

MIGRATION AND MODERNITY IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE ARAB SPRING

Mihai SANDU¹

ABSTRACT:

NOWADAYS, WHEN TALKING ABOUT DEVELOPMENT, STABILITY, WELL-BEING AND PEACE, ONE WOULD ALWAYS REFER TO A SINGLE WORD, DEFINING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY AND FOR THE SO FAR EVOLUTION OF HUMANS, SOCIETIES AND STATES – DEMOCRACY. CONSIDERED A DECISIVE AND ESSENTIAL ELEMENT FOR WELL-BEING AND POWER, DEMOCRACY REPRESENTS A REALITY FOR THE MOST DEVELOPED PARTS OF THE EARTH, AS WELL AS A MUST-BE FOR EVERYONE ELSE. HOWEVER, THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY HAS TOO OFTEN BEEN UNDERESTIMATED AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY PROVED TO BE TRICKY FOR STATE EVOLUTION, BECOMING A WEAKNESS FOR THE STATE AND SOCIETY WHEN THE DEMOCRATIZATION WENT WRONG. AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF THIS ROAD STANDS MODERNIZATION. IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THE POSSIBILITY OF DEMOCRACY, THE MAIN ISSUE IN DEBATE IS THE LEVEL OF MODERNIZATION AND THE MODERNITY ACHIEVED. BEING THE MOST IMPORTANT REPRESENTATIVE OF A SOCIETY, THE POPULATION IS BOTH THE FIRST CATEGORY AFFECTED BY CHANGE AND THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF IT. THE SPRING AS WELL AS THE SPREAD OF IDEAS IS CARRIED OUT BY PEOPLE; AND WHEN PEOPLE ARE ON THE MOVE, IT IS THE FIRST SIGN THAT ONE IDEA, ONE PHENOMENON OR ONE IDEAL HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME CHANGE ITSELF.

KEY WORDS: MODERNIZATION, DEMOCRATIZATION, MIGRATION, ARAB SPRING

INTRODUCTION

When talking about democracy we often miss an essential element, consisting on the conditions met by the state and society before moving towards democracy. The fundamental question that should be answered to is not whether the state is ready to go for democracy, but rather if every component of it is able to understand and willing to take part in the evolution of every structure, microsystem and macro system, towards what democracy means. The process of modernization, with its result, modernity, provides state and society with certain elements without which democracy becomes either impossible or skid and evolving slow and cumbersome. Why is that? Simply because democratization, as simple and ebullient as it is at first, becomes exhaustive as the society evolves towards a democracy that is real, stable and well impregnated in every piece of it. At this point, modernization

¹ BA, Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, mihaisandu.sandu@gmail.com

becomes a necessity under the shape of a thorough preparation of the process of democratization, which involves a gradual and detailed transformation. This requires a significant amount of patience as well as enough physical and, especially, moral resources from the population, implying a consistent and constant effort from all society components; in short, the existence of modernity comes into question.

“The modernization means that all groups, old and new, are becoming more aware of themselves as groups, of their interests and requirements in relation to other groups. One of the most striking phenomena of modernization is increased awareness, coherence, organization and action, which occur among many social forces that existed at a much lower level of conscious identity and organization in traditional societies”². In his theories, Samuel Huntington speaks of a modernization that occurs in the same time with replacing traditional societies and political systems, without making an immediate switch to the final point, which is to modernity. We are dealing with a type of awareness that is applied gradually, even risking early slips, but that doesn't evolve abruptly towards the next step in evolution.

For Huntington, the impact of modernization upon the values, attitudes and even hopes, which tend to become common in the modern world, is strictly connected to the phenomenon of social mobilization, which involves the population joining together towards the achievement of a common purpose. Apart from the fact that this kind of join introduces a psychosocial signification to modernization, it can also offer explanations for the changing capacity that popular revolutions have manifested throughout history. Furthermore, Samuel Huntington connects social mobilization to the level of economic development, which provides the resources necessary for social deployments. Population becomes the main carrier of the torch for change. Both modernization and democratization become possible due to the population desire and to its evolution and mobility.³ And when talking about social mobility, one speaks, first of all, of migration. Whether it is about internal migration, from one region to another inside the same state, or, sharing the same larger region, from one state to another, or about external migration, involving bigger distances and greater discrepancies between the source and the destination, the population migration has always been one of the most important carriers of ideas or trends leading to change. As for modernization, being a process that is strictly connected to society and to the development and feelings of the population, migration becomes one of the main pillars of change.

