

Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften / Austrian Academy of Sciences

AAS WORKING PAPERS IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Volume 21

Karin Kneissl

ELEMENTS FOR A SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF
THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS IN SPRING 2011



Band 21



ÖAW

Österreichische Akademie
der Wissenschaften

ÖAW ARBEITSPAPIERE ZUR SOZIALANTHROPOLOGIE

**AAS Working Papers in Social Anthropology /
ÖAW Arbeitspapiere zur Sozialanthropologie**

ISSN: 1998-507X

ISBN-Online: 978-3-7001-7112-6

DOI: 10.1553/wpsa21

Wien 2011

Editors / Herausgeber:

Andre Gingrich & Guntram Hazod

© Institut für Sozialanthropologie
Zentrum Asienwissenschaften und Sozialanthropologie
Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften

Apostelgasse 23

A-1030 Wien

Fax: 01/ 51581-6450

E-Mail: sozialanthropologie@oeaw.ac.at

ELEMENTS FOR A SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS IN SPRING 2011*

KARIN KNEISSL

Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come

Victor Hugo

Introduction

These revolts were not masterminded by any opposition force. They were popular uprisings without charismatic leadership, partly enhanced by social network communication, but not a Facebook revolution. Will the changes made by the young generation in the Arab countries inspire other young people without perspectives in Europe and beyond? Developments in Spain and Greece indicate such a development. Will good governance follow decades of authoritarian regimes in the 22 member-states of the Arab League? Or will neo-absolutism in secular or religious form prevail? Any debate in spring 2011 provides us with more questions than clear responses.

However, one fact is undeniable: the Arab world has awakened from a long coma-sleep; another century of stagnation seems to be over. Its impact on other regions can be felt. Civil servants in the US-state of Wisconsin who protested in late February against cuts in their payments shouted slogans like “We are all Egyptians”. The Chinese censorship blocks the notion “jasmine”, trying to avert any potential spill-over of the virus of the Jasmine revolution which started in Tunisia on December 17, 2010.

The market police in a small provincial town in southern Tunisia humiliated Mohammed Boueizi, a 25-year-old graduate, who tried to survive by selling fruits. He had rejected to pay the required “baksheesh”, the tip to the police. His cart was destroyed. Not knowing anymore how to earn a living for his family, he immolated himself. 12 days later he died from his injuries. That act of despair triggered off protests by thousands of Tunisians who spread the message and their comments through social media networks across the country. Soon citizens of all layers of society went into the streets. A revolution had started, not a mere revolt. At stake are political demands not just high food-prices. Notions like dignity and justice dominate the demonstrations from Morocco to Iraq. People of all backgrounds are on the move. This article tries to assess several scientific aspects of the current revolutions in the Arab world. The author who lectures regularly at universities in Lebanon and in Central Asia will analyse the historical background, main factors and potential implications for the Arab regimes and beyond.

The following aspects will be discussed in this working-paper:

- Why did the revolutions start now?
- Which historic references may serve as a comparative analysis – 1789, 1848, 1968 or/and 1989?
- What is the nature of the current revolutions
- The reasons for stagnation in the Arab world

* This text is the follow-up document to the lecture held by the author at the Institute for Social Anthropology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, March 2, 2011. The article may be dedicated to Prof. Fritz Schwind, permanent member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, on the occasion of his 98th birthday in the author’s sincere recognition of all inspiring lectures in Roman and European comparative law and gratefulness for his friendship.

- The fundamental differences between the various Arab societies and their common features
- The role of the media: the Arab satellite channel Al-Jazeera and social networks
- The virus of the Jasmine revolution spreading globally
- Reactions by the West: oscillating between passive surprise, humanitarian intervention and cheque-diplomacy
- A prudent outlook: from interim governments to new governance in the midst of global economic distress

1. Setting the revolutions in a larger historic frame-work

The notion of time differs profoundly between East and West. During my early days of Arabic studies I was intrigued by the absence of the future tense, which is expressed by a mere prefix used rarely in written classical Arabic. Time is calculated more in terms of generations than in the guise of quarterly reports, as is the case in the Occident. I recall a conversation with a Damascene shopkeeper in the mid-1980s. Speaking of the economic situation he said: "Currently life is not easy, this might still be the case when my son takes over, but maybe during the life-time of the son of my son, things will change for better." That long-term thinking taught me a lot about the long breath Oriental people have.

1.1. Looking back to the An-Nahda movement of the early 1900s and today's potential for a secular political movement

The Arab world awakening is not a new phenomenon, though scale and global impact, such as the new price-hikes in the oil-market due to geopolitical risk premium in the futures' market, is unprecedented. But it was in the late 19th and early 20th century that political salons mushroomed from Casablanca to Alexandria. Young men who had studied in Paris or Heidelberg returned to their homes and spread the idea of nationalism. That trend was called the An-Nahda movement for it amounted to an Arab renaissance, a real awakening as the Arab word signifies. The book written in 1938 by the Lebanese author Georges Antonius carries the very title; it turned into a classic textbook for students of Arab nationalism.¹

The roots are manifold and complex. However, one major momentum for the emergence of Arab nationalism in opposing the then ruling Ottoman Empire was the renewal of the Arab language. The once pure classical Arabic had degenerated into dozens of dialects; teaching of high-level Arabic, mosques apart, was rare. The omnipresent administrative language was Osmanli. It was the linguistic work of the Boustany Brothers in Beirut and other authors of dictionaries and encyclopaedias, which contributed massively to the rise of the An-Nahda movement. The reform of the language as the pre-condition of all thinking was essential; the importance of the language holds true for all forms of political mobilisation.

Interestingly enough, many political activists in the Arab Nationalist movements of republican nature were Christians and not Muslims. The concept of a secular movement of Pan Arabism as opposed to an Islamic legitimisation of the autocratic ruler was convincing for Non-Muslims who felt marginalised in the Ottoman Empire. Their status of *dhimmi*, which literally means protected member of a religious minority, put them into different fiscal and legal categories.² The sultan,

¹ Antonius, George. 1938. *The Arab Awakening*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

² The Ottoman Empire continued the Byzantine system of autonomy in the guise of the millet system, which granted a large degree of self-rule to the religious and ethnic minorities. It should not be judged merely from the perspective of discrimination. On the contrary, in spite of all corruption within the Ottoman administration the religious autonomy enabled inter-ethnic coexistence within a multi-national empire.

a political leader, who was at the same time the Caliph, the religious authority within the Sunni world, ruled all subjects of the Ottoman Empire.³ The concept of a secular ideology such as Arab Nationalism shifted the political patterns fundamentally: it inspired young highly educated Arabs and contributed to the internal demise of the Ottoman rule in the Arab regions.

