use it as Libyan General Hafter did by launching Operation Karama, a military campaign in 2014 under the guise of a counterterrorism operation with Egyptian and UAE backing (Al-Kuwari, 2019, p. 190). Like many Arabic terms circulating to legitimize and delegitimize the interplay of different forces in state-society relations since 2011, karama treaded into a conceptual battlefield where it is seized to instill life or deprive life from narratives and counter-narratives. An often-quoted Antonio Gramsci line has served in one sense as the metaphysical axiom of

the years following the 2011 Arab spring: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 275–276). The question is rarely asked, where is the citizen in all of this state "dying" and "birthing"? What future is there for any karama paradigm?

Rania vs. the Cold Monster

Let us attempt a thought exercise in the Arendtian tradition to understand what the politicized individual in the Arab world is up against. Indeed every city and country will have its peculiarities, but overlaps abound. For example, a survey of protest signs across the MENA region and over the past decade reveals striking similar messaging. One can easily swap the signs and banners (minus giveaway details such as political allegiances and country names) between Algiers and Baghdad and they would be instantly relatable by demonstrators in both cities. Interestingly, the breakout of every demonstration in Arab countries tend to reveal a guiding theme of a shared struggle with other Arab countries that are exhibited through flags, signs, and solidarity chants by protest organizers. The similarities and intersections of years of reports and stories build up a meaningful aggregate of what the protestor faces in spheres of Arab civil disobedience.

Let us consider a hypothetical underemployed university graduate and 23-year-old woman protestor named Rania. She takes the bus to the main square of her city somewhere in the Arab world where protestors have camped, and holds up a sign that reads "We want our dignity! We want a new social contract!" If Rania's hope and message, along, of course, with the collective body voicing this demand, was able to achieve the desired change, a sense of individual dignity and being part of a new vibrant social contract (how that is measured is not the point here), then we need to take stock of the obstacles that stand in the way of Rania.

The Social Landscape

Rania comes from the "middle-class poor" (Bayat, 2013, p. 34) meaning that despite her university education and worldly outlook, she harbors middle class aspirations such as moving out of home and travel to places she's knowledgeable of but her diminishing income (or no income) incapacitates her from fulfilling middle class expectations. Like millions in her situation, she struggles to narrow the gap between lifestyle and taste with her education and status, which leads to an "acute awareness of what is available and of their inability to acquire it gives them a constant feeling of exclusion" (Bayat, 2013, p. 247). This leads to what Barrington Moore described as "moral outrage" and what Asef Bayat deems this category as "likely to be revolutionaries" (Bayat, 2013, p. 247).

Rania is already a threat as she entered a lethal equation that holds "when the streets and public spaces became a place of insurrection and politics," the regimes strike back "violently, humiliating women and beating or killing people indiscriminately" (Harrold, 2018, p. 104). Even without protests, she has to contend with the usual "informal policing of public space by men" that include glances, verbal harassment, groping, sexual harassment and assault (Harrold, 2018, p. 99). This takes place in a climate in which demographic and gendered pressures sees governments rather than address population growth and unemployment respond by treating youth as a security threat. In Rania's case, as a young activist woman, she is seen as both a moral and security threat.

Rania's employment chances and sense of belonging are worsened by the decision of many fellow citizens opting for emigration that foments a chronic brain drain and leaves gaping holes in the socio-economy. She still refuses to be part of the trend that sees the Arab region as "one of the most active in exporting highly qualified human capital equipped with university degrees." Not only is human capital a major Arab world export, but it is "possibly equal to oil and gas in value" (Ḥanafī & Arvanitis, 2016, p. 151). Rania is aware of this on the everyday level, for she has been to more farewell parties than she can count. With most of her friends abroad, she seeks protest as a new liminal space to reproduce new friendships sorely missing in her life through living and sharing the protest event that crystalizes in "collective acts that endorse a shared meaning" (Khosrokhavar, 2016, p. 7). Her mingling with different protestors of diverse classes and faiths gives her a dose of elation of what a pluralist future could look like. "No, I will not emigrate," Rania tells herself again in the midst of euphoria and in the hope that some miraculous change will unfold by the protestor's actions. Yet she is realistic to tread carefully because polarization along sectarian and ethnic lines runs deep, and she knows it is a weapon her government uses to mobilize and scapegoat key constituencies. For now, she has to constantly fend off the occasional conservative passerby's who are less interested in her political message than her doing something "unbecoming" of a young woman. She feels her years of activism are bearing little fruit. There is a futility to it aggravated by the myriad of problems in the social contract.

The Political Landscape

Rania gets tired and sits down with some friends she made that day. She takes out her phone to read the news updates on her country's political class from an independent news service that is blocked in her country, so she uses VPN. She sees a side-story on a new oil field discovered and sighs, as she knows the same corrupt sycophants who will pocket the riches from this. Rentierism is slowly killing her people (see chapter of Nader Kabbani). She recognizes a plain-clothed officer walking menacingly by. She is triggered by a memory of her friend who was kidnapped by state security two years earlier, his whereabouts still unknown, and a journalist friend murdered the previous month, possibly by a militia or a police officer, she is not too sure. The terror of uncertainty is an all too familiar feeling she has become accustomed too. Rania is keenly looking forward to tagging along with her new friends as they head to a popular café and its nearby art spaces that act as a makeshift refuge for her sanity. However, she decides to stay a little while longer knowing she can only drive home the message by making her presence felt in the square where local, regional, and global media news outlets are sporadically stationed. Suddenly, she receives a barrage of hate tweets and emails from regime trolls on her phone. Rania takes consolation in that she does not have many followers on social media.

The Geopolitical Landscape

Rania opens her news app again and is daunted by the world out of her control. She closes the app and reflects on the collapsing regional order, internal and interstate conflicts—Rania lives in a new "Middle East [that] has rarely seen such a confluence of wars and interventions" (Lynch, 2016, p. 4). This is not to mention the environment causing water shortages and hotter summers. She believes her country has a chance of improving but then remembers that one irresponsible Gulf country, or is it two or three of them? Which keeps interfering in her country's political system, jittery-ridden monarchies always wanting to project "an aura of confidence that belied their profound feelings of insecurity" to her nation's detriment (Lynch, 2016, p. 9). She is grateful that a civil war has not broken out like in her neighboring country, but wonders if she is now forced to rely on protection from her sect. She asks herself, "Is not the whole point of her protest to avoid relapse into the old power arrangements?"

Rania understandably overthinks the world around her, everything seems to devolve into an existential question. She sees what has gripped the Arab political circuit: a zero sum game of winner takes all logic, failure to reach the lowest common denominator, factionalism instead of pluralism, exclusion at the expense of tolerance, and the timeless binary reaffirmed in the public mind: despotism or chaos. Something clicks in Rania, messages of support from across the region remind her she is protesting similar problems as other activists in North Africa and the Middle East. She is inspired by a demonstration taking place in another Arab country. She flips her sign, and writes in Arabic a message of support and tweets it to the people rising up against tyranny in a place she has never visited. Suddenly, she receives a volume of traffic from that country, new followers, new engagements; a small new world has opened up in her life. She is reminded that there is something bigger than a social contract, something bigger than the initial reasons she protested for. Her memory warms her soul as she feels echoes of 2011 when her late father took the teenage Rania to her first demonstration and she became part of an unfolding regional narrative. Karama is a language that crosses borders, it is global in scope, and it is a story yet to be told.

Beyond the Social Contract

The coffeehouses in the Arab world not only act as barometers of subtle changes that can easily be overlooked, they can also reveal the nuanced positioning of karama. For example, it would have been rare under Mubarak's rule not to find a portrait of the president hung in Egypt's coffeehouses. You put up a picture of Mubarak because that is what you did previously with leaders like Presidents Sadat and Nasser and King Farouk and Fouad. You did not think about it; you just hung it up. It was not necessarily and directly enforced; you just did that to reduce questions or harassment from passing security officials and protect your business from closure. Yet one is hard pressed to find a portrait of el-Sisi in these same social spaces today. Why in the most repressive time in Egypt's modern history are there barely any portraits of its ruler? Perhaps there was a taken for granted authoritarianism that preceded the decades that are no longer easily enforced? Is the security sector not wishing to overextend its hand in political iconography in public spaces, thus limiting it to elections and referendums on the streets and shop windows? Are coffee shop owners asserting their dignity in quiet ways? Something has changed in, and since, 2011.

One of the problems in academia is that our frames of references and right terminology are lacking. The social contract is important, but it might be a limitation as well. As Loewe, Zintl, and Houdret (2020) stated:

> Most writings though are rather theoretical and normative in that they consider the social contract as something that is good or even necessary to overcome the natural state of anarchy, and to establish property rights and security or distributive justice. In addition, they implicitly or even explicitly (McCandless, 2018) see the nation state as default scope of any given social contract. Only few authors . . . conceptualize supra-national agreements, like the European Union (Rhodes & Mény, 2016). (p. 2)

The authors highlight crucial and overlooked points. The social contract is but one means. Supra-national agreements are barely ever considered based on a few flawed assumptions. The thinking goes, if most national Arab social contracts are in disarray, then how does one even consider a wider venture? This presumes the nation state, as the authors note, as the "default scope." It does not take into consideration that citizen-led initiatives that operate in a parallel polis let alone the journey of political ideas that commence at the periphery before they move (even if they take years and decades) to the center. With a sense of destroying "everything," rebuilding is the natural pathway. Yet any idea of meaningful cross-border bonds smacks of aging Nasserist hacks and pan-Arabist papers collecting dust in a Damascus library. The lesson of 2011 can be forgotten in the subsequent chain of catastrophes, while the protests were focused on national grievances and local contexts, they were wired into a shared Arab public sphere that was electrified by "regional demonstration effects" (Lynch, 2012, p. 390). There are many ideas that can go into building the kinetic karama and the supra-national narrative: the role of Arab exiles in places like Berlin and elsewhere (Ali, 2019), political value systems, pluralism discourses, schools of thought, ideational movements, egalitarian philosophies, among many others. I wish to contribute one key idea integral to the karama paradigm: physical mobility.

In an Arab world with porous borders, a news headline might have read following the Beirut blast of August 2020: "A mammoth bus convoy of volunteers from Cairo, Damascus, Amman and Baghdad headed to devastated Beirut with stockpiles of food and medicine." This would not be unusual when given the chance; for example, Egyptian activists crossed into Libya with food and medicine to help Benghazi in the early days of the Libyan revolution. Yet in the world of hyper-securitized Arab-Arab borders, the reality is that a Yemeni will be refused a travel visa by the Egyptian consulate in Sana, a Libyan will be held for extended questioning upon arrival in Cairo airport only to be sent back on the next available flight based on flimsy suspicions, an Algerian will live a long life without crossing the border even once into Morocco, a Moroccan woman on a legitimate work visa will be interned in Kuwait airport for days based on stereotypes. The impediments, real and imagined, for travel within the Arab world are so vast that they are enough to dissuade one from travelling. Opportunities of exchange, marriage, trade, education, is slowed down, if not comes to a grinding halt. To take a road trip from Madrid to Prague can be found in today's travel brochures, to take a road trip from Alexandria to Tangiers can only be gleaned in medieval texts.

It is one of the peculiarities of our time in which an EU national has a much higher possibility of visiting almost all Arab countries if they so wish than a national of an Arab country could do, hindered by passport rankings, visa regimes, and postcolonial insecurities. It is not unusual for Arab activists and cultural workers to make their first contact with other Arab peers at a conference or workshop in Europe, not in another Arab country. One Egyptian journalist who is in the process of applying for her German citizenship told me the first place she will travel upon her receiving her German passport will be Morocco. In a bizarre sense, the road from Cairo to Casablanca is through the EU.

In September 2020, three years after the train incident, a similar event took place in a video that went viral. A conscript on the Mansoura-to-Cairo train who was unable to pay for a ticket was humiliated by the ticket inspectors, so an elderly woman intervened to pay for his ticket. She was hailed a hero on national media, while the inspectors were reprimanded (Ahram Online, 2020). The incident was hyped up for populist measures which led to honors bestowed on the conscript, and a bill allowing officers to ride the train for free if they are in uniform or showed their ID. This divided social media with many activists claiming the incident was a charade given the "train lady" has been seen prominently in pro-regime videos and the passenger filming was a member of the pro-regime Future of the Nation Party. This was contrasted on social media to the previous year in which two street vendors jumped out of a train after the conductor threatened to report them for not having a ticket. One of them died and was dubbed the "ticket martyr." As one Twitter account noted: "Neither of the men had tickets; the civilian was killed and the conscript was honored" (Al-Monitor, 2020, para. 9). This meant that the civilian public had to bear the increased costs of train fares and endure glaring inequalities induced by the protection pact that masquerades as a social contract. The conscript of 2017 at the start of this chapter had been vindicated.

Mobility in its holistic sense of movement—district to district, town to city, city to city, country to country; planes, trains, buses, and cars; and access to tickets, passports, and visas—is just one of many factors that point back to the karama paradigm. The narrative needs to focus on what the present and the future of the Arab bargains entail and to raise questions about the myriad, imaginative, and empirical ways that we improve upon a dire situation. It is my hope that researchers, thinkers, and activists can expand on the karama paradigm, and actively think with it, for it, and even against it. They should also be offered the space to make their intellectual contribution to an as-yet unspoken project in the making. Numerous creative minds are needed if knowledge production with consequence is to materialize. The Arab Spring barely produced, let alone was led by, its Václav Havels and Nelson Mandelas. There were no political tracts or essays that stood the test of time that could have laid out a foundation or process. Yet what 2011 and the years since have taught us is that karama is more than a fundamental rallying cry. If Arab countries fail at a shared political affinity on the transnational state level, their citizens do better at cross-border affinity on the social, cultural, and grassroots levels.

Conclusion

Kinetic karama keeps the "drive toward life" from being thwarted and mitigates the "drive toward destruction" for it is composed of life affirming and reflective qualities in the negotiation of the daily internal clash between one's acts and values. Citizens are thrown onto the pursuit of destructiveness when the future severs them from the attainment of promise, forgiveness, and responsibility. The conditions that make the suppression of life possible, make its destruction inevitable. The interlocking battles between the state and the citizen can end up inducing the latter to pursue strategies that make "freedom from" damagingly an end in itself. Kinetic karama, rightfully an end in itself, asks the citizen to reclaim the capacities for speech, deeds, choice, and responsibility, and build something new: "freedom to."

Most Arab regimes will continue to deepen their repression in one-sided social contracts that redefine dignity on their terms. A new bridge is dignified; a citizen is not. The tug and pull of dignity generates a sea sickness on the long journey for the millions of Ranias engaged in the struggle to keep dignity intact while continuing to nourish its political and humanizing qualities. However, the regimes come up against national idiosyncrasies of refusal and resistance bound across borders by shared language, history, trade, cultural ties, and social justice. The karama paradigm born in 2011 enables hegemonic imaginaries to be decolonized and reconstructed in an ongoing process of taming, if not reforming, the cold monster and animating a "freedom to" philosophy.

The karama paradigm is larger than the national limitations that is entailed by the normative social contract. The constant brewing of the political imagination, legitimizing narratives, and currents in the Arab world should enable a supra-national social contract to be worked on, even if it means commencing, at the very least, on the intellectual margins. Mobility is one of many dimensions of kinetic karama that can be fleshed out, but much more remains. This is not to engage in wishful thinking; indeed, we will not see anytime soon Arab borders de-securitizing, transnational mobility agreements in North Africa signed, and referendums on supra-national social contracts set in motion. The task is to draw out struggling realities that support this aim from the political fog and give it a name, shape, and form to understand and engage with it better. So, in favorable times, it becomes part of the mainstream political lexicon that can shape visions, practices, and policies.

For some time to come, Nietzsche's cold monster will remain over the Arab world and engage in linguistic confusion and the scrambling of good and evil codes. It will continue to be the coercive and artificial reality that turns people into populations, organic life into mechanized life, diversity into homogenization, and devitalize life into the undead, the "slow suicide." Yet unlike, for example, human rights, which operates by abstract universal agreements and the rules of the state, even if it languishes in opposition or prison; karama is intimate enough for ownership and mobilization yet amorphous enough to frustrate the state for it sits outside the established fixtures and court rulings. It is not that a viable social contract is the end result, for it will always be negotiated every day, but the engagement with the 2011 imperishable gift of karama will illuminate the road to Tangiers or Alexandria.

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CHAPTER 3

Arab Youth, Between Inclusion and Revolution

Youssef Cherif

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Algerians kept up the pressure for the 41st week of protests, against their government and against the presidential elections scheduled for December 12, 2019.

Bayat (2017b) stated:

> Such notions as "youthful rebelliousness" and "youth war" virtually linked those revolutionary moments to a youthful disposition, assumed to be shaped by a specific "stage of life," a mix of alienation and presence, or the generation war; while some argued that age conflict had taken the place of class conflict, others took the young as the new revolutionary class that had replaced the proletariat as the agent of political transformation. (p. 18)

The topic of the book is the transformation of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region since 2011, and this chapter looks specifically at the mechanisms of this transformation and a much-celebrated actor: the youth. The commonly termed "Arab Spring," which we will call "Arab Uprisings," is an ongoing process that is changing how political systems, states, economies, and societies work and interact. It is a revolutionary movement that has clearly started in 2011 but that has not ended yet, 10 years later. Its most active player is the youth. In fact, the MENA region is among the most youthful regions in the world, and where youth unemployment is the highest globally. The actions of these revolted young men and women, and the outcome of their movement, is what the next pages will attempt to chronicle.

Most MENA postcolonial regimes are the product of 20th century youth revolutions. But these regimes were built as repressive systems that brutalized their subjects, in the name of Arab unity, political autonomy, state-building, and so on. During their decades of existence, these states faced countless revolts and many of these were the work of young individuals who refused the paternalistic authoritarian rules. Youth movements kept mushrooming one after the other, to end up suppressed by the ruling regimes. The year 2011 hence marked a breaking point, with a new generation using both street and online activism to confront the ruling establishments and threatening or even ending their existence. Ten years later, the struggle continues, with new techniques, goals, and spaces of contention. Outcomes are also multiple, from partial inclusion to lethal exclusion. The chapter uses qualitative examples from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.

Revolutions in the Arab World: Genealogies

Definitions

The Arab Uprisings[2], as is always the case with events of such scale, are not without their detractors. The appellation itself is an issue. "Arab Spring," for instance, is often considered nonacademic, too orientalist, and utopian. Therefore, "Arab Uprisings" is preferred to "Arab Spring" in scholarly contributions. However, even such terms can have a negative connotation among Arab publics[3]. Conspiracy theorists, for instance, frequently describe the movement as a global conspiracy led by Israel or benefiting Israel, hence the derogative "Hebrew Spring" used by many Arab politicians, journalists, and other opinion makers (Hebrew being ibry in Arabic, a word play occurs with araby, Arab).

But more than the name, defining the nature of the event is itself tricky. To put things into perspective, the problem of defining a revolutionary movement is recurrent across historical eras and continents; every uprising or revolution brings its load of supporters, chroniclers, analysts, and negationists. Therefore, the questions asked in the Arab world about the nature of the Arab Uprisings are not a novelty, and debates related to these interrogations continue to this day. Was it a revolution? A social movement? A mere wave of discontent and a parenthesis that has closed? A conspiracy or a foreign-led uprising? Was it a political struggle? A socio-economic one? Did it stem from a religious rift? Was it a generational struggle?

Dramatic political changes have been a persistent feature of the recent history of the MENA region, especially in the 20th century (Chalcraft, 2016). But for many Arabs, from conspiracy theorists to convinced human rights acti-

[2] *The term "Arab Uprisings" will be preferred to "Arab Spring," and it will encompass the protests that are shaking the Middle East and North Africa region since December 2010.*

[3] *"Arab" and "Arabs," in the text, do not refer to an ethnic origin but to citizens and affiliates of the Arab League of States countries.*

vists, the Arab Uprisings are simply referred to as al-thawra (the Revolution) or "the so-called-Revolution" for the more skeptical among them. This is partly due to media bombardment, as the event is commonly referred to by that name in the dedicated thousands of hours of media coverage, especially in the 2011–12 period. But it may also indicate how Arabs perceive the changes occurring in their lands, and what they witnessed and what they hoped to see. "Revolutions are the archetypal instance of social breakdown and re-emergence" (Lawson, 2019, p. 10).

Another concept, less used than thawra in the Arab political lexicon, is the concept of social movement. Needless to say, Arab intellectuals do contribute to the field of Social Movement Studies and there are many books and articles published by MENA scholars about social movements (e.g., Amin & Abdul Kayum, 2006; Kraiem & Gallisot, 1996). In Morocco, the protest movement of 2011 was called hirak February 20 (the February 20 Movement). In Tunisia, the word became briefly popular around 2014 when President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki (2012–2014) launched a new political movement called hirak cha'b al-muwatinyn (the Citizen People Movement). In Tunisia as well, an NGO founded in 2011 and called the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) publishes regularly on social movements issues. But the concept did not make it to the mainstream lexicon until late in the 2010's decade, with the 2019 protests of Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, and Sudan. Unlike the 2010–11 events in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, that were called thawra, the 2019 ones are designed as hirak (movement).

