

Questioning “mono-causal” perceptions of the Arab revolts

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Abstract: Following media, academic, and public debates, it seems the Arab protests have sometimes been reduced to mono-causal narratives. Several analysts have produced limited interpretations by making parallels between current revolts and previous uprisings or, worse, by looking for explanations that suit their own political agenda. Another problem is a persistent black-and-white view, where different factions only recognize political actors that fit into their worldview. It is a difficult task to read the Arab revolts and even more difficult to establish their nature. Before we can understand these phenomena, we must first deconstruct several interpretations that only prevent us from recognizing their originality. This paper seeks to organize these tendencies, illustrating them with examples, and, thus, contribute to the discussion of the root causes of the revolts. It is not an analysis of the revolts, but a discussion related to the discourses most commonly used to explain them.

Keywords: Arab revolts, Middle East, peace, reforms, revolution

Introduction to the debate

Some experts have produced limited interpretations by simply creating parallels between the current revolts and previous ones or, worse, by looking for explanations that suit their own political agenda: some see only the groups they identify with—some leftists recognize only the agency of Communists (a kind of Lenin-Mohamed), Iran credits Shiites, Al Qaradawi only sees Sunnis, Europe sees promarket agents, internet users see bloggers. By the same logic, leaders see their enemies in order to legitimize their continued grasp on power: Gadafi saw CIA agents, Bashar Al-Assad only sees Al-Qaeda, and Israel only sees Islamist groups.

Such logic has produced at least five different interpretations that I would like to analyze and challenge here. This article identifies the following mono-casual discourses: a) the Arab proletariat instigated its own “October Revolution,” b) a process of Islamization occurred, c) this is a Facebook revolution, d) the conspiracy theory, and e) another war for oil.



One dilemma is whether to use a theoretical framework because of the limitations that such theory may impose on the analysis. Doing so would risk repeating exactly what we reject here: a mono-causal reading of the Arab revolts.

In the Arab revolts, there is a Muslim agenda, as well as bourgeois and workers' agendas. Oil and Facebook have played a role, but, taken separately, none of these elements sufficiently explains the developments. The revolts have also unquestionably revived political debate. Journalist Daniel Iriarte says that in Tunisia, "before, people used to talk only about soccer in the cafes, but now everyone talks about politics."

For some who have fallen into the trend of calling any protest or minor uprising a "revolution,"¹ it is an "Arab revolution." Others call it the "Arab Spring" and see it as equivalent to the European revolts of the mid-nineteenth century,² or comparable to the events of 1989: the collapse of the Soviet Union.³ For others, the changes so far have not gone to the root of the structures of the political systems in question and, therefore, up to this point, they are no more than cosmetic changes. Without a doubt, in the Arab revolts it is not difficult to find elements in common with the taking of the Bastille, with the 1848 European Spring, and even with the October Revolution. But, as Marx said, each revolution is unique.

The complaints of the so-called Arab street protesters can be organized into two categories: in the first, those issues that aim to achieve political freedoms, against exclusion, against one-party regimes (Syria, Libya, and Egypt), the questionable electoral processes, and defending the right to create nongovernmental organizations, and so forth. To sum up: issues related to freedom and the political agenda.

The second level is related to issues of inequality, unemployment, lack of social justice, increase in food prices, cutting subsidies, and similar concerns. In summary: the agenda related to economic and social inclusion.

In Egypt, the slogans used were, "bread, freedom and dignity,"⁴ "the people want the fall of the regime," "Mubarak, Mubarak, the plane is waiting for you" (*Al Quds al Arabi*, 2011, 26 January), as well as "Hosni down, Gamal down" (in reference to Mubarak and his son). In Yemen, thousands of people united under the slogan "no to corruption, no to dictatorship." One of the slogans heard in Syria is "Allah, Syria, Freedom." In Morocco, the slogans are related to unemployment and housing problems. In Bahrain, the Sunnis are the ones who govern, and the Shiites the ones who protest, yet the most common slogan is "neither Sunni nor Shiite, we are all Bahrainis."