Beginning with the theories of Huntington and of other personalities in the field, the theory of modernization becomes more explicit and gains more relevance once the practical highlighting of the phenomenon and its components is brought up by the examples offered by the evolution of certain states in certain periods of time.

One of the most recent examples in this field is represented by the so-called “Arab Spring” and the evolution it triggered. When thinking about the “Arab Spring”, one could just as well refer to an “Arab Decade”, or even to a “Muslim Quarter of a Century”.⁴ The magnitude of the events, the extension of instability in certain areas, even beyond the original borders, are able to transform the concept into a civilizational phenomenon which stands as a symbol of change itself, not only marking the removal from power of some authoritarian leaders whose reigns proved to be obsolete and outdated. Also, it doesn't represent the singular desire for democratization suddenly lit in the Arab space, but rather the tendency to advance, to modernize, in the context of big social discrepancies. In Egypt, for example, half

² Samuel Huntington, *Ordinea Politică a societăților în schimbare* (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 41

³ Huntington, *Ordinea Politică*, 37

⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, “The Arab Quarter Century”, *New York Times*, April 10, 2013, A23

of the female population cannot read.⁵ This general tendency appears as one of the results of a period of stability which had been reached under the leadership of authoritarian leaders and characterized by a stagnation that sometimes degenerated into decline. Therefore, when a society, with an increasingly active young population, gained access to media that allowed them to witness the developing conditions of other people around the world, it reached the conclusion that it was the right time to discover new instruments that would allow them to capitalize their potential.⁶ In other words, by wishing for change, they caused the collapse of a stability that left room for a fresh, new road towards modernization, even if this would first cause instability.

TOOLS OF CHANGE IN THE ARAB SPRING

For many researchers, the Arab Spring didn't start in Tunisia, in December 2010, but rather originates in 1991, in the aftermath of the first Gulf War. Unsatisfied with the harshness of Saddam Hussein's regime, the Iraqi unleashed a series of public manifestations demanding foreign forces to intervene against their ruler. It was about the same foreigners that had bombed them only a few months earlier. Although they remained unanswered, those social movements represented a signal revealing that the old ideas, based on tradition and on a cultural ideology proper to the Islamic world, can be questioned. Following their example, in 2011, "instead of the illusions the Arab society was based on, the young revolutionaries made a political priority of their fight against dictatorships, just as their fellow Iraqis tried in vain to do 20 years earlier"⁷.

The course of events in the countries of the Arab world revealed two major conclusions. First, we can notice the desperate tentative of some of the monarchies in the area, such as Jordan, Lebanon or, in a rather different context, Iran, to support rebellions directed against some of the other countries' leaders in order to impose new governments, found under their influence, that would be inspired by the traditional Arab world, relying on elements that Saddam Hussein offered as negative examples in the past, such as exacerbated nationalism or sectarianism. Secondly, the conclusions reveal that "our species, at least in its modern shape, needs states to begin with, even the imperfect ones"⁸. In order to hope for development and even democratization, a minimum of modernization is essentially necessary. In the Arab world, this thing must be understood first and foremost by the societies that cling to the past, even risking total state destruction, such as Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. "The Syrian crisis is just the most recent episode of a chain reaction unleashed more than 10 years ago with the *war of choice* against Saddam Hussein"⁹. Along with the war started in 2003, the Middle East became a place characterized by transformation and instability, everything culminating with the triggering of the Arab Spring in December 2010.

Coming back to social movements, one of the main tools for this transformation that occurred in the Arab space is the process of urbanization, which could represent an internal model of migration. Throughout Middle East and North Africa, among the key elements of the recent development, urbanization holds one of the top positions, withal being responsible for the breakthrough of the separatist feelings and of the pro-democracy movements among the population. The demographic explosion, doubled by the accelerated raise of the standard of living in the urban environment, has led to further city developments and to an

⁵ Friedman, "The Arab Quarter Century"

⁶ Friedman, "The Arab Quarter Century"

⁷ Kanan Makiya, "The Arab Spring started in Iraq", *New York Times*, April 7, 2013, SR7

⁸ Makiya, "The Arab Spring started in Iraq"

⁹ Stefano Stefanini, "Ten years after", *Longitude* 26 (2013), 58

accentuation of the importance that urbanization holds in their societies. Moreover, the upsurge of this process in the last half century has led to the evolution of radical Islamism, enabling this movement to find much more adherents in such an environment rather than in a socially dispersed one. Also, using the same reasoning, we might say that the same coordinates are available for the spread of democratic ideas, favored especially by the fastest access of the population to the international community through the advanced technology present here.¹⁰ On the other hand, it is also the urban environment that creates mutations in the confessional field, giving birth, under the circumstances of a low standard of living and of growing urban structures, to extreme religious forms, which can be combined with forms of exacerbated nationalism met mostly at extremist clusters from the suburbs.¹¹