Conventional Arab revolutions (i.e., what revolution studies consider revolutions, the major struggles against colonialism of the first half and the middle of the 20th century) are referred to as istiqlal, independence, and not thawra. Apart from these, thawra in the Arab Imaginary mostly refer to putsches, top-down or state-led initiatives: Nasser's 1952 July Revolution in Egypt, Gaddafi's 1969 September Revolution in Libya, Assad's 1970 Corrective Movement in Syria, Bashir's 1989 Islamic Salvation Revolution in Sudan, and so on. Other events that are commonly called revolutions, such as Tunisia's 1984 Bread Riots or Algeria's October 1988 Riots, were rather short-lived protests, unconnected geographically, and that were crushed by the established regimes.

Until 2011, therefore, the one major and multinational thawra that the popular Arabic political lexicon regularly referred to was the 1916-1918 Great Arab Revolt (al-Thawra al-'Arabiyya al-Kubrá) in the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant. It was a movement of emancipation from Ottoman rule, largely accompanied by the British and the French (hence the role of Lawrence of Arabia and the Sykes-Picot Agreement). The Great Arab Revolt, though, led to the establishment of absolute monarchies and not of democratic republics. Moreover, it is largely regarded as a Franco-British conspiracy against the Ottomans. It was therefore not a model to emulate for 21st-century millennials. "Pro Democracy activists who sparked the 2011 uprisings drew no visible inspiration from or made any mention of previous revolutionary experiences" (Ottaway, 2017, p. 23). Hence the uniqueness of the Arab Uprisings, both for the Arab political lexicon and for Arab history.

Short History of Arab Revolutions

The 20th century was an era of radical transformations in the Arab world. Most of the nation-states that were created or revamped by the middle of the century came as a result of contentious activities against the ruling colonial powers and their political and economic policies. These actions often morphed into major revolutions, involving street mobilization and violence. Those who led these movements and shaped the transition were mostly young European-educated men (and a few women) who identified with the global trend of liberation movements.

The first postcolonial de facto leaders of Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Syria (under the Baath), Iraq, and Sudan (as the DRS) were aged between 32 and 44 years. The median age of the ministers of Tunisia's first republican government was mid-30s. Libya's Muammar Gaddafi took power at 27. In the 1950s and 1960s, therefore, many young colonial subjects rose to prominence and dismantled their countries' colonial or traditional structures. They came with fresh ideas, be it of pan-Arab nationalism as in Egypt, Islamic nationalism as in Morocco, country-specific nationalism as in Tunisia, or pan-Islamism as in Saudi Arabia. They built new nation-states, often with the repertoires of progress and development. Yet they relied massively on police repression or military doctrine, rather than inclusiveness and democratic norms (see Amro Ali's chapter).

Following independence, economic crises spread across the former colonies. On one hand, young and inexperienced leaders struggled to replace the old established order. On the other hand, former colonial powers, in defense of their national interests, often acted as conventional counter revolutionary forces hampering progress. Moreover, disagreements among political leaders were frequent, which widened the existing crises. Corruption and authoritarianism made the postcolonial subjects unhappy, and that triggered movements of contestation of political and economic nature.

Consequently, as the revolutionary independentist movements became bureaucratic establishments, other movements gained prominence, attracting students, young professionals, and disenfranchised individuals. Many of these opposition forces followed the global Marxist trends that were popular for most of the 20th century, and groups influenced by Lenin, Trotsky,

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The first Tunisian Government (1957).

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The first post-colonial Algerian government (1962) was led by Ahmed Ben Bella (46 years old). The defense minister, Houari Boumediene, was 30 years old; the interior minister, Ahmed Medeghri, was 28; the foreign minister, Mohammed Khemisti, was 32; the justice minister, Amar Bentoumi, was 39; and the youth minister, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was 25.

Mao, and even Enver Hoxha popped-up across MENA, radically opposed to the regimes in place. Others evolved within the framework of Pan-Arabism, or of pan-Arabism, or pan-Arab nationalism itself adopting adopting Marxist thoughts. They gathered momentum around anti-imperialism and the Palestinian cause, even overthrowing regimes in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Libya. Labor unions, many of which were formed during the colonial times for colonial workers, were also quick to adapt to the new settings and monopolize the grievances of young industrial workers, often in confrontation with the ruling regimes.

Overall however, the repressive systems that ruled the MENA states and the civil unrest that characterized many of these countries limited the spread of these revolutionary ideas. Dissenters were disconnected from the general public and their participation in civic and political life was jeopardized. Youth movements emerged[4], mostly in universities, but the moment they spread outside of university walls, they were immediately crushed. It was only occasionally that youth were able to occupy streets and public places, most notably in 1968, or between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, either as a result of major economic crises, or in response to Israeli military policies in the Middle East.

Between the 1980s and 1990s, pan-Islamist movements led by young revolutionaries were supplanting the Marxists and pan-Arabists. Islamists campaigned for elections and started garnering votes in many MENA countries, something other opposition groups were barely able to do in previous decades. Yet, most of them were violently suppressed by the ruling regimes in the early 1990s. Some of these groups went into exile as in Tunisia, others resorted to violence and were partly suppressed as in Algeria and Libya, others were tolerated as in Morocco or Egypt, but they were not able to integrate the system nor to apply their goals.

Therefore, states that were built as a result of youth activism or that emerged as youth-led projects ended up repressing their youth. Young leaders from the 1950s and the 1960s stayed in power indefinitely, growing older without opening up to the next generations. Gaddafi, who led Libya's pan-Arab revolution at the age of 27, died at 69 while still claiming the mantra of revolution. Algeria's Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who got his first post as minister at the age of 25, was deposed as president at the age of 82, incapacitated. The Palestinian leadership, a group of freedom fighters in their 20s turned politicians-in-suits, is now mostly a club of men in their 70s and 80s. The MENA region seems torn in a perpetual, often zero-sum game, conflict between established regimes and revolted youths.

[4] *"Youth" and "young" in this chapter refer to those aged less than 35 years old at the moment of the uprisings or when political action is mentioned.*

The Arab Uprisings: A "Generation War"?

Street vs. Palace

The idea of a youth revolution or youth led revolution is not new; on the contrary, it is a recurrent concept in history (Sukarieh et al., 2015, p. 80–81). Moreover, the image of youth as the only backbone and leadership of the protests is overly mythicized[5]. There were thousands of older people from all generations protesting and leading. (Sika, 2017, p. 7; Sukarieh et al., 2015, p. 107). Furthermore, the stress on youth as the force behind the uprisings transformed them into scapegoats sometimes, because they became synonymous with disorder, violence, and chaos (Murphy, 2018, p. 2). Critics of neoliberalism put the blame on the latter's emanations, because youth became a concept to study, study, use, and even even target under the modern Neoliberal regimes (Sukarieh et al., 2015, p. 5). Yet all these critiques taken into consideration, the place of youth in the Arab Uprisings is not to be ignored, rather the contrary.

Prior to 2011, the "Arab Street" was considered sleepy and submissive. The world was changing, observers remarked, but the MENA region remained unaffected. Theories to explain Arab authoritarian resilience abounded, on the borderline of racism: Muslim Arabs are accustomed to authoritarian rule and prefer it to democracy, some scholars claimed, and that is inherent to their traditions and culture (e.g., Lewis, 1996, pp. 52–63). The uprisings were, therefore, a surprise for many. They were the explosion of decades-old frustrations, as well as a fatal blow to a number of essentialist theories.

But, most important for our chapter, the uprisings were the coming to age of a new generation, urbanized millennials born in the 1980s and 1990s in an era of global political and economic liberalization. Education had also reached larger segments of society than in the past, decreasing illiteracy and rising civic awareness, but also creating more needs among the millennials' generation. By the year 2010, satellite dishes had spread across the Arab world, including in remote and poor villages. Smart phones had also started to appear, and the internet was widely available in dedicated coffee shops. The advance of ICT's considerably contributed to democratizing the region (Shirazi, 2008), even if this view is more and more criticized (Sukarieh et al., 2015, p. 107). Young Arabs are perhaps not as tech-savvy as some idealized depictions want them to be, but they can still handle mobile phones and have access to the internet, and they can watch countless TV stations broadcasting different ideas and from multiple countries.

At the same time, police brutality remained consistent, social inequalities kept growing, and the future looked gloomy, especially following the 2008 global economic crisis. The borders remained hard to cross, and a young Egyptian or a young Tunisian had only their country to find a job or to travel around. It was not only about money: visas to Europe or North America, where jobs were available and better paid, were hard to get due to the tough migration policies adopted by right-leaning governments in the West. Arab youths were getting integrated in the globalized society, but Arab regimes did not evolve: the same old bureaucrats with their outdated speeches.

These youths are aware of what is happening around them in the world, but they find themselves neither able to participate in the global progress, nor having their say in their own countries. By 2010 therefore, many young Arabs felt that their material conditions deteriorated in comparison to their parents' times, as shown in Nader Kabbani's chapter. For many, the choice was between unemployment on one side and the precarious and insecure informal sector on the other side (Murphy, 2018, p. 28). A poll is telling: asked about the quality of the education they received in 2018, a majority of Egyptian (68%), Tunisian (67%) and Moroccan (59%) youth responded that what they learned does not fit with the market demands (Sika, 2020, p. 10).

The situation of many Arab youth is therefore that of a feeling of insecurity and uselessness, of marginalization; they are socially excluded (Backeberg & Tholen, 2018, p. 1). The reality of human society puts them away from social networks and limits their participation in civic activities (Backeberg & Tholen, 2018, p. 5). Thus, "Networks and connections . . . play a major role in evaluating the percentage contributions of the individual deprivations. Many young people are denied access to employment or social services because they do not have a proficient network" (Backerberg & Tholen, 2018, p. 16).

They know that opportunities exist, they know they have the right skills and they can blossom, but they cannot climb that last ladder; they are in a state of waithood (Murphy, 2018, p. 33). Young Arab men and women had high expectations when growing up, but ended up in "relative deprivation" (Gurr, 1970/2016, pp. 24–58). As Lawson (2019) said, "revolutionary movements (provide) a means for those living in despair and indignity to reject their conditions and force the opening of exclusionary social orders" (p. 16).

So, when the 26-year-old Tunisian street seller Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in December 2010, the conditions for a large-scale uprising were

[5] *"Bayat argued that youth movements erupt when the state prevents youth from living and acting their youthfulness: however, if "moral and political authorities" are able to "accommodate youthful claims," then "young people may remain as conservative politically as any other social groups." Though somewhat esoteric in its phrasing, Bayat's theory bears strong continuity with more than a century of stereotypes of youth as being inherently idealistic and oriented to change, and of youth movements as being driven fundamentally by the essence of youth nature. In addition to such claims of inherent youth idealism, there has also been . . . a resurgence of theories that place generational conflict as being at the root of the current global uprisings" (Sukarieh et al., 2015, p. 103).*

rife. His act itself was a form of protest that existed in the past and continued to happen after him, symbolizing anger and despair from the existing socio-economic conditions. Bouazizi was not the cause of the cataclysm, but the last drop before the effusion. In moments of revolution, disparate groups gather in networks and form a communal friendship against a unique foe, in this case the Arab regime (Sika, 2017, p. 104). The demonstrators who made the headlines following his death used the same old repertoires of demonstrations, sit-ins, online campaigns, and self-immolations that existed before Bouazizi's celebrated death (Sika, 2017, p. 68). But this time, unlike in previous periods, it worked.

According to Backerberg and Tholen, "the strongest driver of youth exclusion in all Arab Mediterranean countries is the exclusion from social and political life" (Backerberg & Tholen, 2018, p. 16). But it would be farfetched to depict the Arab Uprisings as pro democracy movements either (Sika, 2017, p. 88, 95, 99). Few among those who demonstrated in 2010–11 had plans to establish a democratic system or even a conception of what the new regime should be. Whether economic exclusion plays a major or a minor role, or if the "strongest driver for exclusion in the region is socio-political exclusion," remains debatable (Sika, 2020, p. 2). But broadly speaking, the uprisings, even if they did not belong to an organized movement, relate to material needs and expectations, and raise important demands for increased democratization and the respect of the rule of law. They were fueled in parallel by regime repression and the lack of political alternatives (Lawson, 2019, p. 75).

Since 2010–11, Arab millennials have revolted against the repressive apparels of the Arab regimes. The leaderless revolution, or the youth revolution as some dubbed it, aimed at a total reversal of the system as exemplified by the slogan: the people want the fall of the regime. The movement belongs to a global wave of demonstrations that gained intensity in 2009–2012 and reached around 70 countries (Bayat, 2017, p. 1), so it is not unique to the MENA region, but the economic and political conditions of the region amplified it. Some regimes collapsed, others survived, but social peace was kept. However, in other places such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, revolted youth took up arms against their regimes or ruling elites, and civic movements became armed struggles.

Social Media

Among the labels given to the Arab Uprisings is the Facebook or Twitter revolution label (Ghonim, 2012; Tufekci, 2017). Online activism, linked to the global social data revolution, was perceived by some as the main driver behind the uprisings and the reason why the movement had succeeded, in contrast with previous episodes of civic contestation in the MENA region. Indeed, the widespread use of social media was one of the major shifts in

A protester holding a placard in Tahrir Square referring to Facebook and Twitter, acknowledging the role played by social media during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.

modes of assembly and communication in revolutionary settings (Lawson, 2019, p. 213). Arab youth were quick to adapt to new technologies, while the repressive regimes had difficulties to follow, at first, and then to block the internet when the situation got out of hand. The Arab Uprisings showed that while censorship worked in the era of radio and television, it was less efficient in the internet era. By the end of the 2000s, the internet was everywhere. As Sika (2017) said:

> Activists interacting in cyberspace developed an identity of solidarity among themselves, irrespective of their political and ideological backgrounds. This identity was constructed in cyberspace, through the ability of the youth to interact and develop their political ideals in social networking sites and on blogs that operated far beyond the security constraints of the state and adult political life. Youth activists have developed a space for contention against the regime and against older generations in cyberspace as well as developing their own identities, their contention, and their mobilization strategies against the regime. For them, this was an important forum differentiating this youth generation from older generations. (p. 5)

Facebook groups, pages, and public profiles were the first loci where young citizens from Tunisia and Egypt assembled and through which details of the emerging uprisings were shared with the outside world. In the few weeks that made the 2010–11 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, the regimes attacked the internet, starting with Facebook. In Tunisia, they succeeded in hacking or censoring several Facebook profiles and pages of prominent activists. In Egypt, Twitter, Facebook, and finally the whole internet were shut down. In Syria, the regime's online troops were in constant fight against the opposition. However, the movement did not recede and, in fine, the regimes had to give up: both the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes freed the internet before collapsing, whereas the Syrian opposition was able to continue operating online using external sources.

The regime apparatchiks, especially the securocrats of the ministries of interior, struggled to understand the situation; only a few were initiated to cyber security prior to 2010 and most of their internet use was limited to a few websites and Facebook. Hence, without sufficient proof and falling prey to the conspiracy theories they were traditionally paranoid with, they were quick to accuse their own youth of being foreign agents. Stories about trainings provided to Arab youth by the U.S. State Department, the CIA, and other intelligence and foreign agencies became legion. Books such as those by former Tunisian Ambassador Mezri Haddad (Haddad, 2011) or Algerian pro-regime intellectual Ahmed Bensaada (Bensaada, 2016), as well as countless interviews given by former regimes' officials, showed how little understanding they had of the mechanisms of social movements and the extent to which they were impacted by conspiracy theories.

This is not to say that conspiracies do not exist, or that some cyber activists were not trained by the United States and other Western agencies and programs (Sukarieh et al., 2015, p. 109). As seen in recent U.S. and Israeli actions against Iran, cyber is a weapon that Western governments master skillfully. Furthermore, conspiracies, which include plots and other staged actions, do have a revolutionary dimension and can lead to revolutionary situations (Gurr, 1970/2016; p. 10). Yet the power of conspiring that the representatives of say the Ben Ali, Mubarak, or Gaddafi regimes give to the young protesters and the often-unfounded accusations they bring take them to another level.

Since early 2011, international media outlets and Western scholars have been interested in how young internet activists were interacting with each other and confronting their regimes (Sukarieh et al., 2015, p. 101). Used to cyber activists in their respective countries, these foreign observers were often misled in their observations of MENA online activism. However, blogging and bloggers (i.e., those who had blogs on platforms such as Blogger and WordPress), often described as the leading force in the 2010–11 events, had actually little influence on the ground. Most Arab bloggers who became global celebrities in subsequent years were unknown to the majority of street revolutionaries in their own countries. Online, their preferred language was either English or some sort of intellectual Arabic; it did not appeal to the masses. Blogs were read by a tiny minority of youth. Another common mistake by foreign observers is to overemphasize the role of Twitter. Actually, Twitter is popular in the Gulf -where the uprisings were limited in scale with the exception of Bahrain- but not as much in the Levant and the Maghreb. Facebook was by far the most popular and used website, but it was not as much scrutinized by foreign observers as the blogs or Twitter.

In fact, the real online drivers of the Arab Uprisings were not the urban hipsters or globalized thinkers, but the largely unknown masses whose power resided not so much in the words they wrote, but in the pictures and videos they shared, and the myriad online networks they formed to disseminate information. Furthermore, the Arab Uprisings did succeed in places where internet connection was limited such as Libya and Yemen, which questions the theory that links the success of the movement to the social data revolution. And the fact that demonstrations continued even when internet was dysfunctional in places like Egypt, Tunisia, or Syria showed that cyber was only one of the tools of revolution, not everything (Lawson, 2019, p. 219). Online activism, exaggerated by conspiracy theorists, online activists, regime supporters, and non initiated observers, had nonetheless an important role in changing the status quo and later transforming political life.

Outcome

Cosmetic Inclusion

Following the reversal of regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, a number of young people got empowered and were able to enter the public sphere. Many were either given important political positions or got into global networks, often invited to speak and participate in international conferences and high-level panels. Tunisia's Lina Ben Mhenni (1983–2020), for instance, was invited as a public speaker across the globe, meeting with Nobel Prize laureates and heads of states. Egypt's Wael Ghonim became a global celebrity, treated by some western politicians as Egypt's next president. Everywhere in the region, youth groups mushroomed, be it to demonstrate against the political political regimes or to wage campaigns for democracy or civilians rights, and so on.

Some joined established political groups, others created their own political movements, and others ran for election as independents (Sika, 2017, p. 73). In Tunisia, for instance, Slim Amamou, one of the most mediatized cyber activists of the Ben Ali era, was appointed Secretary of State for Youth in January 2011. In Libya, millennials joined en masse the revolutionary groups that fought against Gaddafi, many rising to the ranks of militia leaders and later deputy ministers or ministerial advisors. In Egypt, young people were at the forefront of the anti-Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) demonstrations, and in the political groups formed around figures such as Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, Mohamed Elbaradei, or Amro Moussa. Others, such as Khaled Ali, created new political movements. In Yemen, young activists led the weekly demonstrations against President Ali Abdullah Saleh. But the role of youth waned quickly, especially when the regimes reversed to authoritarianism or were engulfed by civil wars.

When inclusion took place, it was often cosmetic. Youth in Tunisia, for instance, complain that their voice is marginalized and that political parties use them for propaganda reasons (so as to say that they have youth in their ranks) or to do low-skilled jobs. This has led to disappointment with politics among many young Tunisians, who decided to leave politics once for all (Yerkes, 2017). Similar situations occurred in Egypt. Youth who worked in the campaigns of important political figures or parties were ultimately side-lined so that older politicians could do politics among themselves. Nadine Sika quoted Tunisian scholars Hassan Boubakri and Asma Bouzidi as saying that "young people in Tunisia argue that they do not trust the old leadership of political parties and civil society actors, and hence, they are compelled to develop their own initiatives and movements to counter the hegemony of the old elite" (Sika, 2020, p. 14).

The National Youth Conference to engage in dialogue with youth around the world.

In the case of Tunisia, the law mandates political parties to introduce a youth quota in their electoral lists. This has allowed many young Tunisians to become MPs at an early age, especially in the 2015–19 parliament. However, many, but not all, lacked political ambitions or ideas. Once voted in, they either found themselves lost and uninterested in the complicated work of politics, or became a negative force in the political process (e.g., involved in heated skirmishes and media debates, used by big political players or rich patrons to serve private interests). Hence, with each electoral period, a number of young people are excited to join new political movements that promise a lot but then withdraw by the time the following electoral period comes, after feeling disenchanted. This in turn affects the work of political parties that are suddenly left without members. The cases of Tunisia's CPR (Congrès pour la République), Ettakatol, or Nidaa Tounes, parties that became empty shells soon after winning the elections, are emblematic.

