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Tunisia: The paradigm of a “happy revolution”

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I. Introduction

On 17 December 2010, a Tunisian youngster from Sidi Bouzid, in South West Tunisia, set himself on fire, triggering a political earthquake in Tunisia that led to the ousting of President Ben Ali, his family and his close relatives. Other immolations or attempts at immolation took place in other Arab countries from Yemen in the Arab Peninsula in the East, to Mauritania in the West. We already knew of the “kamikaze” phenomenon which involves someone commits suicide while killing others. But protest immolation is a new phenomenon in the Arab countries. Destitute of all “religious” or “sacrificial” significance, the gesture is rather a form of expression, an act to say “enough” or to say “no”. It cannot be linked at any time to any concept of “d jihad” for any reason, nor, *a fortiori*, to a simple suicide. These young Arabs immolate themselves to communicate their despair. Perhaps, they hope that by rebound effect, they will succeed in awakening their own respective people to get them going.¹

In all Arab countries, henceforth, Tunisia is in their “heads.” The demonstrations, often led by youngsters, are on the increase. The regimes tempt to choke them in their roots. Some demonstrations have been contained up to now, even subdued thanks to an aggressive police. But the regimes are hard-pressed and they fear that their people are impatient and are at the end of their nerves. For the Arab regimes, the Tunisian dream is a

¹ For statistical information used in this chapter, please see: Khader, Bichara, 2011: *Le monde arabe expliqué à l'Europe* (Paris, Louvain-la-Neuve : l'Harmattan and CERMAC) ; Khader, Bichara, 2009: *L'Europe pour la Méditerranée* (Paris, Louvain-La-Neuve : l'Harmattan and CERMAC).

nightmare. Thus, they were eager to give in to some reform: providing subsidies for commodities of prime necessity (Algeria); lowering the price of fuel and calling a state of emergency (Syria); increase in income and dissolution of the Al-Rifa'i government (Jordan); distribution of “cash” (4 billion dollars in Kuwait); announcement of constitutional reforms by King Mohammad VI in Morocco; promises of Al-Maliki of Iraq not to solicit a third mandate etc.

All these measures and promises aim to deactivate the revolt. The problem, however, is structural since it is partly bound to the “high cost of living” and the erosion of the purchasing power due to inflation. It is particularly linked to a “general fatigue of the Arab people” - over 45% of whom are under 20 years of age- of their aging and corrupt regimes that, not only made the dream to “save Palestine” crumble in front of the claws of occupation, but were revealed to be especially politically inept and economically incapable of feeding their populations and offering them better prospects.

It is not astonishing therefore that Tunisia is henceforth “in the mind of all Arabs”: the Tunisian flag is waved by the demonstrators of which some chant “we are all Tunisians” or “Tunisia is the solution” (*Tunis hiya al-Hal*). As for the intellectuals and human rights defenders, they no longer hesitate to speak of the “Tunisian paradigm”, forging a new term in Arabic *tawnassat al arab* (the “tunisianisation” of the Arabs).

Indeed, Arab countries suffer similar hardships: scarcity (of freedom and work) and fear (of control, of repression, of torture, of exile). A revolution similar to the one of Tunisia, unthinkable some months back, already put an end to the regime of Mubarak in Egypt. And the social and political uneasiness is audible in Bahrain, in Jordan, in Algeria and Morocco. In Syria, the demonstrations have been greatly repressed, and the weakened regime appears to be resistant. In Libya, the regime of Gaddafi lives its last moments, particularly due to a military intervention, piloted by NATO, acting under a mandate of the United Nations.

As for Yemen, the protest takes a complicated tour, considering the confessional tribal and regional divisions (the Houittites of the North), but the regime is at the end of its strength and completely delegitimised.

Thus, no Arab country is therefore sheltered. The regimes realise this and already tremble on their pedestals. There is no doubt that other revolutions will end up sweeping other regimes. Nonetheless, if there is not an “Arab revolution”, there are many “Arab revolts” that are not necessarily identical in their starting point, their development and their outcome. This means that every revolt has a “particular colourisation that results from the particular history of every country, the nature of its society, the state of its economy and its geopolitics”. Indeed, if the Arab countries share the same problems, in reality, the things are more complex and varied. It would be erroneous to speak of a “domino” effect, because it conveys something as being automatic, but rather of a training effect, or better still of a “demonstration” effect.

Thus, the thesis that I defend in this text is that with the combination of several elements, analysed below, Tunisia appears to be the paradigm of the “happy revolution” (without prejudging the continuation of events).