In parallel, the movement for a United Arab Kingdom emerged. The Arab Revolt officially started in 1915 as a unified military campaign of Arab tribes of the Hejaz to oust the Ottomans. The British Empire equipped her allies with weapons and logistics. The Hashemite tribe as the guardians of the holy sites of Islam in Mecca and Medina was initially leading the Arab Revolt, but the new order established after World War I differed profoundly from the British promises made to the Hashemites. As compensation the Hashemite princes got a desert kingdom in Transjordan, the Eastern part of the original mandate of Palestine and the throne of Iraq. The Saud tribe replaced the Hashemites in the Peninsula, supported by Britain and later the USA, thereby contributing to the rise of extreme Wahabite Islam.⁴ The ruler Abdel Aziz ibn Saud established Saudi-Arabia as the outcome of a jihad in 1932. The Hussein-McMahon correspondence is a detailed description of the British promises and commitments to such an independent Empire while urban young élites far away from the Arab desert plain in the Hedjaz strived for republican models based on separation of powers in the spirit of Montesquieu.⁵

What happened is well known. None of those Arab dreams materialised. British and French decision-makers had other plans for the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. The secret correspondence between Mark Sykes in London and his French counterpart Georges Picot in 1915 resulted in a tentative reshuffling of the map of the Middle East, notably Turkey, Mesopotamia, the Levant including Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. However, it was not the so-called Sykes-Picot Agreement, which shaped the territory. It became public during the Russian Revolution when its copy was found in the Tsarist Archives in St.Petersburg shocking both the Arab Nationalists, the Hashemite leaders of the armed revolt and the Zionist movement. All had been promised different plans by the British government. The territorial arrangement according to the Franco-British zones of influence foresaw spheres of direct and indirect control by the respective colonial power. It was different from the ultimate delimitation of borders, which are still valid. It was in April 1920 in the Italian sea-resort San Remo where British and French negotiators, primarily from the oil industry, determined the tracing of a pipeline from British controlled Northern Mesopotamia through French controlled Syria to the port of Haifa in the British Mandate Palestine. The increasingly strategic importance of oil in warfare had resulted in the emergence of oil diplomacy. Actually, the oil-companies inspired the tracing of the future borders between Iraq and its north-western neighbours. Iraq was created along pipelines and it

³ Sulta means in Arab worldly power, while Caliph is originally the successor, thereby following Prophet Mohammed. Since the beginning of the revelation of Islam the Prophet proved to be both a religious authority and a political leader. Personal union has accompanied the making of the Islamic and Arabic Empire. Separating politics and religion has often proved complex because of that historic union.

⁴ See *inter alia*: T.E. Lawrence. 2002. *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*; first privately printed in 1926; and Reinhard Schulze, *Geschichte der islamischen Welt im 20. Jahrhundert*, München: C.H.Beck, 216ff.

⁵ Those “betrayals” led to a profound disillusion by the Arabs with Europe. Shortly after World War I, the King Crane Commission dispatched by US-President Woodrow Wilson did surveys on possible options for trusteeships in the region. The USA would have been welcome by the Arabs who considered the US-government as much more trustworthy than the Europeans, who were geographically so close and pursued their colonial aspirations in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Various authors dwelled on that chapter from different perspectives. An Arab perspective can be found in Hourani, A. 1993. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. London: Faber; an Anglo-Saxon view is contained in Hudson, M.C. 1977. *Arab Politics – The Search for Legitimacy*. Yale University.

could probably also implode along new production-sharing agreements subsequent to the intervention by the US and her allies in March 2003.⁶ The importance of commodities like oil and natural gas should be taken into consideration in all deliberations about external interests in the region.

Pan Arabism as an ideology was institutionalised with the Arab League in 1945. The authority of that regional organisation declined dramatically; it proved unable in handling the Palestinian Question and many inter-Arab conflicts. Nevertheless, with the arrival of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1952 the spirit of Pan Arabism reached its climax. Nasserism became the synonym for Arab nationalism. The defeat of the Arab armies in the Six Day War in June 1967 was the definite end of secular ideologies. The massive humiliation by the victorious Israeli army was another *naksa* (disaster in Arabic) after the establishment of the Jewish State in May 1948. Given the impotence of Arab nationalism a rising number of Arabs turned to political Islam. The Muslim Brothers, founded in 1928 by Hassan el-Banna in Egypt initiated its offspring among Palestinians, later known as the Hamas movement. The Israeli occupation authorities promoted Hamas until 1978. Israel preferred young Palestinians to pray in new mosques than to join the leftist PLO.

There followed decades of stagnation in the Arab world, dominated by the unsolved Palestinian question, a series of wars in the region within and between Arab states and foreign interventions. Even during the 1990s when a fresh breeze provoked a shift of political patterns on a global scale, the Arab world looked immune to any changes. The first Arab Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme UNDP in 2002 investigated into the reasons for that stalemate. Their conclusions read as follows: absence of freedom and the exclusion of half of the population from public life, i.e. the female population. The authors, the majority of them Arab intellectuals, were very clear in their diagnosis.

“There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and other regions in terms of participatory governance. The wave of democracy that transformed governance in most of Latin America and in East Asia in the 1980s and Eastern Europe and much of Central Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s has barely reached the Arab States. This freedom deficit undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development. While de jure acceptance of democracy and human rights is enshrined in constitutions, legal codes and government pronouncements, de facto implementations is often neglected and, in some cases deliberately disregarded. In most cases, the governance pattern is characterised by a powerful executive branch of the state, being in some cases free from institutional checks and balances. Representative democracy is not always genuine and sometimes absent. Freedoms of expression and association are frequently curtailed. Obsolete norms of legitimacy prevail”.⁷

The report gave an honest and gloomy picture of gender inequality in the Arab countries, highlighting the absence of women in public life. Occupation in Iraq and Palestine were dealt with specifically in the UNDP report of 2004. Revising the Arab Human Development one can study the indicators announcing turmoil for demographic reasons and frustration of a highly educated young generation facing political and economic limits on all fronts.

The fact that no other generation of young Arabs has been as large as today can be illustrated by some statistics from the 2009 Arab Human Development Report:

⁶ The author argues this thesis in Kneissl, K. 2008. *Der Energiepoker*. Munich: Finanz Buch Verlag.

⁷ Arab Human Development Report 2002 by the UNDP, p.21; see: <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdr/ahdr2002e.pdf>.