The cosmetic inclusion of youth took other forms as well, such as the big fora. Following Abd el-Fattah el-Sisi's coup for instance, Egypt resorted to initiatives from the Mubarak-era, such as the youth fora of Gamal Mubarak (Sika, 2017, p. 64). Major youth conferences were organized, under president el-Sisi's patronage, to show that youth had a prominent place in the regime's policy. The World Youth Forum (WYF, a name mimicking the World Economic Forum [WEF]), organized annually in the tourist city of Sharm el-Sheikh, brings young people from all over the world: youth are used for the propaganda

of the regime, so that international news outlets portray el-Sisi's Egypt as a country where youth have a say, and so as to influence Arab youth and lure them away from democracy: in this forum, Egypt as a military-led, strong state is glorified. Tunisia, Egypt's democratic antithesis, organized similar events, reminiscent of the Ben Ali era. A National Youth Dialogue (NYD), like el-Sisi's WYF, was organized in 2016 in Tunis and was largely criticized as a cosmetic show. The democratic life of Tunisia, however, allowed critics to raise their voice and the NYD was never repeated again.

After initial attempts to include youth or by the youth to be included, the old system took over again. Older politicians and other influential people regained power and pushed the young citizens aside. Tunisia remains an exception, with young people participating in public and political life but even there their place is mostly the end row.

Lethal Inclusion

As stated above, Arab regimes were built on oppressive police and military structures. Millennials grew up revolting against these systems, a revolt that climaxed with the Arab Uprisings. However, following the fall of the regimes, they were not included in the political sphere. Their anger, therefore, is occasionally channeled by extremist Islamic groups, criminal cartels, football hooligan groups, or populist political movements.

Many Arab youth joined extremist movements. Radical Islamic groups, mostly al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS), were able to recruit thousands of young people from Tunisia and Egypt. In Egypt, an IS insurgency formed in the Sinai Peninsula, and several terrorist attacks perpetrated by young Egyptians rocked the country in the last decade. In Tunisia, al-Qaeda did recruit, but IS was the largest recruiter (Zelin, 2020). Young Tunisian sympathizers of IS staged attacks inside and outside Tunisia, becoming an important battalion between Syria and Iraq and waging a number of attacks in Europe. IS was also able to recruit tens of thousands of young Moroccans, Syrians, Iraqis, Saudis, Jordanians and Yemenis.

In Libya, young people were used as cannon fodder by the warring militias. Videos from the Libyan civil war often show young men in their twenties firing machine guns. Hundreds among them died. But ironically, when there are political negotiations, it is mostly officials of 50 years and older who are present. And when young people are appointed in high level positions, it is often related to their pedigree or because they belong to a specific clan or tribe, not necessarily due to their aptitude.

Another phenomenon reported in the Arab countries that went through political upheavals in the last decade is that of the rising criminality and violence. Arrests of young men and women working in gangs are regular headlines in Morocco, Tunisia, or Egypt. There are regular reports about atrocious crimes and rapes committed by youth. An "opioid crisis" is also silently affecting Arab youth. Football hooligans, such as the ones who joined the Ultras of Tunisia and Egypt, frequently resort to violence against their sports' adversaries or state representatives, mostly the police, and oftentimes in response to police provocation (Zaghdoudi, 2020).

Disappointment with the Arab Uprisings led many young people to join populist, anti-democratic movements. In Tunisia, many joined Nidaa Tounes, a party that advocated for a strong state and focused on security. After Nidaa Tounes disintegrated, many young people later joined the more radical PDL, a party that openly praises authoritarianism and considers the Arab Uprisings a foreign conspiracy. In 2013, in Egypt, hundreds of thousands of young people formed the Tamarrod movement and cheered for Abd el-Fattah el-Sisi after he overthrew President Mohamed Morsi, basically establishing a military dictatorship.

Actual Exclusion

Ten years after the Arab Uprisings, youth feel largely excluded. In Tunisia, after 88 years old Beji Caid Essebsi was elected president in 2014, and as his alliance with 73 years old Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi was sealed, Tunisians joked that "a youth (shabab) revolution was stolen by the elderly (shouyouh)." Caid Essebsi died in office in 2019 aged 93, and Ghannouchi was elected parliament speaker the same year, aged 78. In Algeria, after the youth-led Hirak precipitated, 82-year-old Bouteflika's fall in 2019, 74-year-old Abdelmajid Tebboune was elected. A year later, he contracted COVID-19 and spent months in convalescence.

Murphy (2018) explains:

> In their political lives too, young people are forced to live with a profound and grating dissonance between the populist, nationalist, participatory and often democratic discourses of regimes, performed through hollow institutions and carefully constructed policy frameworks on the one hand, and the reality of exclusivist, neo-patrimonial, often authoritarian and even gerontocratic political realities. (p. 31)

Youth ideals and demands such as more democracy and openness, or the quest for jobs and a better future, were neglected by the political class of the 2010s. In places where the uprisings occurred, the top political and social debates were about the fight between Islamists and secularists or Islamists and leftists, or the centuries-old struggles between ethnic or religious factions; and so on. These problems counted for the older politicians who spent their youth in the second half of the 20th century, but not for millennials.

And exclusion often comes at a high price. Societal movements being a major threat to autocratic rule (Sika, 2017, p. 43), dictatorships were wary of any protest happening in their countries. Therefore, the repressive regimes of Egypt and Syria, for instance, regularly jail their young activists. Many either died in prison or were executed. In Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood members or sympathizers were among the first targets of purges. But it was not only Islamists who were imprisoned. So-called secular journalists, bloggers, and other activists, such as Ismail Alexandrani, Wael Abbas, or Alaa Abdel Fattah were either in jail or under constant police harassment. A whole generation was being outlawed and destroyed. In Egypt, moreover, laws limiting civic activism continued to be upgraded, such as the Law of Associations and Other Foundations Working in the Field of Civil Work (No. 70 of 2017). It was the same with Syria where prisons are full of radical Islamist and secular leftist activists alike. In Bahrain, the crackdown on young activists included heavy jail sentences and executions. In Saudi Arabia, although a 32-year-old became crown prince, young, prominent feminists were imprisoned along with Islamist writers. And the list goes on. Furthermore, extremist organizations, in Egypt's Sinai or outside of regime areas in Syria, participated in the killing of young people who were accused of being immoral or working with the regime or foreign agencies.

In many of these countries, therefore, the authoritarian system emerged even more vociferous than its pre-2011 predecessor. Young activists ended up dead, jailed, exiled, or they decided to hibernate, disengaging from politics and civic life (Sika, 2017, p. 140). In Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, or Qatar, where young men reached leadership positions, respectively the prime ministers, the crown prince, and the ruling prince, the "rejuvenation" was restricted to limited spheres of power, and the old guard remained in charge. In 2021, most MENA governments are composed by sexagenarian or septuagenarian apparatchiks who resemble those who ruled before 2011 - and in some places it is the same ruling clique. A number of youth, accordingly, decided to exclude themselves, out of fear, disappointment or lack of trust in the platforms at their disposal (Cherif, 2018; Sika, 2018, p. 255, 260).

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The closing of ranks between the President of the Tunisian Republic, Beji Caid Essebsi, and the leader of the Ennahda party, Rached Ghannouchi, was a symbolic moment of post-2011 revolutionary developments in Tunisia's politics.

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Protesters raise the Lebanese flag to the sky in revolution against government. This picture was taken in southern Lebanon's Nabatieh on October 10, 2019.

Ongoing Demonstrations

Youth are still demonstrating in every MENA state, with varying degrees of force and success (Sika, 2018; 2020; Halawa, 2019). Most demonstrations turn around equality in employment, better quality of life, keeping subsidies, opposing the IMF austerity measures, and other socio-economic causes. But other protests, especially the ones that rattled Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq in 2019–20, were political in nature.

> According to a 2018 poll:
> Young people in general are interested in mobilization and protest activities, for instance, a large percentage who have never participated in such activities are willing to participate in the future . . . in Lebanon, 8.7% have participated in peaceful demonstrations, while 30% argue that they might do so in the future. In Tunisia, 17% have participated in demonstrations, while 24% argue they might in the future. In Morocco, 9% participated in peaceful demonstrations and 34% said they could do that in the future. (Sika, 2020, p. 13)

Nadine Sika (2018) differentiated between three types of civil society actors in the MENA region. The most common and perhaps the most consequential for the Arab Uprisings are "informal networks of university students, youth campaigns and unemployed youth" (p. 241). They do not necessarily define themselves as activists, as they are the popular masses whose everyday anger and discontent ended-up sparking the Arab Uprisings. Then, as a second category, she ranks the "protest movements or issue-oriented campaigns developed by independent activists," as well as NGO's and labor unions' members. These movements do target specific goals and obey a certain drive: here we find the hooligan football clubs (such as the Ultras in Egypt and Tunisia) and the purpose-driven actions like Lebanon's "You Stink" or the anti-sectarian protests. The third category she mentions is that of political parties and groups, and they are listed as civil society because, Tunisia aside, "opposition parties are more or less able to organize in political parties, and run for elections, but cannot win these elections." (Sika, 2018, pp. 241–242)

In Tunisia, there are ongoing protests related to campaigns of different natures[6]. Youth assemble either in structured organizations (local or international NGOs), or in unstructured groups (ad-hoc demonstrations or sit-ins). Structured actions are often the work of registered NGOs, based on specific projects. They are usually foreign funded and respond to the needs of a globalized, urban youth, leading to activism on minority rights, climate change, heritage protection, and so on. Unstructured groups, however, involve young people who lack jobs and organization, usually from the rural or underprivileged areas.

[6] *The FTDES website is the best archive to read about these movements.*

Lebanon was largely calm during the events of 2011, and the country was often portrayed as an example. Yet, from 2015 on, well organized groups began to appear, starting with targeted campaigns and ending in massive street riots, calling for a drastic change of the political apparatus. The anti-garbage campaign, for instance, began as a protest movement against waste management in the capital Beirut. That movement spread and tens of thousands of young Lebanese demonstrated for several months, calling for the resignation of the government and clashing with security forces. It was followed by large-scale campaigns demanding that nonsectarian political representation be established; the country was put on standstill in 2019–20. Some of the movement leaders made it to parliament or municipal councils, but their influence remains limited. Several Lebanese governments resigned in the last decade but the same people continue to pull the strings. The sectarian and clientelist realities of Lebanon prevail over time.

The years 2019–2020 were also significant in Algeria, Sudan, and Iraq. Just like Lebanon, these countries were spared by the upheaval of 2011. In Algeria, experts claimed that the memory of the 1990s civil war was still alive, which is why Algerian kept quiet. In Sudan, it was said that the authoritarian system could impose order and avoid any uprising. In Iraq, it was believed that democracy helped thwart any serious threat to the system. In all three countries, revenues from natural resources were thought to be enough to buy social peace. Yet in 2019, young citizens went out and demonstrated, demanding regime change. Some of them succeeded, to some extent. In Iraq, governments resigned and others were formed, although the sectarian structure and corruption were not removed and foreign influence continues to punctuate political life. In Sudan, the regime of Omar Bashir was overthrown, but his defense minister became the all-powerful head of the Sovereignty Council, and the latter, even though it includes a number of democrats and reformers, remains largely controlled by the military elements, all of them remnants from Bashir's bloody regime. In June 2019, when protests ignited again, the Rapid Security Forces, whose leader is the deputy head of the Council, massacred about a hundred youth. A similar situation occurred in Algeria, where President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was finally removed following weeks of major street movements. The 79-year-old deputy minister of defense Ahmed Gaid Salah became the country's de facto leader, shaping the transition in a way that kept intact the system to which he belonged, until Tebboune was handpicked and elected. The youth of Iraq, Sudan and Algeria, even if they participated in toppling their leaders, could not control the aftermath.

Conclusion

Revolution is an integral part of contemporary Arab history; it was a wave of revolutions that led to independence and the foundations of most of the current MENA nation-states. But the exclusionary regimes that succeeded the colonial empires, along with the recurrent economic crises, did not allow space for political participation. Those looking for change or unhappy with their fate, especially among the younger population, had only one way left: that of revolt. Yet the regimes were always able to suppress dissent and upgrade their authoritarian means. The year 2011, therefore, marked a break with the past and had observers hope for a better future, hence the utopian "Arab Spring" denomination. Young, partly globalized citizens, armed with smartphones and peaceful slogans, made the headlines.

Repression pushes young people away from political participation, either out of despair or fear. Exclusion, among other factors, leads them to join violent or undemocratic groups that would harm them and their countries. After a brief interlude in 2011 and 2012, youth were sidelined again. In most of the MENA region, young people now live in a remake of the pre-2011 system where they have to follow, listen, abide, but not act. What regimes miss is that this is only postponing a problem, not solving it. And, due to exclusion and repression, youth grow up little-trained for civic participation, which perpetuates the ambient chaos. Sooner or later, these young people will revolt and take the streets again. The examples of Lebanon, Algeria, Sudan, and Iraq show that the fire has not been extinguished.

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CHAPTER 4

Political Economy of the Arab States—Whither any Change?

Özlem Tür

Although "nothing immediately suggests that the Arab economies of the Middle East and North Africa have a particularly onerous heritage that is inimical to successful development," as compared to other regions like Latin America or Eastern Europe (Noland & Pack, 2007, p. 11), the economic performance of the Arab states has been disappointing. Keeping in mind that the region's economies are diversified and different from each other, which might make it difficult to generalize, the Arab economies as a whole suffer from chronical youth unemployment, corruption, lack of foreign direct investment, institutional effectiveness and technological competence. What is more significant, when compared to other regions is the Arab countries' political systems and their rather unchanging nature. "It is interesting to observe that no developing area was as unchanging as the Middle East" (Noland & Pack, 2007, p. 11). When there was change of regimes, for example, through the 2010–2011 uprisings, the old elite/institutions mostly found a way to continue enjoying power and the socio-economic problems endured. This chapter aims to look at the political economy of the Arab countries by looking at the interaction between political structures and the economic performance. It will argue that politics dominates economics in the region and as long as the Arab states continue to prioritize regime survival and reproduce the ruling coalition, composed of security apparatuses and crony capitalists, the economic performance of these countries will continue to be negative and unimpressive.

Short Look at the Political Economy of the Arab Countries: Pre-Arab Spring

1950s and '60s: Developmentalist Model of the radical republics

At different levels, Arab states embarked on ambitious developmentalist policies during the 1950s and the 1960s. This was especially evident in the republics. As the Arab nationalists captured state power, one important component of the reorganization of the state was the economic realm. Considering the existing bourgeoisie as comprador and no other group able to tackle the arduous process of industrialization and thus breaking the chains of dependency to the former colonial Western powers, the state took on the role of leading the economy, calling the newly forming system as state socialism. Without going into the discussion of whether that system could be called as state socialism or not, it would suffice for this essay to note that the state embarked on both productive and distributive functions, becoming the largest employer in the radical republics. With import substitution industrialization (ISI) put as an ideal model for building independent, self-sufficient economies, state owned enterprises began to spread all over these countries with the formation of a manager class—the state bourgeoisie. State officials and workers formed the backbone of the regime and the state sector overgrew during this period, constituting the bulk of the economic activity in the 1960s (Ayubi, 1995). Politically as well, the populist-corporatist model integrated the masses to the system. The social contract at the time was based on a distributive state; the population was rewarded economically and subordinated to the state.

The state developmentalism began to show signs of decline and created significant bottlenecks in the economy starting from the 1970s onwards. The states were faced with important foreign exchange shortages and needed to reform their ISI policies to create new employment opportunities. As the enterprises directed to produce consumer goods saturated and could not create new jobs, the ISI needed to pass to its second stage: the production of durables. Yet, none of the radical republics had the know-how or the foreign exchange to get it and generate enough resources to create a new industrial investment at this stage. So, having stuck with stage one, consumer goods production, the state faced two alternatives: to reform or to borrow. As there were availability of funds during the 1970s, thanks to the rising oil prices and the petro-dollars circulating in the Western Banks, most developing countries found the opportunity to borrow money at this time, Arab countries being no exception. But at the same time there was effort for limited reform, opening up the economy with infitah policies from the 1970s onwards. The reform was termed by some scholars as "selected liberalization" (Heydemann, 1992), opening up some sectors to private companies which will create employment and incorporate new groups of loyal businessmen into the ruling coalition without harming the existing ones. As the petro-dollars began to dwindle by the end of the decade, call for reform became more significant. The rollback of the state and the reduction of government expenditure, through cutting of subsidies, decreasing state salaries, wages and jobs from the 1980s onwards began to change the nature of the social contract of the 1950s and the 1960s. This social contract, which was based on state production, management and distribution of goods and services to the population—providing economic security in return for citizenship loyalty—was shaken, hurting the lower classes dependent on low wages and the poor most (see the previous chapter of Amro Ali). With the decreasing subsidies, protests and bread riots were seen in many cities in the region but did not turn into mass mobilization that could be able to push for democratic reform. Threatened with the rising dissatisfaction of the masses, the state became increasingly security oriented, working for its own survival. From the 1980s onwards, an "unsocial social contract" (el-Haddad, 2020) was formed in which the cronies emerged as the most favored group in the ruling coalition along with the security forces at the expense of the masses. This period also witnessed an enormous growth of the informal sector (el-Haddad, 2020). This situation became the reality of most radical republics

in the region. *In Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*, Clement Henry and Robert Springborg (2010) detailed how the radical republics, becoming obsessed with regime survival, created a state-party-security apparatus symbiosis at the expense of economic development. They all faced deep economic challenges as well as having problems with integration in the globalization processes. Henry and Springborg divide the radical republics into the Bunkers and the Bullies. While the Bunkers are ruling through a narrower coalition, are more authoritarian and less integrated into the markets, the Bullies manage to build an initially larger power base which make them better politically than the Bunkers yet equally problematic in economic performance (Henry & Springborg, 2010). It was mainly the collapse of the social contract of the 1950s and the 1960s in these radical republics with the removal of the middle classes out of the ruling coalition that called for crisis. The inability of these regimes to build reform-based, open, inclusive new social contracts and instead settling with "new, repressive-exclusionary social pacts across the Middle East" (Heydemann, 2020) further exacerbated the long crises in the region in the decades to come.

Post-1980s: Rise of Crony Capitalism and Deepening Corruption

As el-Haddad (2020) defined them, "the cronies" are the regime's clientele, owners, and managers of businesses benefitting from preferential treatment by the regime. In return, they provide political support. The cronies emerged as an important feature of the political economy of the region as the statist development model began to flounder. Being supporters of the regime and mostly members of the inner circle of the ruling coalition, they managed to get hold of the opportunities as the state enterprises were being privatized or joint ventures with foreign firms were allowed to operate. Through credits from state banks, they were nurtured as reliable supporters. There has been a strategic alliance between the state and this "new elite" as the "businessmen and bureaucrats have learned to manipulate economic policy to maximize personal benefit at the expense of national development" (Sadowski, 1991), and the governments were "hostage to the politically primordial need to generate and disseminate patronage" (Springborg, 2011, p. 432). Who would be benefitting from this patronage became the major question at this time. As patronage is the "most economic of the political relationships . . . inequality not the inefficiency of patronage" was problematized. In Sadowski's (1988) words, "if everyone had equal access to patronage few would complain" (p. 170) but cronies left little room for others to join in.

The number of the cronies varied from state to state but is mostly considered to be around 20–30 families close to the ruler. In Egypt, 30 prominent businessmen on the boards of some 104 firms were identified to directly or indirectly control the 385 firms (Diwan et al., 2015, p. 69). From the 1990s–2010, these firms grew to earn 60% of the overall corporate profits in the country, even though they employed only 11% of the labor force in the formal private sector (Diwan et al., 2015, p. 69). No doubt, this situation posed important challenges for the middle classes and especially for the youth in terms of unemployment and lack of opportunities for social upward mobility unless they were members of the well connected crony-families (i.e., the members of the ruling class; see the previous chapter of Youssef Cherif).

As this deepening cronyism failed to generate a vibrant economy, the Arab world's economic performance remained rather low. Coupled with high birth rates, the growing youth bulge and the educated youth unemployment, the region became an attraction for call for reform. As the former communist/socialist economies made their way into liberal economic order one by one after the end of the Cold War, the Middle East stood more or less as an anomaly and was often referred to as having failed in integrating with the globalized world economy in particular and globalization processes in general. The huge youth bulge and crippling high unemployment marked the region as a ticking bomb ready for turmoil. According to the World Bank (2020a) data, youth unemployment fluctuated between 24% to 26% in the region through the 1990s—24% in 1991, peaking to 27.6% in 1995 and 26% in 2000.