Another advantage that urban areas have is that of the technological advance that is favored in this area. Technology conducts more and more the crowd psychology, equally replacing it and thus determining the amplitude of social phenomena. Through Mass-Media, Internet and, lately, Social Media, the element of cohesion inside the social movements is provided, representing the main reason for which the movement intensifies much faster and becomes more unpredictable than it used to, even if it often doesn't imply the physical presence of individuals, as it has been highlighted during the panic attack from Wall Street, in 2008, and, especially, during the movements from 2011, the year of the Arab Spring.

The propagation of ideas isn't only conducted through technology, but also due to the advantages that a country with a high level of urbanization and civic education manifests. Inside the great urban agglomerations with a distinguished tradition in urbanization, the spread of ideas happens fast due to the cramped social arrangement, regardless of their geographical position.¹² Today, we can speak of a new type of migration, determined by Internet – an online migration. In terms of culture and intellectual advance, the experience that in the past had been collected by the population only by physically experimenting life in the advanced societies in the West or elsewhere can simply be accumulated today, up to a certain point, through the connection to internet, if in areas where it is only partially free.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In the region affected by the events of the Arab Spring we can distinguish an increase in the presence of NGOs militating for democracy, both in the immediate proximity of the movements started in Tunisia, in December 2010, and earlier, in the 2000s, as well as an online activity of remarkable magnitude. Especially inside the countries whence the movements began, Egypt and Tunisia, the young people's blogs, as well as the social networks, have emphasized a vertiginous raise in the dissatisfaction towards the political system blocked within traditional power structures, towards high unemployment rate or towards reduced involvement of the civil sector into politics.¹³

Beyond the influence of Internet and Social Media, the classical means of Mass Media have a large amount of influence, as well, originating long before the events in 2010-2011. The presence in the region, as a common element, of the independent TV station *Al Jazeera*, has enforced the social cohesion and offered the possibility of immediate connection of the entire region to any important event. Moreover, beginning with the events of the Arab Spring, the television has offered the proper framework for the propagation of

¹⁰ Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2012), 122

¹¹ Kaplan, *Revenge*, 122

¹² Kaplan, *Revenge*, 123

¹³ Courtney C. Radsch, "Blogosphere and Social Media", in *Seismic Shift: Understanding Change in the Middle East*, ed. Ellen Laipson et al. (Washington: Stimson Center, 2011), 80

social movements and for hardening the popular support for them in a way much more relevant than the capacity of Facebook and Twitter. However, such an effect wouldn't be possible without the Arabian language, common for the entire space, which has represented the best way to develop the ideas and to spread the events started in 2010-2011.¹⁴

For the entire Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the main element that could have announced the vast social movements started in 2010 was the rapid and surprising emergence of the civil sector, determined by the increased presence of NGOs and by the development of mass media and internet. However, even if renowned international NGOs and western think tanks had begun their activity in the area in the early 2000s, bearing western influences and permanently monitoring the raise of civil society, no one could have really foreseen the amplitude of the events forming the Arab Spring, due to the roots too deep that the regional leaders had, due to the traditional elements that supported their regimes and due to a salient lack of cohesion manifested among the soft oppositions and social movements.¹⁵

The changing trends, scarce and weak, existed due to the presence of these elements, but have started to matter only after they were hardened by classic forms of migration. By carrying the influences of the NGOs, of Social Media and of Mass Media from areas where the presence of these elements was possible into places where these were either forbidden or granted limited access, migration favored an intercultural change which can definitely be considered as one of the key items of change, whether it is about modernization or democratization.

MIGRATION IN THE ARAB SPRING

If by the end of the 2000s, a constant, but not spectacular raise in the number of emigrants from the MENA states was distinguished, the present reveals a fresh new episode in the increase of migration in the area towards both Europe and the West, and other developed countries in their neighboring region. The main reasons seem to be the economic crisis and the instability created and extended in the area by the Arab Spring and its follow-ups.¹⁶ Based on the history of emigrations towards certain European countries, some EU states have introduced specific regulations and have signed agreements with host-states upon which new conditions of developing legal migration were possible. It is the case of the agreements between Morocco and Spain, or between Egypt, Tunisia and Italy. The Egyptian example implies certain specificities. Having an ideal position for the transit from and to the West, and benefiting from the privileged relationship with EU states in terms of legal migration, Egypt represents a transit point for both emigrants and immigrants from the Arab space. The numerous population and the high unemployment rate have determined many Egyptians to leave their country and head towards western countries, as well as towards other countries in the neighborhood, the best example being Libya. Also, due to the fact that it is considered a safer country in the region, Egypt also represents one of the favorite destinations for refugees, this leading to the amplification of civic sentiments for all the