It is necessary, moreover, to discuss several other specific interpretations that have emerged from the wide array of attempts to understand the revolts, such as the conspiracy theory, political Islam, the advances (or

not) in the current political transition, and oil as a resource in dispute. But the biggest difficulty is to overcome a Western discourse that insists that Muslims are antidemocratic by nature and the Arabs are politically immature. This is part of the challenge.

My goal with this article is simply to identify trends in the analysis of the Arab revolts. The various theories discussed here have been put forward by different authors and media analysts in recent months; however, to discuss the specific agenda of each author and to explain their political positions go beyond the scope of this article.

First reading: The Arab proletariat instigating their own October Revolution

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the political actor called to lead the way in social change was the labor movement, and it was defined as the vanguard of the revolution by Marx. Today in the Arab world, the role of the labor movement has been secondary—but not irrelevant (Barreñada, 2011, August)—and the role of leadership has been taken over by the youth (about 50% of the population in the Arab world is below 25 years old). The labor movement itself does not explain the revolt, but the revolt would not have been possible without the labor movement.

Official labor unions played a significant role in past nationalist and independence movements, but “the essential problem was their lack of independence, because the labor union was the ‘labor front’ of the official party” (Barreñada, 2011, August). Now, however, independent union forces have appeared in the Arab world.

In just three days, the Bread Riots of 1977 in Egypt were able to stop Anwar El-Sadat’s neoliberal policy of cutting subsidies. Such protests were led by workers and students (Pommier, 2009, pp. 75–76). Before the elections of 2005, the *Kefaya* platform (*enough!* in Arabic) represented a part of the discontent against Mubarak, although the nature of the platform is quite heterogeneous. There were more than 3,000 worker’s protests between 2004 and 2010 (Lampridi, 2011, p. 63), including the protests by textile workers in April 2008, out of which the April 6 Youth Movement, one of the actors in the Egyptian revolts, emerged.

In Bahrain, the history of the demonstrations goes back to even earlier stages of the country’s independence (which was attained in 1971). Oil production as well as a strong social activism (derived from the formation of labor unions, leftist organizations, and ideological elements with nationalist and anticolonial inspiration) led to recurrent popular uprisings in the 1950s and 1960s. (Mesa DelMonte, 2011, p. 117).

Thus, in relation to the workers' movement, the Arab revolts have represented a change in two ways: first, uncovering the role of the official labor unions, which immobilized the anti-neoliberal protests, and, second, proposing the creation and/or strengthening of independent unions (Barreñada, 2011). The growing strength of the unions was seen in the decision of the transitional Egyptian government, which passed a law prohibiting strikes.

It must be remembered, however, that these protests did not arise overnight; their background is in the struggles of textile factory workers in Egypt, as well as the labor movement in Tunisia. To conclude from this, however, that the protests are a class struggle is a mistake; the weakness of the labor movement and the leadership of other social sectors, such as the youth, make it clear that there is more going on here than simply class warfare. And while it is true that there have been public outcries against unemployment and poverty, that does not justify the invention of an Arab October.

But, in terms of theory, can we define the youth as a social actor? Many of the young protesters have not taken the step from marching in the protests and waving flags to producing clear proposals for social change. And while workers have a defined relationship with the economic model and with the means of production, while the capital-labor contradiction exists within them, the young, as a group, do not have a defined identity or economic role. To be young *per se* means nothing. To say "youth of the world unite" is not very helpful. It is necessary to recognize that although many of the youth who have taken to the streets are either unemployed or underemployed, these facts are not sufficient to define what "youth" means politically.

Nonetheless, the poverty of the workers is shared, to some extent, by all Arab people today, especially if we accept that, as Marx said, the working condition has not disappeared but rather has been extended to everyone (Marx, 1974, p. 141). Therefore, an unorthodox point of view allows us to recognize the alienated/exploited in general—even those who do not have explicit roles as workers—as characterized by the working condition.