The 2000s: Calls for Reform, Little Change

As argued above, the region became the center of attention for different agencies calling for reform during the 2000s. The dire socioeconomic conditions of the masses were problematized and reform policies were encouraged to cope with the challenges. The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) of 2002 described the region as "hobbled by a different kind of poverty: poverty of capabilities and poverty of opportunities" which have their roots in "three deficits: freedom, women's empowerment and knowledge" (pp. 27-29). Underlining what was needed in the region was an "Arab renaissance," the AHDR of 2004 stated that "the Arab development crisis has widened, deepened and grown more complex to a degree that demands the full engagement of all Arab citizens" and added that partial reforms were no longer possible or effective. Accordingly, "comprehensive societal reform can no longer be delayed or slowed down on account of vested interests" (p. 4). The Arab Summit of May 2004 in a similar way called for "the continuation and intensification of political, economic, societal and educational change initiatives that reflect the will and aspiration of Arabs." In line with these calls, there was a reform effort in the region. However, rather than creating more open societies, most reform further enhanced the regime survival efforts of the ruling parties that upgraded the authoritarianism rather than changing the system for more inclusive mechanisms (Heydemann, 2007).

In most Arab republics, the quest to find an immediate solution to economic problems of their countries reflected a more explicit linkage between the businessmen and the politicians. As the regimes refrained from genuine opening up and inclusive measures which could lead to strengthening the opposition groups at the end, they relied on the existing loyal businessmen, their cronies, to implement the reforms. The businessmen's political connection to the government with direct access to policy formation as ministers, ruling party members and through their influential presence on boards and committees of main economic institutions strengthened during the 2000s. In Egypt, they were politically connected to the government with direct access to policy formation as ministers, National Democratic Party (NDP) members, and through their influential presence on boards and committees of essential economic institutions like the Economic Policies Committee (EPC), chaired by President Mubarak's son, Gamal Mubarak. For example, Mohammed Mansour, who had exclusive import licenses for Chevrolet and Opel became the Minister of Transport in 2006. Ahmed Ezz, who was a member of the ruling National Democratic Party, became a steel tycoon, controlling the 62% of the domestic market in steel production (el-Haddad, 2020). While wealth of the well-connected businessmen increased, masses faced enormous economic hardship. As Diwan (2013) argued, Egyptian middle class "shrank from 65% to 58% of the population in favor of the poor" from 2000–2008 (pp. 135004-11).

The situation in Tunisia was not better either. Tunisian President Ben Ali's inner circle was claimed to control directly 21% of all private sector profits in 2010, although their firms produced only about 3% of private sector output and employed only 1% of the labor force (Rijkers et al., 2017, p. 42).These protected firms accumulated substantial profits that in turn led the state-dominated banking system to favor them with loans; they have received close to 2.5% of GDP in bank loans, around a third of which were granted without any guarantee (Rijkers et al., 2017, p. 42). In Syria, by the beginning of 2011, Bashar al-Assad's cousin, Rami Makhlouf, was said to control as much as 60% of the country's economy through a complex web of holding companies involved in telecommunications, oil and gas, banking, air transport, and retailing. He held such a concentration of power that, according to many observers, made it "almost impossible" for outsiders to consider conducting business in Syria without his consent (Owen, 2014, p. 52).

Corruption also became a common and more explicit characteristic feature of the system in the 2000s. In Tunisia, corruption became especially visible again around the working of the Ben Ali-Trabelsi entourage. "The Clan of Leila Trabelsi" was reported to be working "like a mafia, extorting money from shop owners, demanding a stake in businesses large and small and divvying up plum concessions among themselves"; "having a stake in Tunisian banks and airlines, car dealerships, Internet providers, radio and television stations, industry and big retailers" (Ganley & Barchfield, 2011, para. 3-4). Alvi (2019) wrote that one of the brothers of Leila Trabelsi had a bureau operating with the "purpose of taking care of Tunisians' legal problems for a fee," where "they'll go and bribe the judge to make sure you win the case" shows the extent of corruption. This was all made in the open, leading to immense resentment among the masses (Alvi, 2019, p. 10). In this situation, the hopes for future, especially for the youth looked grim. As Alvi underlined:

> If you were a young Tunisian and a university graduate, you were not likely to find a job, marry, and start a family, and in practically every economic sector you faced no recourse from corruption. If you complained, you faced threats of imprisonment, torture, and no means of protection. (p. 10).

So, the state mobilized all its resources to the service of the cronies at the expense of the masses; at times made the cronies a part of the state, but why? What did they deliver back? The cronies mobilized their wealth to keep the regime in power and opposition down. Amirah el-Haddad gave the details of how the minority rich in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco helped during elections to have the ones in power re-elected and keep the opposition from increasing their votes. She detailed how during the 2010 elections in Egypt, businessmen hired armed men "to intimidate ordinary people and stop them voting" and Ahmed Ezz carried "thousands of employees of his steel factory and arranged for the bussing of government employees from other state and semi-state enterprises and ministries to vote for the regime." Similarly, in Tunisia the National Council of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), "closely supported the president in elections, issuing a statement in 2010 calling on him to run for the following elections in 2014" (el-Haddad, 2020, p. 5). So, for the regime survival, cronies played the crucial role, the role that they were supposed to play.

During the 2000s, the region was swept with the further enrichment of the minority rich, the so-called "fat cats," rising corruption, declining life standards for the masses, rising unemployment coupled with an increasing authoritarianism. This all fed into an increasing feeling of inequality leading to demands for change toward more democratization. Diwan (2013) argued that from 2000–2008 the call for democracy among the middle class Arab population has become significant and has been accompanied by a large increase in the perception of inequality.

The AHDR of 2009 highlighted how the human security or lack of it in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region constituted an important watershed in these discussions. The report argued that "the trend in the region has been to focus more on the security of the state than on the security of the people" and called for a new approach that focused on the "human as the main agent" (Mirkin, 2013, p. V). The dominant traditional conception of security in the region "led to missed opportunities to ensure the security of the human person" (p. V). Thus, what is faced in the region resulted in "an

all-too-common sense of limited opportunities and personal insecurity, witnessed in the world's highest levels of unemployment, deep and contentious patterns of exclusion" (p. V). The figures demonstrate this situation openly. In 2011, the world average for unemployment was 6% and youth unemployment was 12.6%. The numbers for the Middle East were as high as 10.2% and 27% respectively. Youth unemployment went as high as 28.1% in Jordan and 40% in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Mirkin, 2013). This brought us to what is termed as a big group of "middle-class poor" (Bayat, 2013) or "would be middle class" (Khosrokhavar, 2012) in the region. With little hope in their own country, the 2000s witnessed highest levels of skilled emigration from the Arab world (UN Development Programme, 2016, p. 155). As the AHDR of 2016 stated, the number of youth emigrating and seeking to emigrate have been increasing according to youth surveys. Figures show that "among the highly educated in Tunisia, the share of youth aged 15–29 willing to emigrate jumped from 22% in 1995 to 76% in 2005"; "in Lebanon, a third of young graduates were willing to leave their country in 2008"; and "in 2010, 62% of Jordanian migrants abroad were university graduates" (UN Development Programme, 2016, p. 155).

Is there a way out of this crises? The Arab Uprisings can be seen as a way to change the challenges facing the Arab societies.

Arab Uprisings and Beyond: What Has Changed?

The masses going to the streets demonstrating for change led to the events known as the Arab Spring. This chapter will not look at the processes of mobilization or each stage of the uprisings. It will rather look at the change, or lack of it, in different countries and its reflection on the political economy. It will especially try to identify the elements of change and continuity in the political economy of the republics that have witnessed regime change as a result of the uprisings.

The uprisings shook the radical republics deeply. As argued above, the republics faced the gravest conditions of inequality, corruption, and repression. Some of those with oil wealth, like Algeria and Iraq, managed to stay stable until the end of the decade while the uprisings led to peaceful ousting of the leaders of Tunisia and Egypt. The change created a democratic regime in Tunisia yet another authoritarian leadership after 2013 in Egypt. The process of change led to civil wars in Libya and Yemen; the Assad regime continued to stay in power in Damascus as the country went through a deeply entrenched and bitter civil war. As events in Tunisia began and reached Egypt, the "threat of the Arab street" was felt deeply in the monarchies as well. However, the protests in Bahrain, Jordan and Morocco, did not lead to any radical change. The protests that began in Bahrain in February 2011 remained short of bringing any change, mostly due to the involvement of regional actors. The GCC's Peninsula Shield Force was sent to Manama to support the monarchy. It was mainly "1000 men of the Saudi Arabian National Guard" and "500 military police from the United Arab Emirates" that restored stability (Ulrichsen, 2013–14, p. 4). It was interesting to observe the regional rivalries and the role of sectarian politics in Bahrain and the role of Saudi/UAE help in suppressing the protests. In Jordan and Morocco, the protestors wanted change, new constitution, and better economic conditions yet, their demands remained short of regime change and overthrowing the monarchy. In both cases the kings managed to respond quickly to some of these demands, calming the streets to a great extent. In Jordan, the protests were directed against corruption, for more political accountability, freedoms, and democratization. As the king responded with dismissing the government and the prime minister, promising reforms and change of laws and the constitution, the streets calmed down (Ryan, 2012, p. 156). In Morocco, in a similar vein, the protestors demanded freedoms and a stronger constitution and not the removal of the king. In Adrian Lawrence's terms, they wanted a "king who reigns but does not rule" (Lawrence, 2016). The king promised political reform, changed the constitution, and allowed a new party, the Justice and Development Party, to form the government. These steps helped to ease the tension and send the protestors back home at that time.

The following part of the chapter will look at Egypt and Tunisia—the countries that witnessed rather peaceful change—and will discuss to what extent the period following the uprisings created new economic relations and responded to the demands of the underprivileged classes under the new regimes in these countries. Tunisia holds a success case while Egypt represents a reproduction of the old order with new opportunities for the few. One important component of this period is the growing importance of Gulf aid for regional stability for those going through change and for others to keep the stability intact. Gulf aid has always been an important feature of regional politics, especially in relation to the Palestinian issue and during the Gulf Wars. Yet, how that aid demonstrates once again the prominence of the politics driving aid policies became obvious during this process. The following part will look at these discussion points.

What Happened to Tunisia: Dynamic Change and a Success Story?

The streets were filled with angry protestors after the self-immolation of Bouazizi in Tunisia. Bouazizi's action reflected the frustration of the youth, the economic hardship, and the state repression that they had to go through on a daily basis. Masses came onto the streets demanding change, a regime change that would get rid of the corrupt order of Ben Ali. As Ben Ali escaped to Saudi Arabia in the early days of the uprising, 662 firms belonging to the

Ben Ali family were immediately confiscated.[7] The Tunisian case became the only example of the Arab Spring countries that managed to make its transition to a democratic rule. Although socio-economic problems and security issues have shaken the country at certain points in time since 2011, such as the political assassinations and terrorist attacks on the Bardo Museum and a holiday resort in Sousse, as a whole, the Tunisian experience is praised by many (Yardımcı-Geyikçi & Tür, 2018). As early as October 2011, the nation's first free and fair elections, the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections, were held. Ennahda (Renaissance Party), won the NCA elections, receiving 37% of the total vote and 89 out of the 271 NCA seats. As the NCA began to work, it was also charged with drafting the constitution, which was successfully written in 2014 mostly thanks to the effort of the "Quartet," formed by the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) along with the Tunisian Union for Industry, Trade and Handicraft (UTICA), the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH) and the Bar Association. The consequent product of the process, the 2014 Tunisian Constitution, for many observers, is accepted as one of the most progressive of its kind in the region.

Although not at satisfying levels, foreign aid kept coming to Tunisia, especially to support democratic transition and the electoral process. The EU institutions allocated around 105 million EUR to Tunisia during the 2010–2011 period and EU member states contributed "just below three-quarters" of Tunisia's total official development assistance for the same period (Kausch, 2013, p. 16).[8] Qatari aid has been significant. In 2012, 1 billion USD, half of which would be used by the Tunisian Central Bank, arrived from Qatar (Khawaja, 2012). It has also invested heavily in the telecommunications sector and tourism. Qatari support especially for Ennahda during this period has been well documented and the continuing flow of funds from Qatar has been heavily criticized by the opposition.[9] Although aid came to Tunisia, its economy suffered. The Tunisian economy rested mainly on tourism and foreign investment, which declined due to the political turmoil. The developments in Libya, which was Tunisia's main trading partner after the EU, also negatively affected the economic situation. This hardship led it to sign an agreement with the IMF. The IMF approved a 24-month 1.74 billion USD stand-by arrangement with Tunisia on June 7, 2013. The reforms which were required as a part of the agreement aimed to:

> achieve stability in the financial sector, ensure tax fairness, broaden the tax base, lower energy subsidies, protect society's most vulnerable segments, decrease fiscal risks, enhance the monetary transmission mechanism, provide greater exchange rate flexibility and promote balanced growth driven by the private sector. (Hecan, 2016, pp. 774-775)

By 2014, Tunisian civil society and secularists were not satisfied with the Ennahda led government. Alvi saw that the Islamist parties had different priorities once they were in power. They tended to "focus on socio-religious policies, such as women's dress codes, corporal and capital punishments, "Islamizing" codes and laws of the country, gender segregation in public spaces, Islamic curricula in schools, and the like" while the masses were demonstrating for socioeconomic rights, equality and dignity (Alvi, 2019, p. 7). Thus, approaches and strategies of Islamist leadership, turned out to be "recipes for failure." Faced with growing opposition in early 2014, Ennahda had to step down, thereby giving power to a neutral, technocratic government. Since then, reforming the economy has continued to challenge the Tunisian state.

Considering the developments in Tunisia in the 2000s, fighting against corruption became a major issue. More than 85% of Tunisians considered the fight against corruption as a very good way of improving Tunisia's economy at the time. In June 2014, the Truth and Dignity Commission (TDC) was established on the basis of the country's transitional justice law and had a mandate to investigate corruption and human rights violations committed since independence in 1956 (Editorial Board, 2017). However, faced with opposition from the "old elite," the TDC could not work effectively, and in September 2017, the Economic Reconciliation Bill was passed, which granted amnesty to corrupt businessmen as well as state officials accused of financial corruption and misuse of state funds, as long as they repaid the stolen money. While the president supported the bill as a way "to create funds for bolstering economic growth, because it would help recover billions of dollars" (Ghanni, 2017), opponents believed that this Bill would harm the whole transitional justice process.

Despite the shortcomings of the Tunisian political sphere based on consensus of the political parties, the main challenge remains for Tunisia, as with other countries of the region in responding to the socio-economic expectations of the society, especially in creating new jobs. In 2017, the general unemployment rate in Tunisia was reported as 15.3%, up from 13% in the pre-revolution period (France24, 2017). Youth unemployment was reported to be around 33%, varying between 30% and 40%, based on region, sectors, and age (Schaefer, 2018, p. 2). Unemployment among the university graduates was reported to stand around 31%, double that number for the female graduates (Schaefer, 2018, p. 2). In the first quarter of 2017, nearly 260,000 people with higher degrees were unemployed in a country of 11 million (France24, 2017). As

[7] *For details of these firms and their economic value, see Rijkers et al., 2017, p. 43.*

[8] *New EU funds were made available in 2013 for projects preventing gender-based violence and assisting performance of the justice sector—see "Tunisia: EU Funds New Tunisia Projects," Magharebia, March 17, 2013. In the period 2011 to 2015, the EU allocated a sum of 1.3 billion EUR bilateral assistance to Tunisia, which was well spent—see Special Report—EU Assistance to Tunisia, European Court of Auditors, (2017), no. 3.*

[9] *For the extent of support see Kausch (2013); also for continuing criticism of Qatari influence in Tunisia, see Ashawkat Awsat (2020); AW Staff. (2020).*

a follow-up program to the Stand-by Agreement in 2013, the IMF has also approved a 4-year, 2.9 billion USD extended fund facility (EFF) loan to Tunisia in May 2016 (France24, 2017), which required reforms in reducing the subsidies, reforming the pension system and shrinking the public sector with a hiring freeze. Expectedly, these measures were not welcomed by the masses, including the influential UGTT and the leftist elite. The country witnessed a new round of protests in 2016 and 2017, which reflected the dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions. As the new round of protests shook the image of stability, foreign investment did not arrive in the country. Lack of foreign investment and new jobs led to further frustration and protests—what Cherif called a "chicken-egg problem" (France24, 2017). There does not seem a way other than implementing the reform process further, albeit hard, at the moment.

According to the Arab Barometer 2019 Report, Tunisians continue to see the economic problems as the most important challenge of the country. The percentage of those who are saying that the economy is good has declined by 20% since the beginning of the uprising, from 27% to only 7% (p. 3). This figure is sharply lower than the MENA average, which stands at 26%. The hopes for future economic recovery also remain low; the percentage of those saying economy will be much better or better in a few years declined from 78% in 2010–11 to 33%, again lower than the average MENA results which stand at 37% (Arab Barometer, 2019, p. 4).

As explained above, one of the important features of pre-revolution Tunisia was corruption. The post-revolution performance does not seem to be satistying in this issue either. The perceived corruption in the system remains around 90% among Tunisians, while the perceived fight against corruption stands at 41%. All this rather pessimistic outcomes lie in contrast to the high trust in the security apparatus with 90% trust in the army (Arab Barometer, 2019, pp. 5-7).

Egypt: Issues of Continuity, Role of Aid, and the Military as Economic Actor

After Mubarak was ousted from power in February 2011, Egypt entered a period of turmoil. The military took over, forming the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). In June 2012 the country elected the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Morsi, as the president of the country. Morsi ruled the country until July 2013, when he was forced out of office through a coup by Abdul Fattah el-Sisi, his minister of defense and chief of staff. El-Sisi later became the president of the country, ending short the process of Egyptian transition to democracy.

There was a lot of continuity from the Mubarak period in the working of the economic sphere in the post-uprising period. Like previous decades, economic recovery was needed by stimulating private sector investment and cutting public expenditure. Similar to the Tunisian case, with the ensuing political uncertainty growth rates declined, revenues from tourism were hard hit and investment did not arrive. Technocrats who held positions during the Mubarak era continued to control the day-to-day workings of the economy (Butter, 2013, p. 4).

These technocrats concentrated their efforts to search for credits from international, regional, and bilateral donors. Credit from IMF was available but unwanted at this time. A stand-by credit was made available by IMF by May 2011, which the SCAF was unwilling to commit to at the time; under Morsi, a possible IMF agreement was also put aside. The announcement, of the central bank at the end of 2012, that "it will not be able to meet the foreign exchange demand of the state and the market and had to devaluate the Egyptian pound showed explicitly the weakness of the economy" (Butter, 2013, p. 4). However, what has been a significant feature throughout this period was the availability and abundance of regional aid to Egypt, which enabled it to push IMF loan aside. According to Hecan (2016), what distinguishes Egyptian and Tunisian cases in their relation to IMF, making Tunisia sign a deal and Egypt to refrain from it initially was the availability of alternative sources of funds, especially the Gulf aid. Qatar became the major donor at this time, with an assistance package reaching 7.5 billion USD in May 2013. Saudi Arabia provided a total of 2 billion USD while Turkey gave a grant of 1 billion USD. In addition to financial support packages, Iraq, Qatar, and Libya provided crude oil on favorable terms in an attempt to resolve the escalating oil shortage in Egypt (Amin, 2014). The US aid, given to Egypt since 1979 and amounting to an average of 1.3 billion USD per year, bulk of which goes to the military, continued to arrive to Egypt after the uprisings (Najjar, 2017). After Morsi was elected President, Qatar and Turkey became the major donors; around 7 billion USD came to Egypt from Qatar for Morsi, compared to 1 billion USD from the Saudis (Dunne, 2020). Despite the Qatari and Turkish economic (as well as political) support for the Muslim Brotherhood regime, economy suffered greatly under Morsi. News circulated underlining that the members of the Mubarak-era establishment intentionally tried to undermine the Morsi rule and worked collectively to worsen the economic crisis in the country. It was argued that one prominent businessman of the Mubarak era, Naguib Sawiris, considered to be Egypt's richest man, openly gave support to efforts to oppose Morsi, through his media outlets (Hubbard & Kirkpatrick, 2013). Although the Muslim Brotherhood leadership was meant to continue with neoliberal economic principles, pursued close relations with the members of the business community and encouraged privatization,[10] its policies were met with suspicion, in the economic arena as well.

[10] *For details of the Muslim Brotherhood's economic policy while in power, see Gamal (2019).*

As the Morsi government was ousted, economy went in disarray once again, to be partially rescued by immense aid flow into the country, this time mostly from the Gulf again but excluding Qatar. US support has also been significant. As Stenslie and Selvik point out, Washington was careful at this time not to label el-Sisi's power grab as a "military coup" to maintain the economic transfers to Egypt (Stenslie & Selvik, 2019, p. 30). Under US law, aid must stop to "any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup d'état or decree" and the US aid continued to arrive. But the big money came from Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait. Investment Minister Ashraf Salman said that Egypt obtained 23 billion USD in aid including oil shipments, cash grants, and deposits in Egypt's central bank from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait "in the 18 months since Islamist President Mohamed Morsi was ousted" (Reuters Staff, 2015). The amount reached 30 billion USD by 2016 (Dunne, 2020).