“(…) the Arab countries will be home to some 395 million people by 2014 (compared to about 317 million in 2007, and 150 million in 1980). In a region where water and arable land are shrinking, population growth at these rates while falling, will still put intense pressures on the carrying capacity of Arab countries’ lands and further threaten environmental sustainability.” (….) the most evident and challenging aspect of the region’s demographic profile is its “youth bulge”. Young people are the fastest growing segment of the Arab countries’ populations. Some 60 percent of the population is under 25 years old, making this one of the most youthful regions in the world, with a median age of 22 years compared to a global average of 28.”⁸

1.2. Why now?

Those demographic and socio-economic trends pointed towards a mounting crisis or even to social explosion. However, nobody could foretell an exact date. But the fact that an uprising of a discontented youth would happen one day was evident. Teaching in several Arab countries gives me opportunities to listen to young colleagues. The issue at stake is always finding an adequate employment and dreaming of travelling or even definite migration.⁹ However, visa and travel restrictions turn all projects into a distant dream. I may quote an Algerian colleague who teaches literature in Oran: “When I wrote my thesis in the late 1970s, it was possible to travel to France and do my research for a year. None of my students today has ever left Algeria.” Those constraints to freedom of movement contribute vehemently to the overall frustration.

Eventually, the Arab world might have seen popular democratic uprisings earlier, if the Iraq war had not come in between in early 2003. This view is voiced by Volker Perthes, director of the Berlin based Stiftung für Wissenschaft und Politik.¹⁰ And I do support this assessment, since the notion of democracy has been connoted with interventionism, instability and anarchy ever since the invasion into Iraq for the sake of regime-change started.

Furthermore, the strongmen in charge, in particular the former President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak, cultivated very well the paradigm of “Either the Islamists or me”. That menace contributed, *inter alia*, to the unconditional support of Western governments, which feared chaos in a post-Mubarak Egypt. Alliances of European governments with the autocratic regimes in Tunisia and Libya were considered as guarantees against illegal migration. In 2008, the governments of Italy and Libya ratified a bilateral agreement to control migration, which stipulated Italian financial aid for large camps where migrants from Sub-Sahara African countries were held in rather inhumane conditions.¹¹

⁸ See Arab Human Development Report of 2009, p. 19 and 20 at: <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdr/ahdr2009e.pdf>.

⁹ Literature and films on that subject are abundant. I may quote the following documentary, which illustrates the topic perfectly well: *Messages from Paradise #1* by Daniela Swarovsky and Samuli Schielke.

¹⁰ See radio interview on ORF Ö1 on February 12, 2011 (<http://oe1.orf.at/artikel/269438>).

¹¹ On 30 August 2008, Italy and Libya signed a friendship, partnership and co-operation treaty for the purpose of developing a “special and privileged” bilateral relationship involving a strong and wide-ranging partnership in political, economic and other fields. Article 19 deals with the “intensifying” of co-operation in “fighting terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking and illegal immigration”, in accordance with the agreement signed in Rome in December 2000, and subsequent understandings, including co-operation protocols signed in Tripoli on 29 December 2007. The two parties also agree to set up a border control system for Libyan land borders (50% funded by Italy and 50% of the funding sought from the EU on the basis of unspecified understandings reached between Libya and the European Commission “in the past”). For more details see: Trattato di amicizia, partnerariato e cooperazione tra la Repubblica Italiana e la Grande Giamarria Araba Libica Popolare Socialista, 30.8.2008 (in Italian). The Libyan authorities opened up those camps

Similar arrangements had been concluded with the former Tunisian government of President Ben-Ali.¹²

The West's preference for these autocratic regimes found its legal and political basis in those bilateral agreements and partly also in the EU association agreements. The EU-Tunisia association agreement was regularly cited as a model for market economy and dialogue.¹³ Apparently, officials in the European Commission or diplomats of the EU-27 serving in Tunisia did not seize the degree of corruption in Tunisia, where the vast majority of public tenders as well as construction contracts, licences etc in the private sector were shared within the family of the President, respectively his wife's clan, the Trabelsi family.

In addition to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Euromed, also known as the Barcelona process of 1995, a Mediterranean Union was initiated by the French EU-presidency in May 2008. The essence of that parallel structure was a relaunch for a multilateral partnership that encompasses 43 countries from Europe and the Mediterranean Basin: the 27 member states of the EU and 16 Mediterranean partner countries from North Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans. During his electoral campaign, Nicholas Sarkozy said that the Mediterranean Union would be modelled on the European Union with a shared judicial area and common institutions. Furthermore, he saw Turkish membership of the Mediterranean Union as an alternative to membership of the European Union.¹⁴ The first secretary-general of that very Union, Ahmed Masadeh, quitted his post on January 26, 2011 stating, that "the general conditions against which he accepted to assume the job have changed".¹⁵

"States follow interests, not principles" is the shorthand for *realpolitik*, which also applies to the double standards practised regarding Arab governments. Whether it is the topic of migration control or energy-interdependence, the bilateral relations between European and North African respectively Middle Eastern governments have been determined by those constraints. The special case of Libya, where a military intervention was launched on the basis of the UN-Security Council resolution 1973 on March 19, 2011 will be briefly highlighted. The following should be borne in mind: in addition to the internal problems in the Arab world, the many unholy alliances between European governments and autocratic regimes have contributed to the paralysis in the Arab world. The status quo was preferred to any change.

However, gradually change had been creeping into the Arab societies. Globalisation started to conquer the Middle East and North Africa subtly. One of the engines for transformation was the Qatar-based Arab satellite TV-channel Al-Jazeera in November 1996 following the closure of the BBC's Arabic language TV bought by Saudis and suppressed. The new channel broke

in response to the intervention based on UN-Security Council resolution 1973 in March 2011. That prompted an enormous increase in the flow of migrants from Libya to southern Italy. In early May, approximately 600 refugees died when crossing the straits in the Mediterranean in one night.

¹² See the agreement of 2009, summarised at <http://www.tunisia.com/news/tunisia-france-two-agreements-immigration-signed-between-aneti-and-ofii>: "The Tunisian minister affirmed that Tunisia is the only country in the region to have signed with France an agreement on joint management of migration flows and co-development, signed in April 2008, adding that the agreement is considered by many observers as a model insofar as it affects all aspects of management of migratory flows (illegal migration, migration of seasonal and permanent workers and contribution to development of skills and human resources in Tunisia)."

¹³ See the now abbreviated version on the website of the European External Action Service: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/tunisia/association_agreement/index_en.htm.

¹⁴ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_for_the_Mediterranean.

¹⁵ <http://mideastenvironment.apps01.yorku.ca/?p=1844> visited on March 15, 2011.

the monopoly of state-controlled media, which reduced itself to reports from the court, be it monarchical or republican. Debates started, broadcasting dissenting views and talk-shows created huge controversies in the Arab states.