¹⁴ Aigerim Zikibayeva, Serge Korepin, Shalini Sharan, *What Does the Arab Spring Mean for Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus*, (Washington: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2011), 2

¹⁵ Ellen Laipson, "Understanding Change in the Middle East: An Overview", in *Seismic Shift: Understanding Change in the Middle East*, ed. Ellen Laipson et al. (Washington: Stimson Center, 2011), 4

¹⁶ Philippe Fargues, *Mediterranean Migration 2008-2009 Report* (Fiesole: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, 2009), 16, accessed April 21, 2014, <http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/11861/CARIM%20Migration%20Report%202008-2009%20revised%20Oct09.pdf?sequence=3>

immigrants, a trend which was further developed by the presence of international humanitarian NGOs preoccupied with the fate of the refugees.¹⁷

A particularity of the region is also the raise of emigrants` number following the recent events due to harsh economic instability. However, this more often regards irregular migrations, which are believed to stop once a new economic stability is reached. There is a big chance that the people involved in such migrations will return to their home countries, where they can continue to influence the modernization process by importing western ideas. Starting with the Civil War in Libya, from 2011, the Libyan element has begun to matter more especially in Egypt and Tunisia, who have received hundreds of thousands of Libyans as refugees and who fled back to their country afterwards. Libya is confronted nowadays with an enormous number of immigrants, closing the figure of 8% of the population, fact that can also become beneficial if reported to their contacts with the changes occurred in neighboring countries. Such a consequence can attract an equalization of the modernity achieved in all the countries from the area, inspiring mental, cultural and economic progress through sharing each other`s experience.¹⁸

The phenomenon is further more important as Libya is a country where emigration was almost non-existent before the crisis in 2011, but which had significantly dealt with immigration. In the context of economic regression due to civil war, a decrease of immigration in Libya also becomes obvious, except on the refugees` return, which could produce o relative stabilization in the state, focusing more on increasing the social and cultural cohesion. The negative side of the Libyan situation is connected to the workers who couldn`t return to their home countries after the crisis had burst in 2011.¹⁹ A similar situation occurred in every country affected by the revolutionary wave in 2011, thus becoming a common feature of the entire region.

In Syria, the situation had been relatively stable previous to the outburst of the violent protests conducted against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. The number of emigrants was maintained at a constant level, never exceeding a few hundreds of thousands, most of which headed to European states such as Germany, who had already had a significant number of Muslims, or to richer countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who also have a rather permissive policy on migration. One notable exception for this was represented by a constant migration flow to Jordan and Palestine, or even to Libya, caused by ethnic and confessional reasons. Reversely, the restrictive regime in Syria as well as the low level of attractiveness that is has for foreigners has maintained the number of immigrants at an extremely low level. The exception was also represented by the immigrants from Jordan and Palestine, but also by Iraqi refugees, though there is not an official confirmation of this.²⁰ One positive effect was, like in many other countries in MENA, the

¹⁷ Migration Policy Center Team, *Migration Facts Egypt* (Fiesole: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, April 2013), accessed April 21, 2014, http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/fact_sheets/Factsheet%20Egypt.pdf

¹⁸ Migration Policy Center Team, *Libya Migration Profile* (Fiesole: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, June 2013), accessed April 21, 2014, http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/migration_profiles/Libya.pdf

¹⁹ Migration Policy Center Team, *Libya Migration Profile* (Fiesole: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, June 2013), accessed April 21, 2014, http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/migration_profiles/Libya.pdf

²⁰ Migration Policy Center Team, *Migration Facts Syria*, (Fiesole: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, April 2013), accessed April 21, 2014, http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/fact_sheets/Factsheet%20Syria.pdf

free policy applied to all emigrants, sometimes involving the repatriation of them, which led to an increase of external influences brought by the returning population.