These three rich Gulf monarchies wanted to eliminate both the Muslim Brotherhood and the influence of their rival Qatar in Egypt. Undoubtedly, the generous support helped el-Sisi to consolidate the power of his army-dominated new government. As discussed above, the availability of funds enabled the states to avoid arduous reform packages that comes with the IFI credits. As Sabra and Eltalla also demonstrate, there is a negative relationship between economic growth and foreign aid, mostly due to the "presence of Dutch disease and bad policy environment" (p. 352). The initial years of the Sisi regime managed to escape hard policy choices thanks to this generous aid, which began to fall off sharply as the price of oil began to decline from mid-2014 onwards and political disagreements emerged, especially regarding regional developments, for example, the reluctance of Egypt to send ground troops to Yemen.[11] This was also the time the UAE wanted "to link its aid to a programme of economic reforms," which was not materialized. In mid-2016, the Director of the Egyptian Central Bank announced that "it has been a year since we received any money" from the Gulf (Dunne, 2020), making Egypt to turn to the IMF and sign a loan agreement of 12 billion USD. The agreement came with a package of reform that aimed to cope with macroeconomic imbalance and stimulate growth. The policies aimed at encouraging investment in the private sector and controlling inflation and led to the devaluation of the Egyptian pound and cutting of subsidies. Despite the decreasing aid, the Gulf still matters economically for Egypt through workers' remittances. The presence of millions of expatriate Egyptian workers in the Gulf, who are responsible for a large share of the annual inflow of about 25 billion USD in remittances and continued to make the Gulf region of critical importance (Butter, 2013).

[11] *For Egypt's policy in Yemen and the disagreements with Saudi Arabia see Tür (2020).*

It can be observed that after ousting Mubarak from office, measures were taken to cope with the challenges of the earlier period, albeit with little success. Many observers claim that the Egyptian example constitutes the least change from the earlier period. Some of the businessmen of the Mubarak period, in an effort to prosecute those accused of corruption were tried and sentenced to fines/prison following the uprising. For example Ahmad Ezz, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 111 million USD in fines for corruption, accused of "collaborating to grant licenses without paying fees" and squandering public money (BBC News, 2011). He was released from prison in 2018 after paying 96.4 million USD (Tawfeek, 2018). Similarly, Amr Assal, former head of Egypt's Industrial Development Authority, was convicted of the same charge and given 10 years in jail while former Trade and Industry Minister Rachid Mohamed Rachid was sentenced to 15 years in absentia (BBC News, 2011). Mubarak's two sons, Alaa and Gamal, were also tried in court, for manipulating the stock exchange. Gamal was charged with "participating in the crime of profiteering and illegally acquiring for himself and his companies more than EGP 493 million by agreeing to sell the National Bank to achieve financial gains for them and others, and enabling him to acquire shares from the bank via a company in Cyprus" (el-Din, 2020, para. 6). The case started in 2012, and the decision that acquitted the two sons was announced in February 2020.

Although since 2016 the IMF-loan based reform package has been underway and is expected to deliver and make changes in the implementation of economic measures, the realm of big businesses seems to remain intact in Egypt, only changing hands. Since 2013, the void left from the big businesses began to be filled by the military itself; the "neoliberal officers" reinforcing their already prominent role in the economy to use Abul-Magd's words (Abul-Magd, 2017). The military has expanded its role immensely in almost all sectors of the economy, especially in the nonmilitary production—from manufacture of basic items such as bottled water and furniture into mega-infrastructure, energy and technology projects. While some of the authors see the role of the military in the economy as a necessity and rather a temporary situation until the economy recovers from the multiple crises it has been witnessing and does not crowd out the private sphere (Adly, 2020), many others approach the issue more cautiously underlining that the military itself is safely deepening its role in the economy, in a position not to leave it. El-Haddad (2020), sharing the second view, underlines that this crowing out effect can be seen, for example, in the cement industry where due to the role of the military, other firms had to quit production. To what extent there will be room for smaller firms in the economy remains a tough question for future.

Looking at the findings of the Arab Barometer in its 2019 report, it is striking to see that compared to Tunisia, Egyptians are more optimistic about their economic future. This might as well be because the Tunisians were freer to answer the questions, not restrained by their regime. Yet the report is interesting as it underlines the duality in the responses, as those better educated and employed seem happy while those that are poor and out of the market seem pessimistic. Such a distinction was not reflected in the results in the Tunisian case interestingly. Those that have been viewing the economy positively has increased in Egypt since 2013, according to the findings. While 23% of those in 2011 "evaluated the current economic situation in Egypt as very good or good" (Arab Barometer, p. 6), the number declined to a mere 7% in 2013, increasing to 30% in 2016 and 41% in 2019. Although such a figure is not very disappointing, with figures around 27% youth unemployment for 2019, (World Bank, 2019). Egyptian state would need to bolster economic reform further to respond to the demands of the jobless masses.

Second Wave of Uprisings: Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon

Republics that have escaped the Arab Spring in 2010–2011 has witnessed a series of uprisings in 2019–20. Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Sudan went through a round of protests. During the Algerian protests that were postponed in early 2011 thanks to increased austerity measures to keep the country stable with oil money, demonstrators shared the same concerns with the masses demonstrating in Tunisia and Egypt a decade ago. Despite the vast yet declining oil revenues, "Hirak," as the name of the protests in Algeria go, has emerged to protest against the candidacy of Bouteflika for another term in office (France24, 2019). The demonstrators, like in the other Uprisings problematized the corruption and youth unemployment, around 29% of those under 24 were reported to be unemployed in Algeria in 2019 (World Bank, 2021).The diversification of the economy from oil have been only limited and dependence on hydrocarbons limit creation of new businesses and new job opportunities. For instance, the state-owned national oil company Sonatrach owned around 80% of total hydrocarbon production and generates more than 90% of the country's foreign earnings (Africanews, 2019). The protests managed to remove Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was ruling the country since 1999, and elections were held bringing Abdelmadjid Tebboune to presidency (Aljazeera, 2020). As Tebboune was the former prime minister and has been in politics for the past four decades, the result did not satisfy the protestors (Reuters, 2019). Thus, protests continued as change remained far from sight. Under Tebboune the old elite continued to hold their positions and with dwindling oil reserves the economy went into disarray (BBC, 2019).

Similar to Algeria, protestors took to the streets in Iraq in 2019, basically demanding a change in the economy by improving living conditions, jobs and fighting corruption. Iraq, having witnessed a series of wars and sanctions since 1980 and the 2003 invasion, has been fighting with meager economic indicators. What is similar with Iraqi protests and others is the call for economic development and with Algeria, the oil resources. Yet what differentiates the discourse of the Iraqi protestors has been the demand to change the sectarian political system that corrupts the economy further, a common theme with the Lebanese case (Salloukh, 2019). A call for change in the sectarian political system and the corruption getting worse in the hands of sectarian leaders has been a commonality between Iraqi and Lebanese protests. In Iraq, state resources have been under the control of the ethno-sectarian elite. The political system, which was designed after 2003 to appoint ministries between the Shia, Sunni and the Kurdish communities turned into an important vehicle in time by the parties to appoint civil servants "who then run contracts and jobs in the ministries they control through their party" (Patel, 2019). Thus, the most senior government figure in Iraq responsible for pursuing corruption from 2008 to 2011, Judge Radhi Hamza al-Radhi, "identified the government's contracting process as the father of all corruption issues" (Dodge, 2019). As the state sector is the main source of employment in Iraq, the public sector expanded from "850,000 employees in 2004 to between 7 and 9 million in 2016, with some 25% of public funds wasted in corruption schemes" while the "sectarian political elite uses access to subcontracts, border crossings, ports and even gas fields to support their sectarian clientelist networks" (Salloukh, 2019, para. 9). On top of this, like the Algerian case, as the oil prices declined the economy went into disarray, the Iraqi state responded by announcing a hire freeze in 2016, which made the young graduates suffer most. It was this economic disarray and corruption in the system and of the system that the protestors wanted to abolish in Iraq (Slim, 2019). Another common theme between the Iraqi and the Lebanese cases, was the impact of regional rivalries and the role of Iran, which at times ran deep in the demonstrations.

In a similar vein with Iraq, the protestors in Lebanon demanded to change the whole system which is based on post-civil war sectarian political system, entrenched with corruption. Since the end of the civil war, sectarian political leaders have enjoyed power and influence in the society through patronage networks and financial incentives in a quest to increase the influence of their communities. According to the Transparency International 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, Lebanon ranked 137th out of 180 countries (180 being the worst; Transparency International, 2019), and corruption seems to "permeate all levels of society" in Lebanon, with "political parties, parliament and the police perceived as "the most corrupt institutions of the country" (BBC News, 2020).

Remittances sent by the large Lebanese diaspora constitute an important part of the economy. Due to domestic turmoil, and the civil war next door in Syria, remittances have been in a steady decline since 2008, constituting 24.66% of

the GDP in 2008 declining to 12.69% in 2018 (World Bank, 2019), adding to the already looming currency crisis and the deep deficit crisis, reaching $ 18.5 billion in July 2019. The inequality of income became striking as the income of the lower 50% of the population combined is equal only to that of the top 0.1% in the country (Salloukh, 2019). As the country entered into a currency crisis, the banks began to hoard dollars while the Head of the Central Bank, Riad Salameh, issued an order requiring all money transfer offices, such as Western Union, to pay cash out in Lira rather than dollars even where transfers were specifically denominated in dollars (Meuse, 2019). Lebanon imports 80% of its goods and as the merchants need dollars to pay for the imports, pressure on the dollar further increased (Koffman, 2020). This led to the emergence of a black market, where lira/dollar peg reached 1650, compared to the official peg of 1507. As the crisis continued, the Lebanese government demanded to put a tax on WhatsApp calls, what is normally free, bringing the people to the streets. In short time the demonstrations became cross-sect and cross-class. According to some analyses, these demonstrations finally signified the end of the post-civil war order (Salloukh, 2019). Although the government of Hariri resigned and a technocratic cabinet was formed, the demand to change the political order has not materialized, neither has the economic situation improved. The slogan "all of them means all of them," suggesting that political leaders of all parties, regardless of sect should be removed out of politics is a clear demand for changing of the old order. The coronovirus has put an end to the demonstrations while the economic situation has continued to deteriorate further. The country has been experiencing blackouts, a shortage of food, dollar rate reaching 10.000 to Lira in the black market and in May 2020 the monthly inflation rate hit a record of 56% (Koffman, 2020). The current situation presents little hope for change in the near future, accelerating the already existing challenges ahead.

Gulf Economies: Facing the Common Challenges as Well?

Despite the economic and political turmoil that most Arab states are experiencing, challenged by the developments discussed above like slow economic growth, huge unemployment in addition to civil wars, and thus increasingly seen as being on the losing side of the globalization processes, the oil-rich states of the Gulf have been pretty integrated with the capitalist markets. As Hanieh demonstrated, the Gulf economy is co-constitutive with the global economy with huge funds flowing constantly to Western banks. How the banks of London played a central role in borrowing from the Gulf and lending to the United States is well documented by Hanieh (2018), as he showed the centrality of the Gulf at the core of the global capitalist economy. Yet the challenges of the region are also felt in the Gulf countries, more in some who are in difficulty or facing future difficulties like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait and less in others like Qatar and the UAE that are so far faring well. For example, despite its huge resources, Saudi Arabia cannot escape the challenges posed by its youth bulge and the issue of unemployment. The official rate of unemployment of the nationals of Saudi Arabia remains as high as 12% and generating jobs for the young graduates has not been easy. The oil curse has long been discussed in the literature. Saudi Arabia has for some time been working on moving its economy beyond the oil dependency. Its

Aerial photo of a desert construction site with the Dubai skyscrapers in the background.

Vision 2030 has been attracting attention as a way to prepare the country for post-oil era. Vision 2030 announced in 2016 that it aimed to create a "vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation."[12] Out of the 33 headings in the Vision 14 dealt with the economy. The Vision planned to:

> increase non-oil GDP from 16% to 50%; reduce unemployment from 12% to 7%; attract $1 trillion in foreign investment; attract 1.2 million (non-religious) tourists, and 30 million pilgrims a year; develop 5,000 projects, including Neom, a 26,500 sq-km, $500 billion futuristic city; develop a $67 billion minerals sector; raise the Public Investment Fund's assets to $2 trillion. The non-oil sector's contribution to government revenues was to increase six times, to $267 billion, and non-oil exports were to treble from 16 percent to 50 percent of GDP.

So far, assessing the Vision 2030 in 2020, analysts argue that some noteworthy achievements have been taking place. Objectives in terms of "fiscal stabilization and macroeconomic management, the development of capital markets and the banking system, the digitization of government services, and social reforms" (Grand & Wolff, 2020, p. 2) are considered to have fared well. However, in most critical areas, similar with the other countries of the region, reform has not gone well "in creating jobs and transforming the private sector into an engine of growth" (Grand & Wolff, 2020, p. 2).

While the success of the Vision was questionable before the COVID-19 pandemic, due to its ambitious nature, the pandemic has further complicated the picture. The decline in the oil prices, interruption of production, trade and financial markets, halting of tourism sector activity all negatively affect the future of the Vision as well as the economies of other Arab countries, in general.

[12] *For details regarding the Vision 2030, see its official website at https://vision2030.gov.sa/en.*

Conclusion

COVID-19 has deeply affected the Arab economies. The region's economy is expected to contract by 5.7%, with the economies of some countries projected to shrink by as much as 13% (United Nations, 2020). According to a UNDP Arab Countries Report, between January and mid-March 2020, businesses across the region have "registered massive losses in market capital, in the order of 420 billion USD . The consequent loss of wealth is equivalent to 8% of the region's total wealth" (UNDP Arab States, 2020). The services sector, employing 54.4% of total employment in the region in comparison to 24.3% for the industry and 21.4% for the agricultural sector, is the most severely affected in this process, leading to drastic reduction in working hours, wage cuts and layoffs; 17 million full-time jobs were expected to be lost in the second quarter of 2020. Considering the discussions above regarding the already limited opportunities for the educated youth, the region is facing an enormous challenge. Considering that COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate the inequality of wealth in the region, future turmoil seems inevitable. The region has the highest wealth inequality worldwide with 31 billionaires owning as much wealth as the bottom half of the adult population in 2020 (UN Policy Brief, 2020).

This chapter tried to demonstrate that despite some success cases of transition to democracy since the uprisings in 2010/11, like in the case of Tunisia, little has changed in the Arab world when it comes to decades-long cronyism, corruption and graduate unemployment. For decades, politics has dominated the economics in the region. Prioritizing regime survival overrun genuine economic reform. Although the region is still going through change, high expectations of the masses were not met in the economic field. One might argue that reforming the economy and seeing positive results is a long-term process which cannot deliver immediately. Yet, people have been waiting for very long time for the improvement of the economy. The more the states cannot offer solutions for deep-running socio-economic problems, the more political turmoil this will cause, which will again make economic success harder. It is a vicious circle that the states need to break, which has become even harder with the declining oil prices and the pandemic.

The chapter also examined what continuities from the earlier periods are not only in the economic difficulties but also in the political scene, with continuing cadres/institutions in the economic decision-making processes. Especially the case of Egypt is significant in this context with the military replacing the old elite and controlling much of the economy as well as creating its own cronies. The direction it will take, whether it will become more assertive in the economy or pursue liberalization (seems unlikely for now) will determine the economic future of the country. This also depends to what extent concerns of regime survival prevail over other goals, which for now seem prioritized.

The chapter also underlined the role of foreign aid, especially that of the Gulf aid in the post-uprising period. It has especially been significant in the Egyptian case. How the Qatari aid poured into Egypt to support Morsi and how Saudi, UAE, and Kuwait rushed in to support el-Sisi and isolate the Muslim Brotherhood showed the centrality of politics in driving aid policies as well. With their own challenges of declining oil prices and the pandemic, aid could play less role in the region in near future, at a time when it is needed most.

The chapter tried to show that the key to address the economic challenges of the region lie with genuine reform that can create jobs, fight corruption and invest in youth policies. These are long-term and painful. Yet, without urgent action, the region could witness more political and economic instability in the years to come. The people saw that they can change their governments, if not regimes, through demonstrations during the uprisings. That will continue to inspire many for change, in the region.

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CHAPTER 5

Economic Dimensions of the Social Contract and How to Address Them

Nader Kabbani

The protests that unfolded across the Arab region in the 2010s were a public response to Arab states' inability to keep their end of a social contract with their citizens; an authoritarian bargain in which citizens exchanged political rights for economic entitlements. Ten years on, most Arab states have opted to increase repression and authoritarian control rather than provide their citizens with greater political participation, economic opportunities, and social justice. This chapter examines the economic dimensions of the Arab social contract and analyses how it can be amended to begin the process of designing a more inclusive society. This will require a combination of policies, including reducing reliance on the public sector; delineating specific sectors where the private sector can operate free from political interference; allowing the social sector to reclaim its role of providing services and supporting low-income communities; and engaging in an honest dialogue with citizens on the financial constraints facing their countries. Ultimately, it will take citizens and their states working together to establish a new, inclusive, and sustainable social contract that can form the basis of the Modern Arab State.

Historical Context

The social contract prevailing in the Arab region has been characterized throughout this volume as a rentier-driven authoritarian bargain, in which people give up some of their political rights in exchange for public services, benefits, and jobs (Ali, 2009). During the post-colonial 1960s and 1970s, this social contract contributed to high rates of economic growth and significant improvements in human development. However, Arab economies faltered during the 1980s and 1990s, while Arab states failed to keep their end of the bargain. The popular protests that unfolded across the Arab region in the 2010s were largely a response to this broken social contract and the inability of Arab states to reform to deliver on their commitments or to renegotiate the terms of the contract with their citizens. On the eve of the 10-year anniversary of the Arab Spring, the social contract remains broken in most Arab countries while authoritarian tendencies and repression have increased.

This chapter examines the economic dimensions of the Arab social contract and reviews the conundrum facing Arab states and societies as they deal with the consequences of a broken contract. The Arab authoritarian bargain is not that different from social contracts struck in parts of Southeast Asia and Latin America. Some of these countries have thrived and even become more democratic over time. Initial conditions help to explain why Arab countries followed a different development path. These included an oversized role for the state in economic and social affairs that predated colonial rule; populist socialist policies introduced in the aftermath of colonial withdrawal in the 1950s and 1960s; policy commitments made by Arab states at a time of high oil prices during the 1970s; and high population growth rates combined with a reversal of oil prices during the 1980s that rendered these commitments difficult to maintain. These conditions resulted in higher public expenditures and declining revenues that, over time, made social contracts in the Arab region economically unsustainable.

The second half of the chapter explores the nature of the Arab social contract in greater detail. It seeks to explain why Arab states failed to adjust course and follow a more sustainable development path or to renegotiate the terms of the social contract with their citizens. It highlights how the political economy landscape in most Arab countries led to weak economic growth, high public spending, a constrained private sector, the prevalence of corruption, ineffective social policies, and economic marginalization of peripheral communities. The chapter then discusses how these factors became intertwined to form a Gordian knot not easily undone. The chapter concludes with an analysis of what can be done either to re-establish or renegotiate a viable social contract in the Arab region.

As with any effort that seeks to undertake a holistic analysis of a social issue, the chapter draws broad historical strokes and maps out trends across an entire region. Critics of this approach correctly point out that the Arab region is quite diverse. It includes poor countries, such as Yemen and Sudan, and rich countries, such as Qatar and the UAE; states with active parliaments, such as Jordan and Kuwait, and absolute autocracies, such as Syria and Algeria; monarchies, like Bahrain and Oman, republics, like Tunisia and Mauritania, and occupied lands, like the Occupied Palestinian Territories; socialist-leaning countries, like Egypt and Iraq, and capitalist-leaning countries, like Lebanon and Morocco; resource-rich countries, like Saudi Arabia and Libya, and resource-poor countries, like Somalia and Djibouti.

Still, Arab countries have much in common in terms of their overall political economy. This can be observed in their many common development outcomes, such as the high rates of public employment, the prevalence of crony capitalism, and high rates of youth unemployment. In the end, all Arab countries are authoritarian to a degree, with the recent exception of Tunisia. The main difference is their access to resources. Arab countries rich in oil resources have been able to minimize social unrest by ensuring that they keep their end of the bargain. Resource-poor countries have not. However, even resource-rich countries are struggling to plan for a future without oil that is only two or three decades away. In doing so, they must eventually fix or renegotiate the underlying social contract. The political-economic malaise affecting the Arab region requires a rethinking of broad development paradigms. This requires a broad strategic view of where the region is headed and how it can adjust course.