Al-Jazeera's in depth coverage of the Arab revolutions, in particular the 18-day-revolution in Egypt with a rather simple one perspective camera from Tahrir Square, gave an essential momentum to the dynamics of the Arab spring movements. It was Al-Jazeera that reported on the riots in Tunisia in early January 2011, when no other TV-station was there. Without the coverage by a large TV-station the Jasmine revolution might not have gained the same momentum. The English programme of Al-Jazeera started in 2006, the programme and staff are different from the Arab station. That channel served as primary source of information in the West.¹⁶

With classical Arabic in decline given the mediocrity in many universities, and among the political class, in particular in Egypt, once the intellectual centre, the Arabic programme of Al-Jazeera has been contributing to the renewal of the language. What had been a sort of monopoly of the Islamist movements, namely the correct use of classical Arabic in all discourse, was now promoted in a secular and neutral fashion. Given the enormous reception of Al-Jazeera throughout the Arab world that TV channel contributes to a new sense of secular Pan Arabism. Certainly, it would be unwise to push analogies *in extremis* and pretend a replay of Pan Arab ideas of late 19th century. Nevertheless, the essential nexus for Arabs belonging to one culture in spite of all ethnic and social differences is the bond of a common language. Improving its quality fosters political thinking. Citizens knew how to learn fresh political thinking opposing the repression by the regime. Access to satellite TV and Internet definitely enhanced this process.

When the whistleblower platform Wikileaks exposed corruption in Tunisia it confirmed public distrust.¹⁷ The out of control food inflation accelerated discontent, which sparked the first food and anti-corruption riots. The amplification of riots by mobile telephones, blogs, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and rapid evolution of self-assembling dynamic networks in streets enabled in digital space, large-scale mass protests erupt in capital overwhelming fears of government reprisal.

Still it would be a simplified and ultimately wrong analysis to call the revolutions in the Arab world the first Facebook revolution as many editors in the US-media quickly termed it. Not only has the Belarus born blogger Evgeny Morozov denied the democratisation aspect of the Internet.¹⁸ So did many activists involved in the demonstrations. The popular revolution in Egypt started in a massive way once the authorities blocked the Internet. People left the Internet café, their PC at home and went into the streets. Instead of chatting behind an anonymous name they overcame all inherited fears and crossed old taboos.

Education, religion, social values and family rules are based on the paradigm of resigning oneself to God's will. "*Kul maktoub*", all is written in the book of destiny, is the often-heard advice. It is

¹⁶ See the author's contribution on the role of Al-Jazeera at the symposium by the Renner Institute on the Arab Spring, Vienna March 24, 2011.

¹⁷ The release of diplomatic cables by US-missions by Wikileaks in early December 2010 might have contributed to the Arab uprising from another perspective: thanks to Wikileaks it became public what had been whispered before in the Arab world, namely the close cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel and the Saudi strong request for a US-attack on Iran.

¹⁸ Morozov doubts the Internet's ability to provoke change in authoritarian regimes, believing it is also a powerful conduit for authoritarian and nationalist ideas. See Morozov, Evgeny. 2011. *The Net Delusion – the dark sides of the internet freedom*. New York: Perseus Group.

not up to the individual to change destiny. What happened in that very Arab spring is the surprise, that hundreds of thousands of young Arabs overcame that very dictum and rose up against fatalist structures.

2. The nature of the revolutions

It is a revolution by the young people against their geriatric political leadership, as far as North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula are concerned.¹⁹ Even outgoing President Mubarak finally understood that challenge when he addressed the youth in his clumsy speech on February 11 still intending to cling to power.

The young Egyptians and Tunisians are eager to save their revolutions; they fear that the survivors of the ancient regime might kidnap it. They aspire nothing less than an end to corruption, a just life in dignity and adequate employment.

2.1. What are the political demands of the revolutionaries?

Three key-notions can be captured in all sit-ins, demonstrations and bloggs: *al-karama* (dignity), *al-'adl* (justice) and *al- ihtaj* (frustration) with the political establishment. *Hurriya* (freedom) was the overriding slogan.

The notion of democracy was heard less. Democracy and love are probably the two most abused terms. Interventions in the name of regime change, like in Iraq and Afghanistan had contributed to a negative connotation of the word democracy in the Arab world. After World War I, Arab societies had been denied independence under the pretext that their peoples were not ready and had to be guided by the Mandatory powers of Britain and France. Democracy can be interpreted in so different ways that the many versions may resemble each other very little. Elections as such are neither the remedy to autocracy nor the guarantee for a smooth transformation of societies in a post-revolutionary environment.

The principle of majority voting fits probably the Anglo-Saxon world used to a fairly successful tradition of two-party system. However, Central and Southern Europe with its historic tradition of autochthonous minorities have opted for different voting mechanisms, granting smaller parties also access to power in coalition governments.

The fact that there is no single universal model for running a state and a society has been amply analysed by the French philosopher Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu. His book “L'esprit des lois” (Geneva 1748) is not only the basis for a clear separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches²⁰ (rather inexistent within the Westminster model). It also demonstrates the many differences among climates and peoples and their different political needs. His studies have largely contributed to the emergence of anthropology. Actually, Montesquieu's political anthropology gave rise to his theories on government.²¹

¹⁹ The leadership in Syria and Jordan is held by men of a younger generation. However, they are as well contested for bad governance and corruption. President Bashar al-Assad and King Abdullah are clinging to their power, but they both lack the authority and political instinct their respective fathers Hafe al-Assad and King Hussein had.

²⁰ His writings influenced James Madison, the “father” of the US-constitution. Montesquieu's philosophy that “government should be set up so that no man need be afraid of another” reminded Madison and others that a free and stable foundation for their new national government required a clearly defined and balanced separation of powers.

²¹ Actually Montesquieu's elaborations on climate and political system continue in certain aspects the studies of the Arab scientist Ibn Khaldun, considered as one of the first sociologists. The latter's main opus being “Al-Muqqadimah” (the Introduction).

Nation building in the recent past has not always been crowned with success. Concepts, actors and circumstances may differ between those who are mandated to do nation building and those who are subject to it. Iraqis followed the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia via the TV screen and asked themselves with a sense of culpability why they had not been able to rid their country of a despot, but had to go through all the consequences of foreign intervention. Regularly, Iraqis are now descending into the street on Fridays, the day-off in Islamic countries, for a “day of penitence”. Those Friday demonstrations carry the name “day of anger” in the other Arab countries.

The British orientalist Bernard Lewis confirms the difference of language and the meaning of freedom, which does not have a precise equivalent in Arabic. “Liberty, freedom, it means not being a slave. Freedom was a legal term and a social term – it was not a political term. And it was not used as a metaphor for political status. The closest Arabic word to our concept of liberty is “justice,” or ‘adl. In the Muslim tradition, justice is the standard of good government.”²² The importance of justice can be retrieved in a large number of political speeches, stretching from PLO-chairman Yassir Arafat (“just and comprehensive solution for Palestine”) to documents of Arab League meetings.