The debate on how to effect social change in institutions is the same debate that faced the French labor movement in 1848. Marx said that the French workers could not take a step forward, could not touch a hair of the bourgeois order, until the march of the revolution rose against this order, and added that without revolutionizing the French state completely there was no way to revolutionize the budget of the French state (Marx, 1995, pp. 98, 168–169). As Marx said, any claim, even the most basic bourgeois financial reform, of the most vulgar liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, of the most trivial democracy, is treated as an "attack on society" and stigmatized as "socialism" (Marx, 1995, p. 219).

Second reading: A process of Islamization

The notion of political Islam is already controversial: whether because any religion inherently contains a social organization proposal that makes it, by definition, also a political proposal, or because in a restrictive sense Islam is not a political proposal because it goes beyond politics. Therefore, to treat politics as an end contradicts the essence of the Islam.

Furthermore, it is difficult to distinguish two different debates: one is the misreading of Islam and another is the underlying problems of a confessional state. The problem is that in both theory and practice, these two issues go hand in hand, making it impossible to discuss one without the other.

In the case of the Arab revolts, besides what has been said about the political character of Islam, with the rise of parties with Islamic profiles in the recent elections in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, we must add another question: Is there a revolutionary character to Islam? Also, there is a question about the traditionalist nature of Islam; in the case of Saudi Arabia, the Great Ulema Council prohibited the protests by *fatwa* (Atuan, 2011, 7 March).

It is naive to think that in a region of Muslim majorities the religious factor is unrelated to political activity. However, the debate is whether the protesters act as citizens or as believers. Although there is a presence of religious actors (such as the Muslim Brotherhood), veiled women in the demonstration and copies of the Koran in the hands of the opponents, nothing indicates that the fundamental cause of the revolt is Islamic (Chomsky, 2011, 4 February).

The spokespersons of Muslim organizations stated that the revolts surprised them as much as the governments. It is true that the people have joined the revolts from the mosques, because they see themselves not only as Muslims but also as citizens. Yet there are more intra-Muslim tensions than there are tensions between Muslims and other religious groups. Islam is massively heterogeneous, and there are significant tensions between its various parts: Alawites from Syria against Sunnis, Sunnis against Shiites in Bahrain, Zaydis in Yemen, and so forth. In the case of Egypt after the departure of Mubarak, however, a new tendency (more religious and less democratic) can be seen inside the Muslim Brotherhood.

The arguments against an Islamic alienation take into account the possibility of what Tariq Ramadan called a "Muslim humanism," which gives concrete answers to concrete problems (Roy, 2003, p. 108). Also, to modernize Islam would not mean "be(ing) flexible with their precepts" but "be(ing) enrolled in a spiritual perspective, in the pursuit of oneself, of personal development" within a universal logic (Roy, 2003, p. 112).

Beyond these semantic debates (important but secondary in this discussion), it is necessary to remember that, although many insist, we are not facing a clash of civilizations, much less a religious war: Al Qaeda attacked Wall Street, not the Vatican. Following Oliver Roy, we could ask “if the West is not Christianity, then why does Islam have to be the East?” (Roy, 2003, p. 21). In this way, what opposes the radical Muslim is not the Christian but the European and American capitalists.

An Egyptian leader in the revolts, before the debate to modify the Constitution, which recognizes Sharia (Islamic law) as the source of law, said, “the Muslim Brotherhood is more liberal than the French extreme right, and Bush was less democratic than the Muslim Brotherhood. If one accepts democracy, one has to accept that they organize themselves and participate.”⁵

Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Arabs have given power to the military, the nationalists, and the neoliberals, and all of them have failed in their promise for justice. Now they may be asking: What happens if we give a chance to the Muslims? We have already seen an example of this in the Palestinian elections in January 2006. In this situation, the majority of Palestinians were not voting in favor of a confessional state but rather voting against the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The Palestinians also voted for this Muslim group because of its social programs and its promise of a welfare state—which is also one of the demands expressed in the revolts (besides the fact that a Muslim voter can identify with a political leader of his own religion).