Economic Dimensions of the Arab Social Contract

The Arab social contract involves both economic and political dimensions. Arab citizens agree to give up some of their political rights in exchange for economic benefits and security. During the period immediately following colonial rule, Arab economies were weak and human development was low. For example, in 1960, average years of schooling in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was the lowest in the developing world (Kabbani & Kothari, 2005, p. 28), including South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa[11]. The Arab region required strong leadership and substantial economic development. However, over time, the financial commitments that Arab states made became economically unsustainable, and Arab states began to renege on the deal. In this section, we explore the evolution of the Arab social contract and how it came to be perceived as unsustainable.

Evolution of the Arab Social Contract

The parameters of the Arab social contract that has prevailed over the past half-century were established early on during the post-colonial period, when the emerging nationalist regimes drew on populist socialist policies to extend their bases of support among the middle and lower classes, bypassing aristocrats who were associated with the retreating colonial powers (Hinnebusch, 2020). These policies were national in scope and drew on a legacy of state-led development and bureaucratic innovations that emerged as part of the Tanzimat reforms undertaken by the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century (Weiker, 1968) and developed further under European colonial rule. As Arab countries began gaining their independence after World War II, the states that emerged were well positioned to adopt and implement nationalist, socialist economic development policies that formed the foundation of the current Arab social contract. States began to play a greater role in delivering public goods and services and introduced anti-colonial policies that allowed them to nationalize entire industries. Arab states were supported in these efforts by a rentier system that benefited from the discovery of oil and the revenues that flowed directly to oil-rich Arab states from its export and indirectly to non-oil-rich Arab states through remittances, investments, and development assistance.

During the 1960s and 1970s, this rentier model worked well. Arab economies grew rapidly, as their governments unlocked economic potential through populist social policies: redistributing wealth and opportunity to the middle and lower classes; establishing public enterprises; increasing public sector employment; expanding public services in health and education; and supporting livelihoods through subsidies on food and energy. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita grew at an average annual rate of around 4%. Arab countries improved along multiple dimensions of human development, including educational attainment, health outcomes, poverty reduction, and even inequality (Devarajan, 2015).

Unfortunately, this state-led rentier system proved to be economically unsustainable. During the 1980s, Arab states experienced declines in revenues and increased demand for public services and jobs; demands they were unable to meet. Oil prices collapsed during the mid-1980s and remained low throughout the 1990s, hovering at around 20 USD per barrel (roughly 40 USD in today's currency). Lower oil prices affected non-oil-producing countries through reductions in investments, development assistance, and remittances from oil producing states. High population growth rates during the 1960s and 1970s (among the highest in the world) increased demand for health, education and other public services in the 1980s. University graduates competed for fewer public sector jobs, which at the time offered better pay, benefits, and work conditions than those in the private sector. Public enterprises were saddled with inefficiencies stemming from heavy bureaucracy, corruption, and excess employment, leading many to operate at a loss. Energy subsidies became ever more costly, as a rising middle class sought to purchase automobiles, air conditioners, and other energy-consuming products while facing little financial incentive to economize or conserve.

In the face of low oil prices, large public expenditures, subsidies, and wage bills needed to either be curtailed or sustained through revenue from taxes and levies on the private sector. However, Arab states had constrained private sector activity and displaced the private sector in many key industries. The constraints on economic activity limited private sector growth and reduced the fiscal revenues that states could generate to cover the costs of public services and wage bills. They also contributed to social problems, such as high unemployment rates among women and youth. What followed was lackluster economic growth and stagnant levels of human development across the region. Real GDP per capita declined by nearly 2% per year during the 1980s and increased by barely 1% during the 1990s (World Bank, 2020). To place this into perspective, adjusting for inflation, real income per capita in the Arab region in 2004 was less than it was in 1980, 25 years earlier (World Bank, 2020). The generation coming of age in the early 2000s were poorer and had fewer economic opportunities than their parents.

[11] *To the extent possible, this chapter reports data for the Arab region. However, regional datasets often cover the MENA region instead. MENA includes Iran but excludes Comoros, Mauritania, Sudan, and Somalia. The excluded countries are usually included as part of the sub-Saharan African region. Differences in data points and trends between the Arab and MENA regions tend to be minor. We therefore use them interchangeably.*

Not-So-Neoliberal Economic Reforms

In the face of increasing financial pressures, Arab governments undertook substantial economic reforms aimed at reducing public spending and creating more space for the private sector. These reforms started in the 1980s in countries like Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, and continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s in countries like Algeria, Syria, and Yemen (World Bank, 2009, p. 34). Arab governments reduced public expenditures by privatizing inefficient public enterprises, limiting public services, rationalizing public employment, and attempting to reduce subsidies on energy and basic goods. At the same time, they aimed to support economic growth and increase government revenues by revitalizing their private sectors. This was done by creating more stable macroeconomic conditions, reducing regulations, removing barriers to entry, reducing price controls, lowering import restrictions, and encouraging private investment.

In theory, a revitalized private sector could help Arab states mitigate their financial constraints at several levels. First, freeing the private sector could help spur economic growth, which had been lagging and depressing incomes. It could also help generate jobs and reduce mounting pressures on Arab states to create jobs for the increasing numbers of young unemployed entrants. Second, allowing the private sector to expand into industries that had been the purview of the public sector, such as education and health care, would help to reduce demands on public services, by providing private-sector alternatives to those who could afford them. Finally, a revitalized private sector could serve as a source of additional revenue that states needed to cover expenses and obligations under the social contract.

Together, such neoliberal economic reform efforts were advocated by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other international organizations and were supported by advice, technical assistance, and loans. However, while the reforms helped to reduce government spending, they also increased the economic burden on the lower and middle classes, increased inequality across the region, and failed to generate the numbers of decent jobs needed to absorb the incoming cohorts of young people (World Bank, 2004). It is important to understand why these reform efforts failed to deliver on their promise to understand why Arab countries ended up with a broken social contract and public protests, rather than a new economic model that could have helped them keep pace with other developing regions. An understanding of the political-economic reasons behind the failure of these economic reforms holds the key to understanding whether the Arab social contract is truly unsustainable or whether it might evolve.

To keep their end of the bargain, Arab states at least needed to streamline public expenditures and increase government revenues without significantly degrading public services. However, Arab states mostly failed to implement the reforms needed to salvage the social contract. On the expenditure side, governments were not able to cut public sector jobs, salaries, or benefits without incurring strong public resistance. However, they were able to limit new hiring. This left many young people without access to related public sector jobs, leading to a simmering resentment. Arab governments also eroded public services by reducing quality and access (Brixi et al., 2015). This was mitigated by allowing private and semi-private alternatives to public provision. Those who could afford these alternatives received better service and were able to bypass long wait times and other barriers to access. However, these policies also left lower- and middle-class families without access to adequate public services. Arab states also tried to tackle the issue of subsidies. Some governments went after basic commodities, such as bread, which are an important part of the social safety net and mainly benefit lower- and middle-income families. These actions resulted in riots, as in the case of Egypt (1984), Morocco (1984), and Jordan (1989). However, energy subsidies whose benefits are less targeted to the poor and which are a source of black market profiteering for insiders, were only addressed after long delays and remain a source of waste in many countries.

Where Arab states failed most was in implementing private sector reforms. A World Bank report found that Arab countries did enact necessary economic reforms for the most part; the main issue was how these reforms were implemented in practice (World Bank, 2009, pp. 6-11). The main ideas behind liberalizing economies are sound. Allowing private companies to develop and grow improves market competition and spurs innovation and growth. The result is more exports, more jobs, better income, and greater opportunities. The recipes for achieving this are clear. Governments should stop competing with the private sector in most industries and should focus instead on creating an enabling environment for business and investment. Governments should remove barriers to private sector entry and allow fair competition, introduce more flexible labor regulations, reorient education away from knowledge acquisition and toward skill development, upgrade social safety nets to support people who are unable to work, and ensure stable macroeconomic conditions and fair, transparent and efficient judicial systems.

There is much debate in the literature about the weaknesses and benefits of neoliberal economic reforms and whether they represent a better alternative than government-led or social-oriented approaches (Gertz & Kharas, 2019). We take the view that many development pathways can lead to progress and prosperity. Typically, it is not so much the approach that matters, but rather

how it is implemented. The neoliberal prescription for private sector development is clear, but this is not what happened in the Arab region. Private sector reform was used by Arab regimes not as a way to foster greater competition and economic growth, but rather as an opportunity to divert resources and opportunities toward regime cronies (Malik et al., 2019). Privatized public enterprises, at least the most profitable ones, found their way to insiders. Emerging crony capitalists further expanded their business operations to lucrative sectors of the economy. They benefited from access to exclusive government contracts, which diverted public resources away from more qualified bidders. Crony capitalists were given a further edge through their ability to avoid paying taxes, fees, and import duties.[12]

Crony capitalists were shielded from competition by Kafkaesque bureaucratic rules and regulations, such as complex approval processes, restrictive labor market regulations, and arbitrary tax systems. While these bureaucratic procedures were initially introduced at a time when governments were extending their influence and activities in the economy, they persisted during the periods of public retrenchment because they served a valuable function of tilting the playing field to benefit insiders who could navigate the bureaucracy. The complex bureaucracy created an opportunity for those with regime connections to game the system, limit competition, and extract monopolistic rents (World Bank, 2009). The result was an increase in private sector activity, but of the kind that favored entrenched interests at the expense of smaller businesses run by the middle class (Diwan et al., 2019). Thus, far from enabling growth and creating jobs, the private sector reforms limited competition and curtailed growth. In other words, the so-called neoliberal reforms were anything but. While the prescriptions advanced by organizations such as the World Bank made sense, they were not actually followed.

The end result of corrupting the private sector was that regimes were able to benefit. However, this came at the expense of generating revenues that governments needed to deliver the public services required to uphold their end of the authoritarian bargain. Because governments could not easily cut back on access to services, they instead cut back on the quality of these services. Class sizes expanded; curricula became outdated; wait times for medical procedures increased; service quality deteriorated (Brixi et al., 2015). Thus, after making remarkable progress in terms of human development during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Arab countries witnessed a steady erosion in the provision and quality of public goods and services.

Furthermore, Arab economies were not able to generate enough decent jobs to employ the large cohorts of youth entering the labor market. With Arab governments unable to continue providing access to public sector jobs and the over-regulation of private sector activities limiting the number of decent jobs being created by the private sector, young people had little choice but to search, often for years, for adequate employment opportunities to come their way (Kabbani, 2019). Their plight was exacerbated by the limited market-relevant skills they acquired in school. Many were driven to work in the informal sector, with limited social protection or prospect for career advancement. Others were driven to become self-employed, hustling in the market to scrape by a living. However, these micro-entrepreneurs had to deal with unforgiving bureaucracies and petty corruption that limited their ability to grow their businesses and earn a decent living. Youth unemployment rates increased across the MENA region and, by the 1990s, had become the highest in the world. Youth unemployment in the MENA region reached close to 30%, compared to a world average of 13% (Kabbani, 2019).

As Arab governments reneged on their end of the social contract and cronyism and corruption increased across the region, public resentment festered. This paved the way for the social unrest that was ignited by a spark in the marginalized town of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia on 17 December 2010, spread across the region like wildfire in the 2010s, and continues until today (Cherif, n.d.).

Arab Spring Through an Economic Lens

Together, weak economic growth, deteriorating public services, constrained economic opportunities, and increasing corruption have had a devastating effect on the Arab region. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, states in all but the richest oil-producing countries were unable to keep their end of the social contract. Furthermore, economic reforms failed to cut a new development path that could adequately replace the public provision of services and jobs with adequate private sector alternatives.

In democracies, people have an opportunity to vote down regimes that limit their ability to live a full and fulfilling life. In 2010, at the dawn of the Arab Spring, only four countries of the Arab League (Comoros, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Morocco) were listed as “partly free” the remaining 18 were “not free.” No Arab country was listed as “free.” Indeed, the prevalence of authoritarian regimes in the Arab region was the worst of any region in the world (Freedom House, 2011). Thus, people were unable to access a democratic means of changing their circumstances. Instead, many young Arabs sought to migrate to better opportunities elsewhere. From 2000–2015, net migration from MENA (excluding countries of the Gulf) was estimated to be 8.4 million, among the highest population shares in the world (United Nations, 2017). Migration within the region is also very high, including young people seeking jobs in the Gulf and refugees fleeing conflict. Most Arab migrants chose to work in oil-produ-

[12] *The Arab region is not alone in this regard. Crony capitalism is prevalent throughout the developing world, and especially high in Russia. See The Economist (2016).*

cing countries of the region, which offered good employment opportunities close to their homes and families. However, these countries were not able to absorb everyone. The majority of people were forced to remain and try to earn a living in their home countries. With no political tools to change their economic circumstances and limited opportunities to migrate, frustration mounted leading to the eruption of public protests across the region in 2011.

The nature of this frustration can be illustrated by examining the case of Mohamed Bouazizi, the 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor whose self-immolation sparked the Tunisian Revolution and the Arab Spring. Bouazizi had applied for jobs, including government jobs, but was always denied. Few jobs were available in a country with a youth unemployment rate of close to 30% (International Labour Organization, 2020), and even higher in marginalized areas like his hometown of Sidi Bouzid. To support his family, Bouazizi became a street vendor selling produce. While trying to earn a modest living, local authorities regularly harassed him, extorted bribes, and confiscated his produce. One confrontation occurred on December 17, 2010, when a municipal official harassed him and confiscated his scales. He went to the governor's office to complain but was refused an audience. Bouazizi then stood in front of the governor's office, doused himself with gasoline, yelled out, "How do you expect me to make a living?" and set himself on fire (Hasan, 2018).

While Bouazizi's story is well-known, it illustrates the breakdown of the Arab social contract quite well and humanizes the various strands of our analysis above. Arab governments failed to provide their people with the public benefits, services, and jobs that were promised as part of the social contract. Bouazizi needed a job more than anything else; he looked, but he could not find one. By 2010, few Arab governments were able to employ additional workers in their public sectors. However, instead of supporting the private sector to create jobs, the president of Tunisia at the time, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, worked to enrich his extended family and network of cronies. Highly regulated and suffering from cronyism, the private sector in Tunisia was not able to create the required number of jobs. And yet, even though the Tunisian regime was not able to keep its end of the bargain, it also did not provide greater economic and political rights to its citizens. When Bouazizi tried to earn a living on his own, he was constantly harassed by local officials and forced to pay bribes, even though he could little afford to. While large, connected firms were doing what they pleased, unconnected small enterprises were under constant threat. Finally, when Bouazizi sought or tried to complain, no one would listen. It was not simply the lack of a government job that was at issue, but rather the accumulation of economic and political exclusion that drove Bouazizi to do what he did, and his actions resonated with force across the country and the entire Arab region.

Put another way, the case of Mohamed Bouazizi suggests it was not just the inability of Arab states to keep their end of the social contract that ignited the Arab Spring. Rather, the biggest failure of Arab regimes was their inability to compensate their citizens for this shortcoming by allowing space for them to engage politically and economically. On the economic front, not only did Arab states fail to enable the private sector to generate needed employment opportunities, they also did not allow people to engage in their own economic activity without undue interference. On the political front, what most citizens were asking for was not full-fledged democracy, but rather an ability to engage with their leaders and a space for their legitimate grievances to be heard and dealt with. The end result of this neglect was a damning and unnecessary constraint of political space and economic opportunity.

The Arab Spring unfolded across the region in 2011 like a tsunami. Autocrats fell in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Major government and constitutional changes were undertaken in Jordan, Oman, Morocco, Kuwait, and Palestine. Protests raged across all Arab countries except Qatar and the UAE, which had the resources to maintain their end of the social contract. The unrest ushered in political changes across the region. Some of these changes were real and lasting, as in the case of Tunisia. In other countries, like Jordan and Morocco, the changes were superficial, aimed at placating the popular unrest rather than renegotiating the social contract. To date, these superficial efforts have largely succeeded, but it is not clear for how long since the underlying tensions remain. In a third group of countries, including Egypt and Bahrain, early advances in political freedoms were soon replaced by increased repression and control. In a fourth and final group of countries, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, civil war erupted and continues. Since 2011, protests and unrest have continued across the region. In 2019 alone, massive protests took place in Algeria, Iraq, Sudan, and Lebanon.

On the economic front, the changes ushered in by the Arab Spring are less clear. Except for a handful of states with enough resources to maintain their end of the bargain, specifically Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE, the social contract remains broken in all Arab countries. Also, in no Arab country has a new social contract emerged. This applies to the case of Tunisia as well, the only Arab country that experienced a successful political transition in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. In the three years following the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime, Tunisia held several free and fair elections but failed to undertake a single meaningful economic reform from 2012–2014 (World Bank, 2020). As a result, economic growth remains weak, youth unemployment remains high, marginalized areas remain marginalized, and public protests continue.

There are important differences between the economic and political dimensions of the social contract that are often misunderstood or misrepresented in the popular press. While activists across the Arab region called for regime change and a renegotiation of the social contract to allow greater freedom and political participation, many of the protestors and those who stayed at home were actually interested in maintaining the old social contract (Ianchovichina, 2018, pp. 34–35). They simply wanted Arab states to keep their end of the bargain (Loewe et al., 2019). This can be seen clearly in the strong public support for the status quo in the handful of Gulf Arab countries with the financial resources to maintain public benefits, services, and jobs. According to the 2012–2014 Arab Barometer, 64% of respondents from developing Arab countries cited betterment of the economic situation and 64% cited fighting corruption as the two main reasons behind the Arab Spring, followed by 57% who cited social and economic justice; by comparison, only 42% of respondents cited civil and political freedoms and emancipation from oppression as the reason behind the Arab Spring (Ianchovichina, 2018, p. 8).

This does not mean to suggest that greater freedom and political participation should not be central pillars of a renegotiated social contract. Rather, it signals the difficult conundrum facing the Arab region. Even if an enlightened Arab government is willing to consider a new social contract, one that offers its citizens greater political participation in exchange for reduced social benefits and services that are in line with the financial capacities of the country, there is little guarantee that social unrest will not follow. The continued protests in Tunisia are a testament to this. Thus, the solution for the Arab region is not predicated on dichotomous choice between two opposing social contracts, but rather requires a more nuanced negotiation on the outcome and a process to get there. This requires first understanding the reasons why the social contract is broken and whether it can even be fixed.

Raising the question of whether the old social contract can be fixed might seem superfluous. The objective remains a new social contract that is governed by freedom, dignity, and social justice. The problem is that, in striving for better, the Arab region has actually ended up with worse. The first year of the Arab Spring ushered in a brief period of hope and change. Regimes across the region engaged in dialogue with their citizens, including Libya, Syria, and Yemen, countries that would later be torn apart by conflict. However, these hopes were short-lived. Arab states soon reverted to their authoritarian tendencies and oppressed public expression. Countries that held democratic elections, such as Egypt and Yemen, found that new leaders resembled the old ones. Countries that introduced political reforms, such as Morocco, Oman, and Jordan found they did not take in practice. Even Tunisia, the posterchild of the transition, continues to suffer from a broken social contract.

Tunisia has (thus far) escaped the fate of other Arab states and transitioned into a democracy. Tunisia was the Arab Spring's first mover, and deep state institutions were not able to absorb the blow and play the long game as they did in Egypt and elsewhere. Also, even though the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia achieved parliamentary gains and formed a government, Tunisia was fortunate to have a more enlightened leadership that was willing to compromise. That said, Tunisia's transition remains a precarious one. The state has not been able to negotiate a new social contract with its citizens. While Tunisians enjoy greater political freedoms and participation, they continue to demand public benefits, services, and jobs; demands that the state has not been able to meet. The private sector remains constrained; less than before, but still unable to generate the required levels of economic growth and job creation. As a result, public protests and social unrest continue to erupt across the country.

Can the Arab Social Contract Be Revised or Renegotiated?

The section above suggested that it is not enough to simply advance advance a vision for a new Arab social contract. In most Arab countries, the broken social contract has led to something worse; a situation where citizens have neither political participation nor economic security and are only kept in check by heightened authoritarian control. Even in Tunisia, which is the only fully democratic Arab country today, the social contract remains broken, and a new one has not emerged to take its place. It is therefore worth examining in closer detail the nature of the old social contract, how it is broken, whether it could be fixed, and how it might be renegotiated, before proceeding with the more difficult task of outlining a viable alternative.

In this section, we unpack the Arab social contract to get a better sense of its underlying dynamics and where it is headed. This can help us identify viable pathways that could lead, over time, to a more inclusive social contract. We first examine the emerging autocratic social contract, exploring whether the old Arab social contract can be fixed.

Where is the Arab Region Headed: A New Autocratic Social Contract?