It should also be borne in mind that all Islamic tradition of governance is based on the concept of permanent consultation. The Ottoman *diwan*, the Sultan’s advisory board of ministers, circumscribes the procedure. The Arabic term reads *ijtima’a*, which means both gathering and discussing a topic until all parties involved might have agreed. One only has to enter the residence of an Oriental dignitary, religious or political, a Christian or Muslim leader, and watch the number of chairs. This is part of hospitality and part of bringing together many opinions. Lewis likes to quote a diplomatic document of late 18th century which reads as follows: The French government was frustrated by how long the ambassador was taking to move ahead with some negotiations. So he pushed back: “Here, it is not like it is in France, where the king is sole master and does as he pleases. Here, the sultan has to consult.”²³ The Palestinian writer and editor Rami Khoury likes to point out that Arab tradition might be the forerunner of the culture of seeking consensus in international organisations.²⁴

British Westminster democracy operates along diametrically opposed criteria. And it can be mentioned, that the office of a Westminster prime minister is often considered as being too powerful, for it is the Prime Minister who determines when “consensus” is reached in cabinet. A cabinet member may be forced to resign simply for opposing one aspect of a government’s agenda, even though they agreed with the majority of other proposals.²⁵

The massive strengthening of the state by the various despots in the Middle East and North-Africa following the independence of their respective nation-states has actually contributed to the loss of old traditional virtues of good governance which can be found in earlier ages. The society was marginalised while the executive became omnipresent with its numerous security and secret services harassing the population and mutually controlling each other. The Syrian Assad régimes illustrate this dilemma well.

The socio-economic situation is also on the agenda of the young revolutionaries and all the other groups which later joined them. The Arab countries suffer from very high unemployment rates, the

²² Interview in the *Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2011. P. A13 “The Tryannies are doomed”.

²³ See Lewis, Bernard. 2002. *The Mosaic of Worlds*. London.

²⁴ Interview with Rami Khoury, editor in chief of the Lebanese paper *Daily Star* in November 2005 in Beirut.

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_democracy#Criticisms.

reasons of which have been discussed in the five Arab Human Development reports of the UNDP. Not being “connected” to influential circles may constrain all efforts of a young graduate to have access to the employment market. Being promoted by a senior official within the establishment, the so-called *wasta*, is essential for finding a work-place, an apartment, obtaining a contract for the company etc. Furthermore, food prices had been constantly on the rise due to the sharp price hikes of commodities. Just as high price levels for wheat and rice had prompted food riots in many countries in early 2008, the risk was back now three years later.

On the overall level, the revolutions did not and do not carry anti-western slogans. The surprise within the surprise of the mass uprising within Arab societies was the enormous potential of secularism. Against all odds, an increasing number of Arabs seem to reject the simplistic slogan of the Islamist movements, that “Islam is the solution”. The Muslim Brotherhood, though outlawed in Egypt since the assassination of President Anwar as-Sadat (a fervent member of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s), has been gaining ground. Their (independent) candidates had been elected both into Parliament, municipal councils and into unions. Their charity and educational organisations had been gradually marginalising the rather inefficient public clinics and schools. The entire face of the public space in Egypt has changed from unveiled women in skirts and men in suits to a majority of veiled women and bearded men in traditional clothes. This societal change can also be observed in countries like Syria and Jordan over the past decades.

However, in spite of all their alertness the Islamists were taken by surprise to the same extent, as were intelligence services on all sides. The new popular opposition was made up of shaved young men; the conservative forces watched with disbelief the mobilisation. With discretion and an impressive delay they jumped on the bandwagon of the new revolutionary movement.

The fact that for the time being no Islamic revolution is taking place has to do with the disenchantment of young Arabs with the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as with other Islamist experiments in the Gaza strip or the schizophrenic world inside Wahhabi Saudi-Arabia. Young Palestinians had launched via blogs an initiative on expressing their frustration with all the social constraints put up by the Islamic rules of Hamas in Gaza.

The appeal of political Islam has indeed decreased, as the French academic Oliver Roy had already analysed in the early 1990s.²⁶ For nearly two decades that analysis was highly contested since it was contrary to the new paradigm of the international threat brought about by Islamism. Roy’s thesis is the anti-thesis of the concept of a clash of civilisations. That very notion titled an article by the US-political scientist Samuel Huntington in *Foreign Affairs* in summer 1993.²⁷ And it dominated all political analysis of the Middle East during the past 20 years, in particular once again after the attacks of September 11, 2001. But a generation of Arab baby-boomers who has grown up with Islamism being part of the political landscape has certainly opted against Islam as the solution to their problems.

The youth of Iran had started its own massive uprising in June 2009 subsequent to the presidential elections and amid fraud allegations. Weeks of civil unrest and mass demonstrations followed, they were all brutally repressed by the military and the security services. Twitter and YouTube videos played an essential role as means of communication within Iran and with the outside world.

²⁶ Roy, Olivier. 1992. *L'échec de l'Islam politique*. Paris: Seuil.

²⁷ It may be pointed out in this context: while the title of the 24 page article still carried a question-mark, the book in 1996 simply read “Clash of civilization and the re-making of the world order.”

However, the authorities quickly retraced all those who twittered via their mobile phones. It was not a twitter revolution in contrast to what some analysts pretended then. It was also not the first time that the Iranian youth had risen up against the establishment. In December 2000 and once again in 2002, young Iranians, all partisans of the then president Khatami, had demonstrated for more freedom. They were arrested, beaten up and judged by the revolutionary council. Their “friendly” but powerless president could not help them.

While Tehran applauded the fall of the pro-Western governments of Tunisia and Egypt and wanted to demonstrate solidarity with the revolutionaries, they remain silent about the bloodshed in Syria, which is their closest Arab ally. Apparently, there are not only the pro-Western governments, which lack legitimacy in the eyes of their peoples.

The Iranian dimension is watched more attentively in Bahrain where all opposition movements were brutally stopped by Saudi forces in mid-March. A Shiite majority, who are ethnic Arabs, populates the Gulf emirate of Bahrain.²⁸ The demands by the protesters on Pearl Square where they tried to mount a popular sit-in similar to the Egyptian Tahrir (Liberation) Square rather quickly moved from a “constitutional monarchy” to eliminating the autocratically ruling family al-Khalifa. The Saudi armed forces, mostly mercenaries, invaded Bahrain backed by a mandate of the Gulf Cooperation Council. What followed was a dreadful series of arrests, including of medical staff treating wounded demonstrators inside the hospitals. The Saudi media speaks of the “Iranians” and not the Shiites in Bahrain, denouncing the protesters as a sort of fifth column.

Revolutionary Iran with its deplorable record of human rights violations has lost all appeal. Another non-Arab country is often quoted as possible model: Turkey torn apart between its secular and Islamist layers of society. Though Turkey, governed by the Islamist party of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan since 2002, has turned into a regional actor with a vibrant economy called the “China of Europe”, its potential role as model for transformation in the Arab world is overestimated.