Third reading: The Facebook revolution

It is true that Libya blocked access to the Web due to material criticizing the government. It is also true that Bahrain closed and stopped some cyber-opponents, Syria had censored Facebook and YouTube, and in Libya activists who had uploaded information onto Facebook about the demonstrations were detained (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2011, 18 February).

The Tunisian Internet Agency tracked and censored social networks; bloggers and activists who had posted information about the demonstrations were also captured (Martínez, 2011, p. 33). Mubarak shut down telephone services and internet for several days. The killing of the blogger Khaled Said, in June 2010, prompted the creation of a website that eventually gathered more than half a million people in Egypt. Even Saif El-Islam spoke on the issue: “There are some opponents who wanted to imitate what happened in Egypt and to take advantage of what has been known as the “Facebook Revolution.”⁶

It is interesting to note that the April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt defines itself according to its use of technology: “We consider ourselves and we are considered ... as an original young movement based on the use of new technology and new media that we use to mobilize, communicate and organize ourselves.” (“Declaration,” 2011)

However, it is a mistake to confuse the means with the ends. It is not accurate to talk about a Facebook Revolution, as if the world were a huge *matrix* and as if a simple text message were enough to bring down a dictator. The internet is not the cause. Demonstrations, vigils, occupations, and even deaths were needed before governments fell.

Previous revolts were possible without Facebook. In fact, internet coverage in the Arab world is only 21% (Álvarez & Gutiérrez, 2011, p. 16), and the use of Facebook for political purposes was, until recently, marginal (Fauad, 2010, July–December, pp. 93–110). In Yemen’s case, tribal poetry played an important role among communities that did not have access to internet (Hamad, 2011, p. 90). In the case of Egypt, Mubarak’s followers, as well as his opponents, used Facebook. One example of the failure of Facebook was the call for the Days of Wrath in Syria on 4–5 February (2011), which very few attended. It was different from the protests that were called for in Daara after the authorities brutally crushed a nonviolent demonstration in March.

It is forgotten, as a Jordanian youth said,⁷ that many older people who do not use Twitter or Facebook joined in the demonstrations. The network of mosques played a role (in some cases, a more effective role than the virtual networks), and in Egypt, a few activists traveled from neighborhood to neighborhood to explain the reasons for the protests.⁸ Moreover, the deaths in Syria and Libya are not virtual deaths. Tahrir Square in Cairo was not full of bloggers but full of ordinary people. And, maybe most important, to succeed on the Web does not mean to succeed in the streets.

We may conclude this part with some words by Linda Herrera: “Political and social movements belong to people and not to communication tools and technologies. Facebook, like cell phones, the Internet, and Twitter, do not have agency, a moral universe.... They are what people make of them” (Herrera, 2011, 12 February).

Fourth reading: The conspiracy theory

The idea is simple: the CIA, Al-Qaeda, Iran, or Zionism (or all of them), through tricks and bribes (with drugs and alcohol, according to Gaddafi) (*Al Jazeera*, 2011, February 21), lured the people into revolting against the regime, although the vast majority supported it. Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi,

in February 2011, compared the protests to Turkish or Italian occupation forces (*Al Jazeera*, 2011, 21 February). Some Imams, at the beginning of the protests in Libya, warned against the manifestations instigated by “Zionism and imperialism” (*Jihad Watch*, 2011, 18 February). Gaddafi divided the opponents into three groups: (1) groups backed by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, (2) groups associated with Al-Qaeda, and (3) “in the third group are kids and some adults that, as we know, had taken drugs and narcotics, and had used them.”⁹

This so-called Syrian exception emerged in Bashar’s speech. He also referred to hidden forces at work stirring up discontent. He stated that in other countries a conspiracy had succeeded, but that it would not work in Syria: “I don’t believe that Syria has experienced any stage that has not been the subject of several plots ... the plots are like microbes, they reproduce at any time and place ... is not necessary to analyze deeply the political and media positions that we have seen in order to confirm the existence of plots.”¹⁰

In Bahrain, the doctors who attended the victims of the repression were charged with treason, for “using” hospitals to develop “acts of sabotage” (Physicians for Human Rights, 2011, April). For the Tunisian government, the origin of the protests came from radical leftists, Muslims, and a “foreign plot, organized by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb” (Martinez, 2011, p. 37).