Besides Tunisia, a small number of Arab states, including Jordan and Morocco, have responded to their inability to keep their end of the bargain by creating more opportunities for economic and political participation. However, these have been half-hearted measures. Early concessions in most countries were reversed, resulting in declines in freedom and democracy. Even Tuni-

sia, currently the freest of all Arab countries, has failed to reimagine a truly inclusive and sustainable social contract, and as a result, continues to face economic stagnation and social unrest. Most Arab states have opted to compensate for the weaker provision of public services and jobs by increasing repression and control. Indeed, regimes across the region have unleashed armies of cyber agents that have turned social media from a tool of citizen empowerment and mobilization to a tool of regime manipulation and control.

Heydemann (2020) noted that Arab regimes responded to the 2011 uprisings not by accepting calls for more inclusive social contracts and not by restoring government commitments to economic security, redistribution, and social mobility. Rather, they imposed "repressive-exclusionary social pacts" in which economic benefits that had previously been offered to all citizens as a matter of right were now being selectively provided to those who demonstrate loyalty to the regime (Heydemann, 2020, p 1). In pursuing repressive-exclusionary social pacts, Arab states have been making two sets of changes. First, they are revising the definition of citizens' economic rights and reframing economic benefits not as universal entitlements, but as contingent rewards. To an extent, this represents a continuation of the reform efforts undertaken during the 1990s, in which Arab governments ended entitlements to public sector jobs, reduced the quality of public services, and encouraged private-sector alternatives for those who could afford them. Second, Arab states securitized and "criminalized the expression of economic grievances" (Heydemann, 2020, p. 3). This can be seen across the region, from action taken against health care professionals in Egypt raising concerns about poor working conditions during the coronavirus pandemic (Michaelson, 2020) to the incarceration of teacher activists in Jordan for demanding that the state keep its promise of pay increases (Safi & Al-Tahat, 2020).

As such, far from heading toward a new inclusive and equitable social contract, Arab states are heading further away from it. This is an uncomfortable reality. However, it is important to begin our discussion of the future of the Arab social contract and the modern Arab state by taking a hard look at the current state of affairs and where Arab countries are headed. This can then be followed by an honest discussion of alternative destinations and a delineation of paths of getting from here to there. In game-theoretic terms, Arab states are moving away from the old social contract, a medium-level equilibrium that offered economic security in exchange for low levels of political participation. However, instead of moving toward a higher-level equilibrium that offers greater economic and political participation, Arab states are drifting toward a lower-level equilibrium that offers neither.

Understanding the current trends is critical. If low-level equilibria involving "repressive-exclusionary social pacts" solidify across the region, it would be very difficult to jump to high-level inclusionary social contracts without either a revolution or the fortuitous arrival of strong and benevolent leaders. Revolutions are destructive, and their outcomes are not a foregone conclusion; simply witness the cases of Syria, Libya, and Yemen. The Syrian civil war, by 2019, had cost the lives of over 500,000 people, led to the migration of 6 million, and internally displaced 7 million people, out of a pre-conflict population of 22 million people. It has resulted in an estimated cost of nearly 400 billion USD and led to the emergence of the Islamic State, a malignant non-state actor that threatened the stability of the entire region (Kabbani & Boustati, 2020). Now imagine such revolutions taking place in countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In 2010, Syria had a population one-quarter that of Egypt and an economy one tenth that of Saudi Arabia.

Likewise, waiting for the arrival of strong and benevolent leaders is not an ideal option. Among the dozens of autocratic leaders that emerged in the region since Arab states claimed their independence, how many have truly been willing to increase political participation? Even if one or more such leaders were to emerge, how kindly would they be regarded by other Arab leaders? As one observer noted a decade ago, the problem with Egypt was not (former) President Hosni Mubarak; the problem was that Egypt was home to a million Mubaraks (Whitaker, 2009, p. 10). The same can be said for the rest of the Arab region. Decisions in Arab families and tribes are made by their heads. Businesses across the region, from the smallest to the largest, are run by autocratic CEOs and their families. Even NGOs are typically run by a single, autocratic head. Why should people expect a benevolent leader to emerge, or democracy to flourish, in the political sphere when it is rarely observed in the business, social or private spheres? This is not to say that it cannot, but simply to note that the change must come from both the top-down and the bottom-up.

As authoritarian Arab rulers contemplate the moribund state of their authoritarian bargains – the broken social contract that has been the source of much public anger and frustration over the past decade – they are considering where to take their countries next. To authoritarian regimes, the experiences of Tunisia, and more recently Sudan, are not entirely convincing. They consider the examples of Bahrain and Syria, two Arab Spring countries ruled by minority sects, and conclude that what saved Bahrain was the faster security clampdown and military intervention of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in March 2011 as compared to the slower military engagement by Iran and Hezbollah in Syria in June 2013. Indeed, the simplest option for Arab autocrats would be for them to abandon the old contract in favor of a new social pact that relies on

greater repression and control. In this context, fixing or renegotiating the old social contract is arguably an option worth considering, as compared to holding out hopes for a new economically inclusive and politically participatory option that may never materialize. Thus, before identifying a pathway forward toward a new inclusive social contract, the first question that should be asked is whether Arab states can be saved from sliding further into repressive-exclusionary social pacts? Can the old social contract be fixed or renegotiated?

Unpacking the Social Contract: Is It Really Unsustainable?

The essential component of the Arab social contract is an authoritarian bargain, in which people gave up political rights in exchange for public benefits, services, and jobs. Over time, it has become economically unsustainable because of how governments approached their end of the bargain rather than the nature of the bargain itself. Initial conditions were important, including the oversized role of the state and the availability of economic rents from oil. These initial conditions resulted in both greater long-run expenditures and weaker revenue streams to support fiscal commitments. Spending on public benefits, services, and jobs outpaced the government's ability to generate revenue to cover the costs. They also created an environment that opened the door to further governance issues down the line. However, it is arguable that these costs can be brought under some control. Let us consider two of the largest public expenditures, government employment and energy subsidies.

Public Sector Employment

Government employment has been a key component of the social contract in the Arab region. Public sector employment increased throughout the 1960s and 1970s, driven by offers of better pay, benefits, and work conditions than jobs in the private sector. The promise of public sector employment came to serve as an incentive for young people to complete high school and earn university degrees to improve their chances of obtaining a government job. By the 1990s, civilian public sector workers represented 17.5% of total employment in the MENA region, by far the highest in the developing world. By comparison, civilian public sector employment was 8.9% in Latin America, 6.7% in sub-Saharan Africa, and 6.3% in South Asia (Schiavo-Campo et al., 1997). Also, in contrast with all other regions of the world, government wages in MENA were 30% higher than those in the private sector (Schiavo-Campo et al., 1997). The appeal of public sector employment is reflected in the high shares of young people who continue, even today, to indicate a preference for a public sector job to jobs in the private sector (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). The main constraint to further hiring has been limited financial resources. The approach created problems when economic rents declined during the 1980s and 1990s. Facing large wage bills, governments could not simply reduce employment levels. Once hired, people had to retire.

In addition to being a financial burden, the high levels of public employment limited the development of a diversified economy. First, large government bureaucracies had the effect of cementing a government-led approach to development. Governments became accepted as the divers and vanguards of economic growth. This fostered a culture of dependency among large segments of the population, who came to expect that governments were ultimately responsible for providing livelihoods and jobs. Indeed, in some Arab countries, people came to regard the private sector with suspicion. Second, by offering better salaries and benefits, states siphoned talented graduates away from the private sector. Moreover, public education systems focused on knowledge transfer in order to prepare students to take and pass national exams that could help them secure government jobs. Less attention was given to developing productive skills that would be useful in the private sector. Third, larger bureaucracies meant greater regulatory power for the state. More government employees required more things to do. This contributed to an over-regulated private sector that could not generate the levels of revenue that states needed to sustain their end of the social contract.

While some have argued that authoritarian regimes limited the growth of the private sector over concern that a business elite might emerge to threaten their rule, this does not seem likely given the ease with which these same authoritarian regimes deposed the colonial-era business elites during the 1950s and 1960s (Heydemann, 2020). Arab regimes had established their authority and largely displaced the aristocrats of the colonial era. Over time, authoritarian rulers were less inclined to shore up regime support among the masses and more concerned with ensuring support within their regimes and making money off privatization efforts. Authoritarian regimes tend to want to be in charge, and to be seen as being in charge, of their country's economic development and prosperity. In the Arab region, this tendency was taken to an extreme because people were already conditioned to accept a large role for the state. In the end, the large public sector and weak private sector development, even after so-called neoliberal reforms, combined to contribute to a failed social contract. Neither of these outcomes was an inherent part of the original social contract. Arab states simply needed to replace public sector jobs with decent jobs generated through an expanding private sector. Arab states simply failed to do so. Instead, Arab rulers and their regimes chose to enrich themselves by capturing the private sector for their own benefit.

Energy Subsidies

One of the largest drains on national budgets in the MENA region is energy price subsidies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that the pre-tax cost of energy subsidies in the MENA region was 237 billion USD in 2011. This represents a staggering 8.5% of GDP or 22% of government revenues across the region. Thus, energy subsidies contribute to an incredible and unnecessary drag on economic growth. By comparison, global pre-tax energy subsidies in 2011 were estimated at 0.7% of global GDP or 2% of government revenues globally (Clements et al., 2013, p. 10). Energy subsidies are part of the social safety nets across the MENA region, not simply in resource-rich countries. As a share of GDP, the IMF found that oil subsidies in oil-importing countries of MENA were only slightly lower than those in oil-exporting countries of MENA. Incredibly, oil subsidies in oil-importing countries of MENA were three times higher than those in oil-exporting countries of Latin America, the next closest region.

Certainly, energy subsidies can help low-income families, by helping them to afford heating oil, reducing irrigation costs to farmers, and supporting low-cost transportation services. However, energy subsidies are not well-targeted. Most of the benefits flow to middle- and upper-income families with their large houses and private cars. A more efficient and effective policy would be to provide support directly to low-income families. Subsidies on necessities, such a bread, should continue. However, food subsidies are small in comparison to energy, estimated to have amounted to 0.7% of GDP in 2011 in the region (Clements et al., 2013, p. 12). Indeed, rather than be subsidized, sound public policy requires that energy be taxed. This would help cover the costs of more effective social services and social policy and reduce energy consumption to mitigate its negative impact on the environment and public health. Indeed, when foregone tax revenues and negative externalities are factored in, the estimated costs of energy subsidies in MENA increase to 13% of GDP and 34% of government revenues (Sab, 2014).

For years, MENA governments have commissioned and studied policies to reduce energy subsidies. Indeed, by 2011, some MENA countries had done so. However, most energy subsidies remained. One reason for the persistence of high-cost energy subsidies is that vested interests connected to the regimes have emerged to benefit from them. Large subsidies create arbitrage opportunities. There is an entire black-market network for operators who buy low-cost fuel from countries with subsidies and smuggle them to countries without such subsidies (Malik & Gallien, 2019, pp. 732–762). Regime cronies are often in on this game, making it very hard to fix the system. Indeed, energy is a sector that is ripe for corruption and mismanagement. In Lebanon, annual losses from the public electric utility, Électricité du Liban, amounted to 1–2 billion USD per year (Detter & Saidi, 2020), and yet Lebanese families suffer from constant blackouts and need to rely on private generators for electricity. Energy subsidies are not an inherent part of the authoritarian bargain, but they have contributed to making the social contract unsustainable. However, dealing with them requires curbing excessive cronyism; something most Arab states have been unable to do.

The examples of public sector employment and energy subsidies suggest that MENA governments have not done a good job of handling their end of the authoritarian bargain, selecting policy tools that are excessively costly and inefficient. Other sectors that have been plagued by inefficiencies, bad targeting, and governance problems include higher education, the military, and public housing. Such mismanagement can have negative spillover effects, contributing to higher levels of corruption, a culture of dependency, the weakening of public institutions, and the creation of market distortions on a massive scale. Indeed, what sets the Arab region apart is the sheer magnitude of the distortions created by its social policies.

While the social contract in most Arab countries is broken, the examples above indicate that the Arab social contract is not inherently economically unsustainable. Rather, it has become unsustainable as a result of the approach that Arab governments have taken to administering their policies. Over the decades, such social policies have developed vested interests and corrupt practices that make them difficult to reform. These policies combined to form a Gordian knot that has been difficult to untangle. So, how might Arab states approach reform?

Arab States and the Conundrum of Reform

While Arab countries are similar in many ways and have adopted similar social contracts, when it comes to changing course details matter. To better understand the political-economic barriers to reform and propose viable solutions for moving forward, we must add some granularity to our analysis above. We illustrate this by focusing on the political economy of two specific Arab countries. While many of the insights from this exercise can be applied to other countries in the region, similar exercises must be conducted for each country. We selected Tunisia and Jordan for this exercise. Tunisia has experienced the greatest change in terms of the old social contract, yet continues to struggle with the change. Jordan is arguably among the countries that have deviated least from its old social contract.

Jordan and the Political Economy of a Social Contract

Jordan provides an interesting case study. Though it has an elected lower house of parliament, political power ultimately rests with the monarch. Jordan's economic development pattern followed that of other Arab countries. During the 1960s and 1970s, GDP per capita grew at a remarkable 10% per year in real terms (World Development Indicators, 2020). Human development improved considerably; average years of schooling increased more than any other country in a region that led the world (Kabbani & Kothari, 2005, pp. 28–29). Like other Arab states, Jordan's economic fortunes declined during the 1980s and 1990s, when real GDP per capita fell by 0.3% per year (World Development Indicators. 2020). Jordan introduced structural reforms, reduced subsidies, and privatized state-owned enterprises. These efforts, together with development assistance from the Gulf and developed countries, helped the economy grow by 3% per year during the 2000s, in terms of real GDP per capita. However, while the country's privatization efforts were successful (Mako, 2012), energy subsides remained around 6% of GDP (Clements et al., 2013, 50) and public sector employment remained above 35% (Assaad & Salemi, 2018, p. 28, Figure 5), an incredible share for a country with no oil resources. Furthermore, Jordan failed to create a more enabling environment for its businesses. Until 2019, Jordan consistently ranked in the bottom half of the world on the World Bank's annual Ease of Doing Business rankings, only recently improving (World Bank, 2020b). As a result, its economy failed to create enough jobs. Youth unemployment stood at around 30% over the past decade, reaching 35% in 2018 (International Labour Organization. 2020), above the regional average and much higher than the global average. Furthermore, human development stalled, with progress ranking among the bottom 25% of countries between 1990-2019 (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], Human Development Data, 2020.).

With few natural resources, Jordan should be leveraging its international standing and its status as an oasis of political stability in the Arab region to expand economic activities such as manufacturing and trade. Jordan should strive to become the Singapore of the Middle East. Instead, the private sector is constrained, and economic growth and job creation continue to lag. Cronyism plays a role in this. Like all other countries of the region, opportunities flow to those closely associated with the regime. However, other factors have prevented the country from making needed reforms. Jordan's population is roughly equally divided between the original inhabitants of the East Bank of the Jordan River and those of Palestinian origin from the West Bank. Another 30% of the population is foreign, including guest workers and refugees. East-bankers are considered the bedrock support of the monarchy. They have more political power, aided by gerrymandering parliamentary seats and holding key positions in the military and the government bureaucracy. Jordanians of Palestinian origin are involved more in the private sector. When the public bureaucracy fails to allow the private sector to develop, at least part of the reason is driven by balance of power considerations, but another part is basic human nature; the simple zero-sum consideration of us/them psychology.

These political economy considerations have implications for how the social contract is managed in the country. For example, if the government reduces public sector employment, new jobs will have to be created for East-bankers in businesses largely owned by West-bankers, creating tensions if not properly managed. Three things need to happen. First, at least in the interim, the state needs to create two playing fields in the private sector: one for industries that are managed by insiders and shielded from global competition and can create uncompetitive jobs for those leaving the public sector, and another for industries that are shielded from internal politics and open to global competition that could be drivers of the innovation, growth, and job creation that the country needs. Indeed, Jordan is perfectly capable of competing globally, having served as a hub for some of the most notable companies in the Arab region such as Aramex, the Arab Bank, and Maktoob. Second, the state needs to create an enabling environment for start-ups, especially youth-led start-ups. The issue of East-bankers vs. West-bankers is far less prevalent among the country's youth. Third, the state needs to engage in an honest dialogue with its citizens about its financial constraints and what needs to be done to move forward. Jordan has already done this in the context of its privatization efforts and subsidy reductions. It needs to have another dialogue on the importance of reducing employment in the public sector and allowing the private sector to grow and create the necessary jobs.

Jordan's political economy situation is not unique. Singapore has a population that is far more ethically fragmented between citizens of Chinese descent, Malay descent, and Indian descent. It has four official languages. Citizens make up only 62% of its population (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2021). Jordan's divisions are simple by comparison. Singapore also has a social contract that could be described as an authoritarian bargain, yet one that has catapulted the country into the top ranks of economic and human development. While not without its problems, such as increasing inequality in recent years, the Singapore experience suggests that the old Arab social contract can achieve far more than it has.

Tunisia and the Struggle to Revise the Social Contract

Tunisia has an elected parliament and president and an appointed prime minister. Since 2015, it has been the only Arab country listed as fully free by Freedom House (2020a). However, its democratic institutions are still nascent and not fully tested. Furthermore, Tunisia has struggled to redefine the terms of its social contract, but a coherent alternative has yet to emerge.

Before the Arab Spring, Tunisia followed a roughly similar development pattern to other Arab countries, including state-led development during the 1970s and a rise in crony capitalism during the 1980s. One key difference is that, beginning in the 1960s, Tunisia placed greater emphasis than other Arab states on women's rights and family planning. As a result, it did not face the same demographic pressures as other Arab countries. For example, Syria and Tunisia had roughly identical populations in 1960. By 2010, at the dawn of the Arab Spring, Syria's population was twice that of Tunisia's. The latter's moderate population growth is reflected in key development outcomes. While income per capita grew at a high rate of 8% during the 1970s, it slowed to 4% during the 1980s. However, it did not turn negative as it had in other Arab states (World Development Indicators, 2020). Tunisia was also able to absorb more children into its education system, achieving considerable improvements in educational attainment even through tertiary levels.

The Tunisian state, while large, has not played as large a role in the economy as other Arab states. By 2000, government spending had approached 30% of GDP and the share of public employment was around 14% of total employment (Brockmeyer et al., 2015). Similarly, while Tunisia provides large energy subsidies, they are lower than the regional average, hovering between 4 and 6% of GDP and averaging 13% of government spending from 2006–2016 (Eibl, 2017). Finally, by 2000, Tunisia had a better business environment than other Arab states, placing 69th in the world in ease of doing business (World Bank, 2010), ahead of all non-Gulf Arab states. Yet, despite the Tunisian state being reasonably well placed to keep its end of the bargain, it was not able to energize its economy and create enough jobs. Regulations remained rigid, crony capitalism was increasing, and many communities were economically marginalized (Sadiki, 2019). As a result, from 1990–2010, youth unemployment rates hovered around 30%, which was higher than the regional average. Unemployment rates in Tunisia were especially high among university graduates, resulting in a wasted investment in human potential.

After the 2011 revolution, Tunisia underwent a dramatic shift toward democracy. In October 2011, elections were held for a constitutional assembly. In January 2014, a progressive new constitution was adopted, followed by free and fair elections for parliament and president. However, on the economic front, the Tunisian state did not renegotiate the terms of the social contract with its citizens. Instead, from 2011–2012 the government increased salaries and hired over 90,000 new public sector employees. As a result, the public sector wage bill increased by 44% from 2010–2014 (Brockmeyer et al., 2015). During this same period, Tunisia did not undertake a single meaningful economic reform (World Bank, 2020c), and the private sector failed to create the jobs needed to transform the economy and reduce unemployment. As a result, youth unemployment rates have hovered around 35% since 2012, even higher than before the revolution (World Development Indicators, 2020). Furthermore, while the Tunisian government has been able to limit cronyism and reduce energy subsidies, the latter remain high and drain public resources (Eibl, 2017). As a result of fiscal mismanagement and an inability to renegotiate the terms of the social contract, Tunisia went from having a primary budget surplus in 2010 to large budget deficits averaging 4% per year through 2018, and central government debt more than doubled from 40% of GDP in 2010 to an estimated 83% of GDP by 2019 (International Monetary Fund, 2019). During this time, public protests have continued, with people demanding better jobs and services (McDowall & Amara, 2020). Far from creating a new social contract, the Tunisian state is on an unsustainable financial trajectory that will eventually lead to severe austerity measures and increasing social unrest.

Even If the Social Contract Can Be Renegotiated, Can Arab Economies Compete?