The legacy of the Ottoman Empire is still present among Arabs today; the mutual mistrust of each other can be resented among all layers of society. Though the Turkish government of the Islamist party AKP has been championed in the Arab public opinion because of Ankara’s new very critical stance towards Israel, the Turkish diplomacy of “zero problems with neighbours” has reached its limits. Neither could Turkish mediation in Libya mid-March 2011 pre-empt a military strike initiated by French and British air force. Nor did Ankara prove to dispose of a real leverage on Damascus.

Turkey’s commercial engagement in Libya actually shows that it acted along the same lines as Westerners did, doing business with a corrupt and violent regime. If Egypt manages to consolidate its post-revolutionary political agenda, if the economic situation – against all odds of the global economy – improves and if social cohesion increases, then Egypt might be able for a comeback as a diplomatic giant of the region. Such a development would certainly weaken the accomplishments of Turkey as the current pivotal actor in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, Turkey can still contribute to a new dynamic in the region given its fairly impressive economic evolution and its role as investor.

²⁸ That island had belonged to Persia at different intervals of its turbulent history because of its geostrategic position. Iran’s parliament passed a bill in November 1957 declaring Bahrain the 14th province of Iran, with two empty seats allocated for its representatives. One can ironically call that island state as “Iran’s Kuwait” thereby alluding to the territorial claims by Baghdad in 1990 considering the city-state Kuwait as its 19th province. In 1965 Britain began dialogue with Iran to determine their borders in the Persian Gulf. The two were not able to determine the maritime borders between the northern and southern countries of the Persian Gulf.

In order to draw a more complete picture of the many driving forces that have triggered off the uprising of millions of discontent Arabs against their establishment one should also look into another important aspect of general frustration (*ihtaj*). A woman and a man can only meet for a date in public once the respective families have fixed their wedding day. It is first and foremost up to the man to pay for the expensive wedding party and to provide an apartment. To find adequate employment and a decent salary has proved more and more difficult in the past decades. A university certificate was never a guarantee. Many men are condemned to remaining bachelors for simple economic reasons. But given the many taboos on extra-marital sexuality men and women encounter numerous frustrations. That very momentum might have served as an additional factor in the mobilisation of the young male population who actually started the demonstrations.

Several background articles in western media have been pointing out the role of the US-author Gene Sharp, whose book “From Dictatorship to Democracy”²⁹ may have inspired many of the protagonists in the protests. His central message is that the power of dictatorships comes from the willing obedience of the people they govern - and that in the case the people can develop techniques of withholding their consent, a regime will crumble.

History might tell us one day if certain networks of non-governmental organisations sponsored by Embassies also had a hand in the movements. Personally, I do doubt it profoundly. In contrast to the color-revolutions of Ukraine, Serbia or Georgia, the uprisings in North-Africa were all home-made. Nevertheless, certain autocrats like Bashar al-Assad, in the tradition of his father, see a conspiracy by foreigners and do not accept the national feature of the revolution. Actually, the Syrian opposition initially did not attack the president but ask for reforms and expressed their support for him.

How to define these events? Where to categorise them historically? That will be the topic of the next sub-chapter.

2.2. Which historic references may serve for a comparative analysis?

2011 could turn into the 1989 for the Arab world – along those lines editorialists made their comparisons.³⁰ The reference 1989 is useful in some regards: we see the domino effect of changes, the spill-over of democratic movements, the risk of civil war and the enormous courage of civilians to challenge their rulers by peaceful means. In many respects, it reminds us of the pictures of the Polish wharf workers in 1982, of the Tuesday marches by the opposition in Eastern Germany and the bloody events in Romania in 1989.

However, in contrast to events between 1989 and 1991 we do not see today a military bloc implode.³¹ There is no Soviet-Union and its satellites that make up a solid power-bloc. The revolutionary essence is the emancipation of humiliated subjects who have lost their fear and are determined to become genuine citizens.

The revolutions of March 1848 might serve as useful reference, for those events initiated a new chapter, namely the beginning of the end of feudal structures in Europe. Started by students, many layers of society quickly joined. Peasants fought for their liberation from serfdom to the same

²⁹ Sharp, Gene. 2010 [1993]. *From Dictatorship to Democracy – A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*. East Boston: Albert Einstein Institute.

³⁰ The author also wrote a comment in that sense for the Austrian weekly magazine *Format*, edition of February 2, 2011, p. 15.

³¹ Comment by Prof. Andre Gingrich on March 2, 2011.

extent as the workers of the slums of the early industrial age went into the streets. A revolutionary wave began in France in February, and immediately spread to most of Europe and parts of Latin America. Over 50 countries were affected, but there was no coordination among revolutionaries. The political demands by the middle-class focussed on constitutionalism to constrain the absolutist monarchs.³² Several drafts for constitutions were written, but later abandoned. Peasants and workers asked for basic rights, such as the right to marry without consent of the land-owner.

Liberalism and nationalism were strongly intertwined. In Frankfurt, the German National Council met for a year long session. This rise of German nationhood threatened the Habsburg court in Vienna, where chancellor Clemens Metternich still fought for a multinational monarchy. The uprisings in the Italian regions were also driven by the dream of Italian national unity. In 1830, similar revolts had already started, but were quickly suppressed. Metternich miscalculated 1848, for the uprising was much more comprehensive than the earlier one.³³ A nice anecdote of March 1848 may be recalled: Emperor Franz Ferdinand who was considered a weak ruler watched the riots in front of the Hofburg and asked a member of his cabinet, whether that was a revolt. The response was: Your Majesty, no this is a revolution! The monarch shook his head in disbelief and made the allegedly famous statement: "Ja derfens den des" (Are they allowed to do so?). Remembering the surprise and shock in the faces of the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents one can use that anecdote, for they were not aware of the strength of a revolution. They may have also asked themselves: Who allowed the demonstrators to do what they did?

Even though Neo-absolutism gained the upper hand and destroyed many of the reforms, the essence of the revolutionary demands survived. And in 1867, the first comprehensive legislation of civil rights was passed. That constitutional human rights catalogue is still valid in Austria. We might see the return of autocratic régimes in many Arab countries, a rising role of the armies which currently assure the interim governments in Tunisia and Egypt. But the demands for political change will persist. And it will not take 20 years as was the case in Europe.

The role of the army deserves further investigation for it was decisive in the outcome of the uprisings. While the chief-of-staff officers in Tunisia and Egypt, trained and equipped by Western governments, quickly sided with the demonstrators and abandoned the presidents, the actual supreme commanders, the situation in Libya and Syria is different. The Libyan army was always weak and small. Real power is held by private armies, controlled by various sons of the Ghaddafi family. Muammar al Ghaddafi had maybe prepared for the eventuality of a military uprising and had organised numerous units of well-paid mercenaries, mostly from neighbouring sub-Saharan African countries. These men as well as loyal tribes continue to form the main pillar for the regime. Urban societies such as in Tunisia and Egypt with a certain tradition of a middle class establishment differ from tribally organised societies like in Libya or in the Gulf states. The risk of a continuous civil war in Libya is highly due to the split among loyal and opposing tribes. The military intervention on the basis of a UN-Security Council mandate in late March 2011 has only increased a long military and political stalemate. How to organise a post-war Libya will be much more challenging than in Egypt, where the limbo situation is also very volatile.