Saleh, the Yemeni president, accused Israel and the United States of leading the protests: “[F]rom Tunisia to the Sultanate of Oman, the revolts are led from Tel Aviv and under Washington supervision. All of you have already seen how the president of the United States followed the events and interfered!” (*Al-Fanar*, 2011, 2 March).

This theory is based on two concepts: one, that the Arab regimes had not done anything against their own people that could justify the protests; and two, that the enemies of the regimes were able in a few days and with few internal allies to stir up the masses through deceit and manipulation. Or, even better, the information about the revolts was just lies, mainly disseminated by Al-Jazeera.

This interpretation produces a number of difficult questions: Can we accept that the so-called experts who defend the conspiracy theory are somehow able to see what any Arab does not see? Are Arabs really fools? Are a few infiltrators enough to bring down a government and to produce a civil war? Were there no objective conditions for the protests? Where were the masses that supposedly supported Ben-Ali, Gaddafi, Mubarak and Saleh so completely and unconditionally?

The erratic approaches by the great powers (United States, France, Russia, and China) showed that they were not able to accommodate the

new scenario easily, so it appears that these protests were not, in fact, “Made in the USA.” The United States recognized in the first weeks the unsustainability of the situation and the need for changes, but they called for a peaceful transition (*Al Jazeera*, 2011, 2 February). Even in the Libyan case the United States maintained their support of Gaddafi, according to abandoned U.S. documents in the Libyan Central Intelligence Agency office in Tripoli (*Al Jazeera*, 2011, 3 August).

Both Europe and the United States essentially sought to protect their interests in the zone, although in an erratic manner: Obama was accused by the Republican Party of acting too late and doing very little in Libya; Italy’s Berlusconi waited a long time before joining the campaign against Gaddafi. However, while the international powers have certainly involved themselves in the revolutions, it would be an enormous leap to conclude that they orchestrated them.

In the case of Bahrain, the revolts cannot be seen as part of a U.S. plot because this little country is the headquarters of the Fifth Fleet of the United States Navy, which controls part of the Persian Gulf. The Bahraini population is Shiite and more pro-Iranian than pro-United States. Moreover, a Shiite revolt in Bahrain could spread to the Shiite minorities in Saudi Arabia, a key ally of the United States and the last country that the Obama administration would like to see in a crisis.

In the case of Al Qaeda, its half-hearted calls to create an Egyptstan did not get any support. Moreover, Al Qaeda is one of the greatest losers in the Arab revolts: except for a small number of its militants in Yemen, in the province of Abya, the revolts deprived them of an important role in the Arab world.¹¹ After Bin Laden’s death (May 2011), there were no protests in the Middle East (although there were protests in Central Asia); his death was simply an event that did not matter very much to most people, and certainly did not cause any joy or sorrow.¹²

Israel (and, therefore, the Jewish lobby and its partner, the United States) is one of the other great losers. Their famous prediction that Arabs are incompatible with democracy — what some call the “Arab exception” — is denied by recent history. Progressive sectors of Israeli society have rejected arguments that “democracy in the Arab world is a threat for Israel”, that “they are a security problem.”¹³ From the beginning, the Arab revolts have showed strong support for the recognition of a Palestinian state, and the revolts have already had several major impacts on Palestinian leaders and people,¹⁴ such as the opening of the Gaza border, the renegotiation of gas being sold to Egypt, the attack on the Israeli embassy in Cairo, and the tensions with Turkey (which is now a new regional leader as a result of the revolts). These are real facts that concern Tel Aviv.