The analysis so far suggests that the Arab social contract is broken because Arab states made financial commitments to provide public services, employment opportunities, and subsidies that were difficult to maintain or reverse. However, the analysis also outlines a path forward for Arab states that wish to move toward a more sustainable version of the social contract. This will require eliminating energy subsidies, rationalizing public services and limiting public employment. It also requires removing constraints on the private sector, allowing it to fill the gap by providing needed public services, and creating jobs. However, key questions remain: If allowed to operate freely, will the private sector be able to grow and create enough good jobs? Will Arab economies be able to compete globally and generate economic growth?

There is nothing to prevent Arab economies from being globally competitive. The MENA region ranks higher than all other developing regions on the 2019 Global Competitiveness Index and is surpassed only by the two developed regions of Europe/North America and East Asia/Pacific (Schwab, 2019). Arab countries are interspersed fairly evenly among developing countries in the report, and there is no reason why they cannot join the ranks of the

highly competitive Asian economies. Arab countries are strategically located as the bridge between Asia, Europe, and Africa. They have good climates, good infrastructures, good ICT adoption, and well-educated populations. As discussed above, they need to improve their business environment and labor markets (Schwab, 2019).

Arab countries have different resource endowments allowing the region potentially to become competitive across a variety of sectors, covering agriculture, manufacturing, and services. That said, it would be difficult to know in advance which sectors will become competitive without experimentation. Dubai provides a good case study. Dubai is one of the seven emirates of the UAE. It has one of the most dynamic and diverse economies in the Middle East, with oil production accounting for only 1% of GDP (Winkler, 2018). Fifty years ago, it might have been difficult to imagine that Dubai, would become the Arab region's top tourist destination raking fourth on MasterCard's Global Destination Cities Index, ahead of New York and Tokyo and first in the world in terms of dollars spend by tourists (Hamel, 2019). It is also the Arab region's largest logistics hub, home to the region's largest seaport and busiest airport. Dubai is also the region's top financial hub (Yeandle, 2016) and (arguably) home to its most vibrant real estate market. The experience of Dubai demonstrates that Arab economies can indeed compete on the global stage.

And yet, Dubai too is struggling under the Arab social contract. Its rentier economy channels money from dynamic economic sectors to support the salaries of citizens working for the public sector and to subsidize the speculative real estate investments of its business leaders. As a result, like other Arab states, the Dubai model appears economically unsustainable and the state must renegotiate the terms of the social contract with its citizens.

(Re)imagining the Modern Arab State: Viable Pathways Forward

The analysis above, including the cases of Jordan, Tunisia, and Dubai, offered insights into how the Arab social contract can potentially be redesigned, renegotiated, and made more inclusive. This section assumes that, for the time being, and in the absence of a revolution or a messiah figure, autocratic regimes will remain autocratic. The primary objective is to prevent Arab states from falling further into political repression and economic exclusion and instead to tilt the evolutionary path of the social contract in the opposite direction. Thus, this section is less about outlining the parameters of an idealized social contract that has little basis in reality and little hope of coming into being anytime soon and more about stabilizing and improving the current situation and identifying a pathway forward that could, over time, lead to a more inclusive and equitable social contract.

Reducing Reliance on the State

Much of the literature on the economic dimensions of the Arab social contract has suggested that it is economically unsustainable. However, this is not entirely true. While Arab states cannot offer citizens access to government benefits, services, and jobs the way they used to, they can maintain a solid core of economic benefits while replacing others with more effective and efficient options. Arab states should focus on providing high-quality public services, including security, education, health care, the quality of which has deteriorated in recent decades. At the same time, Arab states need to bring public expenditures under control by reducing public services and subsidies that do not efficiently and effectively target the poorer segments of society. At the forefront of these should be energy subsidies. States should also rationalize excess government employment and limit the size of the public sector to what is needed for it to function effectively. States must also bring public sector wages and benefits into alignment with those in the private sector. Government jobs should not be regarded as an entitlement or a privilege, but rather as a public trust. Finally, Arab states must ensure that public officials do not abuse their public positions to serve their personal interests.

Enabling Private Sector Growth and Development

Reducing public sector services, benefits, and jobs, means that the private sector must step up and deliver, especially on jobs. This requires the state to create an enabling environment for private investment and business development. Practically every analysis of economic reform in the region highlights the importance of this point. However, excessive bureaucracy and endemic cronyism have prevented the development of a dynamic, globally competitive private sector capable of catalyzing inclusive economic growth and creating enough decent jobs. In the short run, to achieve internal consensus within Arab regimes and minimize the ability of connected spoilers to scuttle reform efforts, the state should delineate a clear space within the private sector where cronies and insiders can operate with minimal internal and international competition. These sectors might include telecommunications, infrastructure development, resorts in designated tourist areas, and so on. At the same time, states should delineate sectors of the economy where innovation, competition, and trade are allowed to operate free from insider favoritism and bureaucratic overregulation. These should be growth sectors that can become competitive globally, generate jobs, and contribute to state revenues. States should prevent cronies from intruding on these sectors and leveraging their profits from the closed sectors to expand their interest in and erect barriers to competition in the open sectors. Finally, special attention needs to be given to start-ups. Jobs are created when small- and medium-sized firms are allowed to innovate and grow.

Addressing Political Economic Barriers to Reform

Across the region, some economic reforms have been implemented successfully, while many others have been blocked or diluted by political barriers or vested interests. Such actions have led to industry capture, jobless growth, and increased poverty and inequality. As a result, these "neoliberal" economic reforms have received a bad name in many circles. While the political economy of each Arab country is different, practically all Arab states suffer from the prevalence of bureaucratic obstacles and cronyism. Indeed, the two reinforce one another. Yet, the bottom line is that economic reforms are an integral part of helping the social contract in the Arab region to become more effective and inclusive. The problem is how to implement these economic reforms without the benefits accruing to vested interests. States must establish oversight bodies reporting to the highest levels of government that can track deviant behavior by state officials and work to eliminate it. This requires increased transparency and monitoring of state institutions and an ability to hold officials accountable. Indeed, often the most difficult yet important thing for an autocratic regime to do is to restrain its cronies, who seek to advance their own self-interest at the expense of both society and the state.

Rediscovering the Social Sector

The sector that suffered most from an expanded role of the state in the Arab region during the 19th and 20th centuries is arguably the social sector. As we observed in the introduction, the Arab region was home to a vibrant social sector that built and ran nonprofit hospitals, schools, nursing homes, orphanages, and shelters. The sector provided social support, including food and basic necessities, to low-income families and communities. Many of these social organizations were taken over or crowded out by the state. Across the region, privately run foundations (awkaf) were brought under the control of dedicated ministries that neutralized their boards and ran them as an extension of the public sector. Bureaucratic barriers were erected making it difficult to register and operate charitable and nonprofit organizations. Part of renegotiating the social contract should include creating space for social initiatives and foundations to flourish once again. These can help fill the gap left by reductions in public benefits and services brought about by fiscal constraints facing Arab states. If done in tandem with an expanding private sector, the wealth generated from the private sector can help fund these social initiatives and bring about a renaissance in social sector activity.

Increasing Citizen Participation

Authoritarian regimes are caught in a vicious cycle. Authoritarian control and repression require further control and repression to sustain them. Reliance on cronies and loyalists enables them to engage in self-serving actions, eroding popular support among citizens and forcing regimes to rely on them even more. However, reforms can move the needle in the opposite direction. Improving economic conditions and creating economic opportunities for citizens can help to reduce a regime's reliance on cronies and loyalists, allowing it the space to further increase economic and political participation.

On their end, citizens must also become more active participants in their own affairs. This requires them to opt out of the trappings of the old social contract and refrain from advancing their interests through corrupt practices. This will not be easy. It requires people to refrain from rent-seeking behavior and instead focus on personal growth and building better communities. Citizens must also change their perception of the role of the state. They must demand fair and unconstrained economic opportunities, not only public goods and services. They must come to view public employment as a public service, not as an opportunity to gain wealth and power. Authoritarian states do not change willingly, but citizens oscillating between acquiescence and revolution can lead to tragic outcomes like Syria. When demanding change, citizens must develop more diverse and sophisticated ways of dealing with authoritarian states, in addition to protests and strikes, such as civil disobedience and coalition building. Civil disobedience has a long history in the region, where it is known as "refusing to hear or obey" *(la sam'a wa la ta'a)*. But it, along with other social movement mechanisms, has largely been forgotten as a strategy to pressure rulers in the region.

Dialogue Between the State and Citizens

Finally, fixing or renegotiating a social contract requires a dialogue between citizens and the state. Obviously, it would not be a dialogue about the actual social contract, which is an intangible and implicit agreement. However, states need to better inform their citizens of the financial constraints they face and engage them in a discussion about how they plan to handle these constraints and what sacrifices need to be made by different segments of society. States also need to hear from citizens about the latter's own preferences and priorities as well as the obstacles they face to living a full and meaningful life. Returning to the story of Mohamed Bouazizi, it was not only the lack of employment that caused him to take drastic action but also the constant harassment by local officials and the fact that nobody would listen to his legitimate grievances. Autocratic states may prefer to avoid dealing with the legitimate concerns of

their citizens and they do not face institutional political pressures, such as free and fair elections, to hold them accountable or force them to act. However, the lack of such accountability mechanisms encourages complacency, which can lead to public frustration that festers over time and eventually spills over into social unrest and violence.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the economic dimensions of the Arab social contract in which citizens exchange political participation for economic entitlements. It discussed the historical forces behind the development of this authoritarian bargain and its eventual weakening and fracture. It also discussed evidence that, far from a more inclusive social contract that offers greater political participation, economic opportunities, and social justice, the Arab social contract is evolving into an exclusionary social pact that offers neither; replacing political exclusion with political repression and replacing economic entitlements with conditional rewards to regime loyalists.

To avoid this fate, the chapter examined how the old social contract can be fixed and renegotiated to stabilize it and begin the process of designing a more inclusive and socially just contract. This will require a combination of policies, including reducing reliance on the public sector; allowing the private sector to grow and create jobs; delineating industries where cronies may engage and others where the private sector is allowed to operate freely; unshackling the social sector so that it can reclaim its historic role of providing services and supporting low-income communities; increasing the participation of citizens, and engaging in a dialogue with them on the parameters of a new contract. In the end, it will take citizens working together with the state to establish a new, inclusive, and sustainable social contract that can form the basis of the modern Arab State.

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Conclusion

Youssef Cherif and Amro Ali

Toward the Social Contract of a Modern Arab State?

The term "Arab states" usually refers to the postcolonial models that emerged in the League of Arab States members in the second half of the twentieth century. From the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, most Arab countries were semiautonomous states that continued to evolve under the Ottoman flag until European colonial powers absorbed them. The British and French empires, and to a lesser extent the Spanish and Italian ones, carved up the MENA region and controlled its affairs for about a century. Although the European presence endured for a short duration relative to that of previous imperial powers, notably four centuries of Ottoman domination, its effects were deep and long-lasting. The political systems that emerged after independence, while claiming authenticity and a return to precolonial roots, were a mimicry of their former metropoles (Ayubi, 2009, p. 11). The style of the British monarchy left its imprint upon Gulf royals, and on the Hashemites in both the Levant and Iraq, with the last remaining stronghold in Jordan attesting to this. Tunisia and Algeria became secular republics that still use French-promulgated laws. Even the radical anti-imperialist, Pan-Arabist regimes of Egypt and Syria followed that model: secular republics with parliaments, political parties, and all the apparatuses of modern Western states.

The "style" and "apparatus" means exactly that, the theatrics of democratic power and trappings of progressive governance that served as a thin veneer over the politically-hollowed out machinery that blocked any real democracy, freedom, oppositional parties, and an independent press. Despite the third wave of democracy sweeping the world from the mid-1970s on, the MENA regimes not only survived, but upgraded their authoritarianism. Hence, when political change touched a specific country (such as in Tunisia in 1987), a stronger and sometimes more violent rule would emerge, never a democratic one. The police and military states that mushroomed were so resilient that some observers theorized that the extreme difficulty in democratizing the MENA region was a foregone conclusion (Bellin, 2004).

During the decades following independence, MENA countries sought different economic models albeit all sharing a core political economy that had some form of rentierism. The Gulf states were able to accelerate rentier capitalism and welfare regimes in large part due to the abundance of hydrocarbon resources. States like Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen alternated between quasi-socialism and predatory capitalism. Some states like Algeria, Libya, and Iraq nurtured their own peculiar form of socialism. By the turn of the century, socialism in its various incarnations was decaying and it seemed that even the most hardened leftist strongholds, such as Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, were moving to the right and opening up to the West. But all in all, the pace of economic and social development was hampered whereas endemic corruption and cronyism kept mounting. This is not to mention the scourge of demographics and climate change, among other issues, that the MENA regimes had to cope with.

A history of revolts and social movements evolved in parallel, and in response, to the political and military evolution. It followed a predictable pattern: popular movements start, then they are crushed or co-opted by the political establishments and security apparatuses, at times with the direct or indirect assistance of external actors such as the US, the USSR, and influential European states. Every historical interval that could have potentially invited a culture of democratic debate, a flourishing civil society and freedom of the press, was torpedoed by the powers that be. The litany of crackdowns and arrests only highlighted the consciously missed opportunities to redeem the political health of the countries and spare further lives from harm and death.

The Arab uprisings of 2011 may represent the end of this period. Ironically, many of the young revolutionaries of the late colonial era, who later became grown-up leaders of the new postcolonial states, were toppled or retired in the 2011 revolts by a new generation of young revolutionaries who only knew a system they saw as built on the robbery of dignity. Some even described the pre-2011 MENA regimes as a new form of internal colonialism, better known as autocolonialism, in which locals reproduce similar ruling practices of previous colonial powers to subject fellow citizens. Before the uprisings, the regimes made cyclical promise of a better future - that never came - but they had fallen on deaf ears. The unison demands of dignity – in the deepest sense of the term – by the 2011 revolutionaries who demanded "the fall of the regime" was in fact the demand for new states and social contracts to replace the tattered old ones. In many respects, 2011 resumed the course that had been diverted in the earlier days of independence.

The authors agreed in this book that these hopes are far from achieved. Ten years after the Arab uprisings, the only place where a positively different state appeared was Tunisia. And even the latter does suffer from numerous problems and the population is far from satisfied given the excruciatingly slow rate of change taking place. The current MENA dissatisfaction echoes similar sentiments that followed independence, two thirds of a century ago an unfulfilled dream. It is of little surprise that countless local uprisings were reported in the 2010s decade in almost every MENA state. Some morphed into nationwide revolts, as in Lebanon, Sudan, Algeria, and Iraq. Others became recurrent events, as in Tunisia. What is certain is that 2011 opened a gate that will be difficult to close.

Envisioning the social contract comes at a time when an imagination bankruptcy reigns supreme. This is a marked departure from the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century that once saw the region's local elites, intellectuals, and liberation movements vibrantly engage with possibilities and prospects that extended fifty years into the future. Now many MENA governments are stuck with a few years to a decade of colorless planning and boisterous megaprojects. As Salem (2019) noted, a "future deficit" runs rampant across the Arab world in which promises and potentialities are hindered by grim arbitrary realities. When the language of security and stability takes the helm, imagination and transformation take a backseat.

In this regard, one study examined future scenarios and categorized them as Arab Simmer, Arab Implosion, and Arab Leap (Gaub & Laban, 2015). It was an exploration, not predictive, of future possibilities that are not distinct developments but could be a combination of the three. Arab Simmer essentially extends the present as a kind of "muddling through" into the future. Arab Implosion could mean a catastrophic worsening of what already exists. Arab Leap could see a dramatic improvement, which might appear to be castles in the sky, but the authors make a sound case for its feasibility pending regional reconfigurations, de-escalation of wars, and authoritarianism's realization of its limits (Gaub & Laban, 2015).

Yet all indicators point to prolonged disorder, which in a best-case scenario will see the newly minted post-2011 (un)social contracts hang tentatively between collapse and worsening authoritarianism. While Tunisia is the better candidate, having produced a participatory social contract, it is however squeezed between extremely unstable neighbors, and its internal political order is far from consolidated. But Tunisia still shines as a reasonable standard for the Arab world to emulate because it showcases another Arab possibility in what once was an unimaginable political reality in the MENA. The presence of a democratic Tunisia is a critical soundboard for the Arab world despite its authoritarian trajectories. It is perhaps where a modern Arab state is emerging.

The region has descended into something far removed from being a meaningful social contract: Egypt's protection pact; Lebanon's eroded social contract; Jordan's and Morocco's pseudo-reconstructed social contract; Gulf security pacts; and state failures that characterize Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria. No new social contract will be crafted in an environment of high stress and political disorientation, and yet the causes of these stresses and disorientations need to be elevated to transnational discussions and the comprehensive ways they can be addressed.

Among the array of supercharged stresses is climate change, which is a relatively new entry into the contemporary political imagination. The social contract will need to tackle urgent apocalyptic-like scenarios that will see, within decades, rising sea levels that will eventually inundate parts of Egypt's north coast, including most of Alexandria, and the Nile Delta; rising temperatures that will make outdoors in the Gulf unbearable; and droughts that will devastate crops and the agricultural sector in the Maghreb.

Regardless of the MENA region's trajectory, civil society and social movements need to mitigate the currents that hold them ransom to authoritarian dynamics. Doing so will require them to act in concert toward new narratives and ways of thinking that encompass climate change, population explosion, rule of law, terrorism, state power, citizenship, and mobility, among many factors that need to be written into legislation and popularized throughout political, institutional, and social spheres.

If there is one evident silver lining—and there are many—that came out of the 2011 events, it is that authoritarianism is no longer a business-as-usual endeavor for autocrats. Repression has had to work much harder than before, and it is often blindsided to its consequences. Just as regimes stand in fear of a bottom-up uprising, for which there is recent historical precedent, they also stand vulnerable to bottom-up thinking that can alter, even if modestly, the political trajectory.

The post-2011 Arab world produced a new political language of karama (dignity) in an era that has wrestled the information monopoly away from regimes and redefined the role of the citizen. This viewpoint is not simply to paint a picture of hope but to assert that the Arab world is a sphere of competing struggling realities, and if the space for political mobility is restricted, then the gray areas that can eventually birth political visions, practices, and policies are plentiful. Revolutions expose what is hidden: the thousands of initiatives that surfaced in the squares and streets that sought to "reconstruct" the future had their origins in the hidden or low-key spaces of coffeehouses, campuses, and houses of worship. The themes of reconciliation, rights, communication, community, education, and civic duty are ongoing forces, and the social contract may very well require the naming, categorization, and shaping of this chaos in discourse as a prerequisite for entry into, or widening of, the political terrain. It is therefore time for new and modern Arab state apparatuses and systems to emerge. This is possible and necessary. The diagnosis is well known, but implementation is lagging. The diagnostic is well known, but the implementation is lagging behind.

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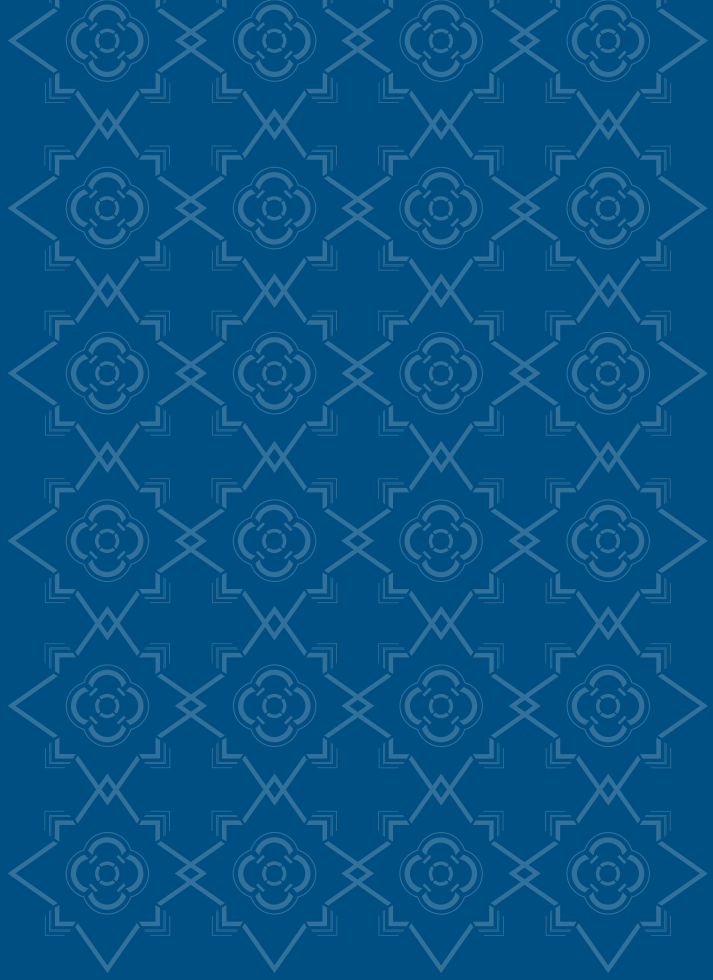

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