The situation changed dramatically with the outbreak of the civil war. The wave of Syrian refugees was dispersed throughout the entire region with the main targets becoming Turkey, Syria and even Libya, besides Jordan and Palestine. The Syrian refugees has become a delicate issue ever since, representing one of the biggest challenges for the entire Arab space, bearing the potential to dramatically affect the economy. For Syria, the evolutionary trend in which all these refugees would return, could have auspicious consequences. In a devastated country like Syria, the eventual reconstruction in the future will equally be conducted by internal factions, regional and international actors and former refugees. The returning refugees would carry with them a certain amount of experience in peaceful transit as well as the memory of modernity and even democratic spirit, which could definitely play an important role for the future of this country.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion related to the implications of the migration phenomenon can be vast, but rather incomplete. Regardless of the obsessive fear for a potential massive migration from MENA, triggered by the Arab Spring, Europe didn't suffer from a significant raise neither of legal migration, nor of illegal transit or refugees. The possible explanation for this could be that the migration wave was stopped by either natural barriers, such as the Mediterranean Sea, or troubled countries, like Syria and even Turkey. The same reason can be available even under the circumstances of the latest increase in the number of Egyptian and Libyan emigrants who have crossed the Mediterranean in fishing boats. The statistics might change in the future, but it would depend on a new destabilizing factor for Europe, that is the Ukraine crisis.

The main reason for which the forecasts referring to the Arab migration wave to Europe didn't come true is related to the fact that the emigrants have focused especially on their spread throughout the neighborhood region. By moving into stronger and economically developed countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar or the United Arab Emirates, emigrants found a solution more suitable in terms of culture, financial issues and even physically, considering the fact that a movement in the region is much cheaper. This cannot serve as a relaxation for Europe, however. Immigration is still massive in Europe and the Muslim population continues to be dominant in this field. Furthermore, the terrorist threat can become active once more following the security gap that was created and is expanding around Ukraine.

A tougher problem is represented by the groups of immigrants found in the countries still affected by the Arab Spring, who can't return to their homelands either due to financial shortcomings, or to unsafe travel conditions. As a consequence, a category of so-called "prisoner-emigrants" was created, posing the risk to become a vulnerability both for the destination countries and for their motherlands, which, in some cases, are European countries whose citizens had left to work abroad. In conflictual areas like Syria, Libya or Egypt, the situation is the more severe as violence has the tendency to exacerbate protectionist and resilient feelings against foreigners of any kind, thus making a humanitarian intervention very difficult or even impossible, be it carried by NGOs. Such resistance is also available for Sub-Saharan Africa or for population from other poor and underdeveloped countries, who manifest the tendency to become victims of the persecutions from the hosts, whose anger is spilled on the minority groups, such as the case of the Tuareg in southern Libya. Veritable enclaves have thus been created by minority populations who fight for survival and sometimes turn into terrorist organizations. On the other hand, these populations,

originating from areas characterized by primitive education and weak social, cultural and economic development, manifest negativist feelings on their way back into their homeland. A good example is represented by the same Tuareg when returning to Mali.²¹

A very interesting issue for the next period will be the tendency of the displaced populations from high risk areas, such as Iraq, Libya or Syria. We are facing a new generation of youth with higher culture and education due to globalization and technical developments, who is going to expect more, both from migration and from the West, including Europe. If Turkey, Saudi Arabia and, maybe, Egypt, will most likely remain the principal safety areas for the refugees, it will be very interesting to watch over the evolution of these populations in host countries, as well as to observe their behavior on their way back into their homelands.

As stable or raising economies, or countries who allow a diversified labor markets, like that of the Saudi Arabia, have the tendency to attract the most the displaced population, the flux of immigrants is expected to settle on specific sectors, being able to develop the economy of the destination state in the same extent as they can destabilize it. Another reason for which the three appear to be more attractive is due to less rigorous religious criteria. The rather fragile exception is Saudi Arabia, where religious restrictions apply especially to women and non-Muslim foreigners, but where the developments in the energy sector increase the need for specialists, most of which come from Europe or from countries from the Persian Gulf area, as well as the necessity of cheap workforce. It is expected that the Saudis will prefer Muslim and Arab workers, which can have a spectacular result, leading to the tightening of links in the region. In time, another consequence of this fact can be a reduction of certain economic, cultural and social discrepancies, although, politically speaking, the region will remain a hot spot. Last but not least, we can witness the establishment of settlements inhabited or created by immigrants belonging to the same ethnicity or sharing the same traditions, one of the best examples in this field being the establishment of the city of Camp Ashraf in Iraq by the Iranian mujahedeen.

²¹ Hein de Haas, "The Arab Spring and Migration", *Hein de Haas Blog*, March 21, 2012, <http://heindehaas.blogspot.ro/2012/03/arab-spring-and-migration.html>

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