The future impact of the revolts on Israel could include “the radicalization of the individual or collective Arab options against Israel,” “the fall of the Israeli legend that it is the sole democracy of the Middle East,” as well as the question of whether Israel “is conditioned by the existence of the Arab dictatorships as well as by the absence of the [Arab] people’s right to freely exercise their will, as long as these dictatorships play the role of a protective wall between Israel and the Arab people” (Harub, 2011, 14 March).

A refusal to accept the authenticity of the Arab revolts is a problem, both for the left-oriented world as well as for all international powers. Even inside the Arab world, some voices in favor of or against the revolts are not based on analysis of the political situation or the validity of the protesters’ demands but on the impact that such revolts could have on their own agendas.

For instance, the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, called Mubarak to show the Palestinian support of Mubarak’s government (*The Jerusalem Post*, 2011, 29 January). Al Qaradawi, the famous Egyptian Sunni religious leader, claims that all the Sunni-led revolts are justified, but he rejects the revolt in Bahrain (where the Shiites are the majority), accusing it of being sectarian (*Al Arabiya News*, 2011, 19 March). For some “France had been preparing the overthrow of Gaddafi since November” (2010) and, therefore, the revolts were only in obedience to orders from Paris (Bechis, 2011, 31 March).

This way of explaining the revolts from an international relations perspective fails to take into account the conditions of the women in Libya, the exploitation of immigrant workers—many of them illegal—by Gaddafi’s regime, and the lack of guarantees to create the organizations and institutions of a so-called civil society.

Some leftists accuse the Libyan revolt of being an “Islamic conspiracy,”¹⁵ supported by Europe, to create an “orthodox caliphate” with the presence of Al Qaeda: “[T]he sober spectator hardly considers that what has happened is a victory of democratic forces; and in Egypt and Tunisia, the results of the revolution are not inclined to democracy, but rather tend towards radical Islam” (Anbilivin, 2011, 28 March).

The problem is the inability of both the right and the left sector of society to detach from the Cold War model, to stop using the well-known logic that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” In the words of Georges Corm, “[F]or two hundred years, the rhythm of the ebb and flow of the values of individual democracy are marked by the nature of European interventions, followed by those of the Israelis and the Americans; the interventions’ excesses feed rejection movements and an identity withdrawal

toward traditional values to the detriment of liberal and modernizing movements” (Corm, 2009, p. 91).

Fifth reading: Another war for oil

The Middle East is, without question, the energy supply of the great industrial powers, and that is why its control is of vital interest to these economies. Therefore, it is understandable that the superpowers support the Arab regimes, regardless of their disregard for human rights and the absence of democracy. The two bases of the United States in the Arab world are Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Egypt receives the second-highest level of U.S. military support (after Israel) and is a partner in America’s so-called war on terror. Egypt has received an annual average of \$2 billion in civil and military cooperation since 1979 (Sharp, 2011, 28 January).

Saudi Arabia produces 10.5 million barrels of oil per day, the greatest producer in the world. Iran produces 4.2 million, the United Arab Emirates 2.8 million, Kuwait 2.4 million—about the same as Iraq—Algeria 2.08 million, and Libya 1.8 million barrels. Moreover, 8 out of 20 of the biggest oil reserves in the world are in this region (The United States of America. Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2012, January). The strategic importance of the region is undeniable, especially when those at the top of the list of oil importing countries are the United States (10.27 million barrels per day), the member countries of the European Union (8.6 million barrels per day), and China (4.7 million barrels per day).

In Libya, the revolt and the international powers’ interest in natural resources came together, in the form of a request for armed action. The superpowers did not call for armed action in Egypt or in Tunisia because they have no oil. They did not call for it in Yemen because it is an ally in the war on terror, and it does not produce much oil. Furthermore, they will not call for it in Bahrain because it is the headquarters of the Fifth Fleet of the United States Navy. They are looking to intervene in Syria, not because of its modest oil production,¹⁶ but because of its strategic location.