³² Evans, R.J.W. and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (eds.). 2000. *The Revolutions in Europe 1848-49: From Reform to Reaction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

³³ von Srbik, Heinrich Ritter. 1979 [1925]. *Metternich – Der Staatsmann und der Mensch* (vol. 1–3). Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, vol. 3: 312.

Looking at the army in Syria, we see a command structure loyal to the Assad régime due to ethnic affiliations. The Alawite minority which comprises ca. 15 percent of the Syrian population runs all major bodies of the country, comprising security and business. As of April rumours about deserting Sunni soldiers who rejected to shoot civilians were known. Most probably mass-killings of those combattants by their officers happened. Testimonies by eye-witnesses confirm this.³⁴ A foreign intervention in the guise of the military operation in Libya is to be excluded for Syria. The risk of a civil war along confessional lines is even worse given the ethnically fragmented population. Furthermore, Syria's oil and gas reserves are not to be compared to those of Libya and Iraq. The resource issue was important for both those interventions.

The Egyptian army, which has been an integral part of the Egyptian ruling hierarchy since the officers' coup led by Gamal Abdel Nasser in July 1952, quickly assured the interim government with the support of the revolutionary groups. The army even adopted facebook as a means of communicating its bulletins or tentative polls of possible presidential candidates. It is not to be excluded that the army will stay in power longer than initially planned.

2.3. Who's next?

The riots quickly spread in late February across the entire Arab world. Even Sudan and Saudi Arabia saw Friday demonstrations. The Gulf States, which dispose of massive influx of money thanks to high oil-prices pushed up even further because of war in Libya, reacted with populist economic measures. King Abdullah who returned only in March from the USA, where he had been hospitalised for five months, quickly reacted to the new situation by promising "panes et circences" to the dissatisfied. The renovation of all mosques, increase of salaries and new housing were on the list of the Saudi king.

On the level of regional security we can observe the strengthening of a conservative Sunni monarchies' axis, with the Gulf Cooperation Council as its centre. They invited even the far away Maghreb kingdom of Morocco to join their regional organisation GCC. New mercenary forces have been recruited by all the Gulf States in order to quell any riot. The Gulf armies primarily rely on paid mercenaries rather than on national drafting. The influx of Pakistani fighters into the ranks of the Saudi security forces has apparently increased disproportionately. According to some US-analysts, Saudi Arabia pursues a strategy, which is out of touch with regional sentiment. The readiness to increase oil-production might be part of this tactic to damage Iran, which cannot go beyond its current quota. That scheme may produce some tactical victories for the Kingdom. But, if continued over time, a strategy at odds with regional opinion will slowly but surely diminish the Kingdom's ability to win others to its side.³⁵ The strong financial Saudi support of Salafist movements in Egypt can turn into an extremely dangerous game; it is all about obstructing the secular character of the revolution. Each country, each society deserves its proper analysis.

To the same extent as European movements, such as the „Los indignados“ initiative in Spain have been inspired by the events in North-Africa, the revolutionary wave might continue to spread further. Commodity rich countries in Central Asia, where authoritarian long-term rulers are also opposed by a young impatient generation, can be affected. The nervousness of authorities in the People's Republic of China is omnipresent in the country. The silent walks were immediately

³⁴ See Al-Jazeera and other media reports as of early May 2011.

³⁵ <http://www.raceforiran.com/oil-and-the-iranian-saudi-“cold-war”> visited on July 16, 2011 at 10:30 am.

forbidden; mass arrests in the aftermath of the first intriguing blogs on the Arab spring highlight this atmosphere. In mid-May events in the Mongolian provinces resulted in clashes between Han Chinese and ethnic Mongolians trying to save pastureland for their animals from coal exploitation. Beijing has orchestrated a complete clampdown on all civil unrest. It remains to be seen whether this policy is sustainable given the rising economic importance of China and the political emancipation of a self-confident middle class. The Arab spring has changed geopolitics on a larger scale.

3. Reactions by the West

“There is no such thing as society”, is probably the most famous quote by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.³⁶ The governments in the UK and US of Thatcher and Ronald Reagan are considered the beginning of deregulation and neoliberalism. Governments were on the retreat, markets on the rise both in the industrialised and developing world. As of the late 1990s the term “emerging markets” captured investors’ minds. North-African countries are among those markets.

3.1. Not only emerging markets, but societies

Emerging markets promise rapid growth and quick profits but also risks. Magazines applauded tycoons like the Egyptian constructor Ahmed Ezz and many others well connected with government, who are now in jail.³⁷ What had happened in Tunisia and Egypt was the return of society, even though a highly fragmented one without any clear leadership. Regime-change came as a shock not only to politicians but also the business community. Society seems to be back and it can disturb business interests. Commercial sections of Western embassies promoted investments in those markets in spite of all visible unrest until the very last moment.

Western governments were taken by surprise in January 2011 when riots started in Tunisia. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs offered anti-riot police contingents to crush the protests; French politicians had passed their winter holidays at the expenses of Ben Ali and Mubarak. Many Western governments did not know how to comment the developments. An embarrassing silence revealed the limits of a foreign policy based on alliances with dictators who had guaranteed stability at a high price.

Given the on-going bloodshed in Libya, Syria, Yemen and the vacuum in Tunisia and Egypt it is impossible to do guesswork on the future of existing contracts. Not only Western governments lost money and employment in Libya. China had to evacuate more than 40.000 workers; Turkey had to rescue only 8.000 citizens active in contracts worth 18 billion US-Dollar. Certain companies, in particular in the oil and gas exploration sector, will have to renegotiate their treaties. The criteria for those amendments depend on the ultimate outcome of the revolutions and interventions.

While the West, in particular Europe, was hesitant to act in the case of Tunisia and Egypt, their action was prompt with regard to Libya. A coordinated Franco-British initiative implemented UN-Security Council 1973 on March 19 by attacking Libyan targets in order to pre-empt a potential attack by the Gadhafi forces on Benghazi. The US rejected a lead role given its military and financial overstretch. Despite all weakening of the regime, Gadhafi is still in power, negotiations will have to be conducted with him. Unrest among military circles because of limits of ammunition and forces causes frictions. The nature of the Libyan opposition is unclear; still the European Union decided

³⁶ Prime minister Margaret Thatcher, talking to *Women's Own magazine*, October 31, 1987.