However, we cannot simply interpret the armed intervention of the United Nations (through NATO) as a “war for oil.” Before the revolt, Europe was already the owner of 79 percent of Libyan oil, China of 10 percent and the United States of 5 percent. The war would only modify those percentages or perhaps temporarily alter the availability of supply.

Thus, in regards to military action, at least two great agendas come together: one is the agenda of the rebels and the second is the international powers’ goal to maintain the Libyan oil agreements. In exchange for maintaining the oil contracts, the rebels received air support; the interna-

tional powers received a guarantee to honor their commercial agreements. NATO is not an independent agent, and so it depends on the agenda of the United States and the European Union, but we must recognize that in the case of Libya, NATO's intervention was in accordance with the legal formalities to act (if this were a valid criterion).

The scenario was very promising for military action from NATO: they had fulfilled legal regulations (with the silence of China and Russia, although without their explicit approval), they had the support of the Arab League, there was a growing rebel army, a government delegitimized outside and inside the country, a Libyan armed forces with a limited military capacity and with internal divisions, an Arab revolt in progress that required a demonstration of power by the permanent members of the Security Council, and, if this long list of factors were not enough, a disgraced leader who justified the judgments against himself through his conduct: using mercenaries, declaring War to the Death to the enemies, hunting "rats" (as he called the protesters) from house to house, and so on.¹⁷

Moreover, NATO air operations (with the zero casualties strategy, as was used in Kosovo) ensured that there would be no victims among their own personnel that could damage the reputations of its member countries. And, most important, the political cost of a prolonged war would be low because NATO could always blame the rebels for ineffectiveness if the fighting dragged on. In addition to all of this, the oil contracts that had been signed by Gaddafi would be maintained by the rebels in exchange for military support—thus creating a win-win situation for NATO countries.

In the short term, the rebels won; they obtained the necessary military aid to take out Gaddafi. In any case, the oil was already sold, and even if the rebels had not succeeded, it would have been delivered to Europe and the United States. In the long term, NATO also won: it gained legitimacy among some Arabs; it protected American and European oil; and it expelled Gaddafi, a former ally who had become undesirable. Furthermore, the political and military price to pay for all these results was relatively low.

Conclusions

For those whose hope it was to build a confessional state where Sharia law would be the basis of government, the revolts have failed because, although the majorities are Muslim, they do not act politically as a religious bloc. For those who are wrongly convinced, like President Obama, that the solution to the conflict is the free market, success would only be achieved when the Arab borders are open to international markets and

when all public institutions and enterprises have been privatized. However, the Arab revolts seem to be heading in the opposite direction.

Whether with neoliberal, Muslim, or democratic agendas, the ideas of citizenship, political participation, and human rights in this region are growing. The current revolts in other Arab countries should not only look at how to change a government but also how to rebuild a society after a crisis. The revolts may, perhaps, even create a space for the dreamers who hope for more radical changes—the ones who characterize revolt as a space of struggle against political control and against the exploitation of men by men, saying that “among social reform and revolution exists ... an indissoluble link. The fight for reforms is the way; and social revolution, the end” (Luxembourg, 1900). Every revolution, as Marx said, is unique, and under this logic the development of the Arab revolts, whose history is beginning to be written, should be understood.

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NOTES

1. In 2003, there was the so-called Pink Revolution in Georgia; in 2004 the Orange Revolution in Ukraine; and in 2005 the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan.
2. See, for instance, the case of Eric Hobsbawm (2011).
3. For a criticism of this reading, see Moghul (2011).
4. Personal interview by the author with Wael Navara (former leader of Tomorrow's Party—Hizd el-Ghad—president of the Arab Network of Liberal Parties—NAL—and current leader of the Egyptian Initiative coalition). Cairo, May 2011. In De Currea-Lugo (2011, pp. 65–66).
5. Personal interview by the author with Gamal Eid (executive director of the Arabic Network of Human Rights Information, ANHRI, based in Cairo); Cairo, April 2011, in De Currea-Lugo (2011, pp. 63–64).
6. Speech of Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi, Libya (21 February 2011).
7. Personal interview by the author with Jordanian youth activists, Aman, May 2011.
8. Personal interview by the author with Nada Tarek El-Kouny, journalist with *Ahram Online*, January 2012.
9. Speech of Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi, (21 February 2011), Tripoli.
10. Speech of Bashar Al-Asad (20 June 2011), Damascus.

11. Also see Cembrero (3 March 2011) and Harub (4 April 2011).
12. Observation during my personal visit to Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, during the days when Osama Bin Laden was killed, Jordan and Lebanon, May 2011.
13. Personal interview by the author with Sergio Yahni (Israeli political scientist and anti-Zionist, and member of the Information Center Palestine/Israel Alternative), June 2011; in De Currea-Lugo (2011, pp. 141–142).
14. Personal interview by the author with Raid Mansour (the Palestinian ambassador to the UN), partially published in De Currea-Lugo (12 October 2011).
15. The debate about the role of political Islam as well as the Islamic conspiracy has already been discussed in a previous section.
16. 401.00 barrels per day.
17. All these factors did not exist in the Iraq war in 2003, for which there was not a consensus in the Security Council of the United Nations, millions of people went to the streets to protest against the war, the apparent existence of weapons of mass destruction was denied, etc.

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Cuestionando las percepciones “mono-casuales” de las revueltas árabes

Resumen: Siguiendo a los medios de comunicación, los académicos y los debates públicos, parece que las revueltas árabes han sido reducidas, a veces, a narrativas mono-causales. Varios analistas han producido interpretaciones limitadas al simplemente crear un paralelismo entre las revueltas actuales y levantamientos anteriores o, peor aún, en la búsqueda de explicaciones que se adapten a su propia agenda política. Otro problema es la persistencia de una mirada de blancos-y-negros, en la que las diferentes facciones sólo reconocen los actores políticos que se ajustan a su visión del mundo. Interpretar el significado de las revueltas árabes es una tarea difícil y es incluso más difícil caracterizar su naturaleza. Antes

de que podamos comprender estos fenómenos, primero tenemos que deconstruir varias interpretaciones que sólo nos impiden reconocer la originalidad de las revueltas. Este trabajo pretende organizar esas tendencias, ilustrándolas con ejemplos, y de esta manera contribuir a la discusión de las causas últimas. No es un análisis de las revueltas, sino un debate sobre los discursos más comunes usados para explicarlas.

Palabras clave: oriente medio, paz, reformas, revolución, revueltas árabes

Remise en cause de la perception « mono-casuale » des révoltes Arabes

Résumé : En suivant les mass media, les académiques et les débats publics, il semble que les révoltes arabes ont été réduites parfois à des récits mono-causales. Plusieurs analystes ont produit des interprétations qui se limitent à créer un parallélisme entre les révoltes actuelles et les révolutions antérieures, ou pire encore, à rechercher des explications qui correspondent à leur propre agenda politique. Un autre problème est la persistance du point de vue blanc ou noir, selon lequel les différentes factions seulement reconnaissent les acteurs politiques qui correspondent à leur vision du monde. Interpréter les révoltes arabes est un travail difficile et il est encore plus difficile de caractériser leur nature. Avant que nous puissions comprendre ces phénomènes, nous devons d'abord déconstruire les interprétations diverses qui nous empêchent de reconnaître l'originalité des révoltes. Ce travail a l'intention d'organiser ces tendances, en les illustrant avec des exemples, et contribuer ainsi à la discussion des causes profondes. Ce n'est pas une analyse des révoltes, mais une discussion liée aux discours les plus couramment utilisés pour les expliquer.

Mots-clés: Moyen-Orient, paix, réforme, révoltes arabes, révolution

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