³⁷ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the-rise-and-fall-of-egypts-most-despised-billionaire-ahmed-ezz/2011/03/29/AFVgNG9C_story.html, visited on April 9, 8 pm.

to establish a liaison office in Benghazi in mid-May in order to promote the transitional phase. The risk of a secession of Libya is possible. The no-fly zone strangely follows the historical borders of the Cyrenaica. Still not all tribes have abandoned Gadhafi. In his speech on February 22, he predicted civil war and a Somalisation of the country, namely a complete implosion of the state.

3.2. The difficult economic situation and looming humanitarian tragedies

Though the revolutions in the beginning did not focus exclusively on economic misery, as had been the case in earlier bread-revolts, the impoverishment of the people will turn into an increasingly burning issue. Food prices are now at an all time high, and are trending higher, indicating that this may be only the beginning of the food riot problem. Outbursts ignite concern that the world is due for a repeat of the 2008 food protests that rocked countries as far apart as Haiti, Senegal and Bangladesh. China and India, like much of emerging Asia, are grappling with an escalating inflation problem. Rising food costs, which disproportionately hit the lower to middle income Chinese and Indian consumers, can result in a socio-political turmoil. Looking back, bad harvests preceded revolutions throughout history. 1789 and 1848 were partially triggered off both by hunger and political dissatisfaction.

The Arab revolts arrive at a complex moment; the overall state of world economy will determine the further evolution of post-revolutionary states. Egypt has to import 80 per cent of its basic food, such as wheat, rice etc. Given the possible further increase in food prices, more subsidies are needed. The economic outlook for the country is gloomy, the tourism sector, a main income in foreign currency, is completely paralysed; US-subsidies might be reduced in the wake of a rising US-deficit and a potential shift of Egyptian foreign policy.

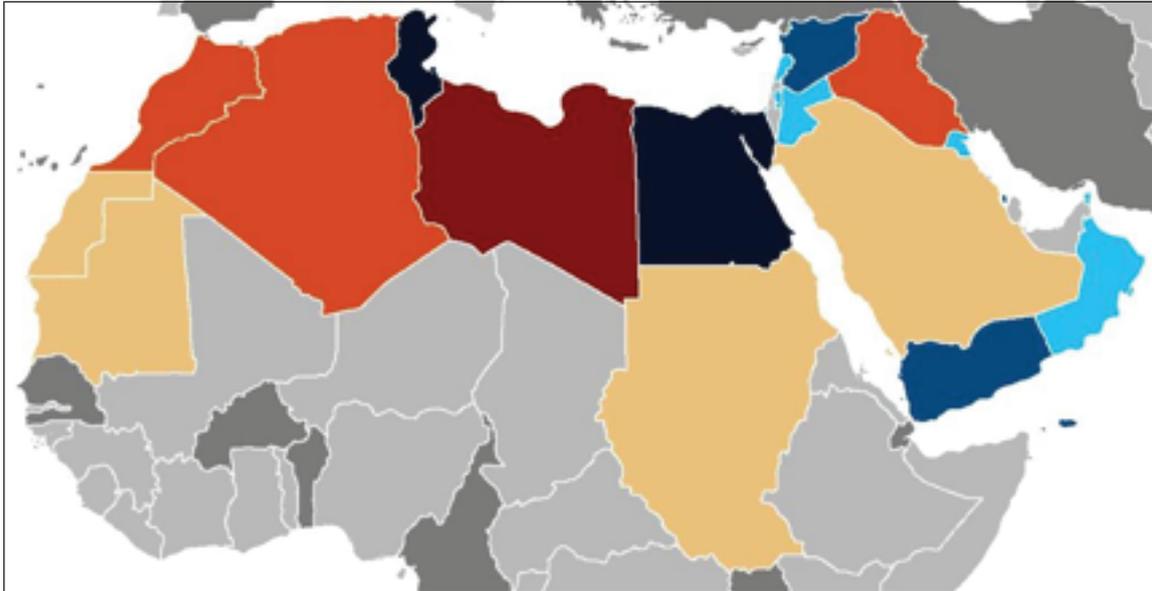
With all due consideration for the socio-economic dimension of the protest, it would be wrong to speak of mere revolts because of high food-prices. The Jordanian government perceives the uprising by its discontent populations as a bread-revolt. This diagnosis is wrong, and the therapy of populist and short-term direct payments to the consumers and civil servants will not result in social peace. In addition to the refugee drama in Northern Africa, which affects countries in turmoil like Tunisia much more than the EU, we might watch soon an even bigger tragedy, which is currently growing in the Horn of Africa.

4. Conclusion: Promises and Pitfalls

There are times of collective suffering and times of collective rejoicing. Digitally driven leaderless revolutions have potential to generate chaos. Turbulences do still lie ahead. We see that in the contested preparations of election, in the debate on new constitutions and above all in the on going violence in North Africa and the Middle East. Whether the Arab spring will open up a new chapter for the region and its peoples is uncertain.

The “Animal Farm” by George Orwell tells the rise and fall of a revolution of the animals against their farmer and the usurpation by the pigs, the conclusions could be: the Arab revolutions might fail as had done before the Russian revolution, the Iranian revolution and many others.

But on the other hand, history is also full of good surprises. The Arab revolutions tell an impressive story about the human will and how to overcome fear. The Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai refrained from commenting the consequences of the French Revolution by saying that “It is too early to tell”. We are in no position to interpret the ultimate outcome of today’s history in the making.



Map of the Arab spring movements

To date, there have been revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt; a civil war in Libya; civil uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen; major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and Oman; and minor protests in Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan.

■ = Revolutions
 ■ = Civil war
 ■ = Sustained civil disorder and governmental changes
■ = Protests and governmental changes
 ■ = Major protests
 ■ = Minor protests

Source: [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/File:Arab_Spring_map.png#filelinksDerivative work of File:BlankMap-World-large2.png](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/File:Arab_Spring_map.png#filelinksDerivative%20work%20of%20File:BlankMap-World-large2.png). A map of protests in the “Arab world” as part of the “Arab Spring”.

Selected Bibliography

The Arab Human Development reports, vol. 1–5, 2002-2009, published by the UNDP.

Antoinus, George. 1938. *The Arab Awakening*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

Lewis, Bernard. 1995. *The Middle East – a brief history of the last 2000 years*. New York: Touchstone.

Roy, Olivier. 1992. *L'échec de l'Islam politique*. Paris: Seuil.

■ **KARIN KNEISSL** is a freelance analyst and university teacher (Vienna, Beirut, Frankfurt etc.). She studied law and Arabic at Vienna University, did postgraduate programmes at the Hebrew University Jerusalem, had a Fulbright scholarship at Georgetown University, Washington D.C and graduated from ENA in Paris. From 1990 to 1998 she served in the Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs. See www.kkneissl.com.