II. Tunisia: paradigm of the “happy” revolution

A bundle of factors and actors contributed to the ruin of the Tunisian political landscape and to the fall of the oppressive regime of Ben Ali. Indeed, when it is a question of comparison, one must not forget that we are confronted with a country from the Maghreb that has its particularities in geographical, historic, demographic, economic, social, political and geopolitical terms.

Geography

Tunisia is the smallest of the Maghreb countries, with an area of barely 163.600 km² and an estimated population of 10.6 million. Tunisia is 5 times larger than Belgium, for instance, and has the same population, but it is stuck between an enormous Algeria measuring 2.381.741 km² (15 times the size of Tunisia) having 36 million inhabitants and Libya, which is also enormous measuring 1.759.540 km² (over 10 times the size of Tunisia) but a population representing more the half (6.6 million) than that of Tunisia. This geographical factor was not negligible in the Tunisian events, notably in terms of the ease of communication and ease to gather. Triggered in the cities of the South West, the protest movement quickly won in intensity through “a catch effect” and quickly spread to all regions. The new technologies (Facebook and Twitter) have, in this regard, played the role of transmission link of the information in real time.

Urbanisation

Tunisia is urbanized: nearly 68% of its population lives in cities. It shares this characteristic with other Arab countries that experienced a massive exodus during the last decades, and shares this feature, although in a smaller measure, with the Maghreb countries where the rate of urbanisation is of 59% in Morocco, 66% in Algeria, and only 41% in Mauritania. On the other hand, Libya is more urbanised with a rate superior to 77%. This rate of urbanisation in Tunisia would not have been an important factor were it not coupled with an unequal rate of literacy of adults of over 78% among women and more than 85% among men, together with a rate of schooling that brings Tunisia closer to European States. We are, therefore, not only presented with an extensively urbanised society, but an extremely educated one, such as Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. From this aspect, Morocco is behind Tunisia, with a rate of illiteracy of more than 45%.

Women

Tunisia, however, is also a society with extensive secularisation, where the female population is by far the most advanced in, if not all Arab countries, at least all the Maghreb. Certainly the Moroccan Moudawana brings Morocco closer to Tunisia, but it is clear that Tunisia has benefitted hugely from the achievements of the Bourguiba period that had abolished polygamy, encouraged the instruction of women, and improved the legal statute of the Tunisian woman. These achievements had several consequences: the Tunisian woman is generally more educated than her Arab sisters, even when compared to women in the Maghreb. It has been seen that the Tunisian woman is more capable of entering the employment market quickly, has a low fertility rate (1.8 children per woman) and has been exposed to other models of domestic organisation through the tourist fluxes and the migratory flux. This gives us precious information on the audacity of Tunisian women, on their employment in certain professions such as lawyers, journalists, teachers, etc. and their active involvement in the resistance against Ben Ali at the time of the popular revolution.

It does not distinguish Tunisia greatly from other countries from the Maghreb notably Morocco or Algeria, but clearly the Tunisian woman has acquired a well-deserved place in Tunisian society, most particularly in the movement for change.

A homogeneous society

The homogeneity of the Tunisian population is the characteristic that most certainly distinguishes Tunisia from almost all other Arab countries. It is indeed a compact society that is not crossed by lines of linguistic fractures (French-speaking-arabophones-berbérophones), ethnic (Arab, Berber, Kabyles, Kurdish or blacks) religious (Christian, Muslim, Shiite-Sunni), or even tribal fractures (as in Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia or even Iraq). Due to this fact, Tunisia lends itself less to manipulation and

instrumentalisation, as well as other forms of interference. Algeria and Morocco, however, suffer as a result of these fracture lines. Other Arab countries endure similar suffering. In the past, the colonial system had played on these differences to create a division. Today, it is not rare that the Arab regimes, themselves, stir the divisions to play the referees, as has been evident in Iraq and elsewhere. This may also be similarly seen in Yemen, as well as Sudan that is to be divided in two. The homogeneity of the Tunisian society has been an important factor to show that it has remained, up to now, welded and bound.

The absence of conflict

The absence of conflict with neighbouring countries was a non-negligible element, because the authoritative regimes have often resorted to the instrumentalisation of the enemy as derivative or as justification. In the past, Tunisia had a conflict with Libya on the delimitation of the Continental Shelf of Gabès, which was however resolved amicably and the two countries have since then enjoyed peaceful relations. Thus, the absence of an identifiable enemy did not permit Ben Ali to play on the nationalistic fibre and to present himself as the “guarantor” of the territorial integrity; as the saviour of the nation or as the “champion of the rights of the peoples to decide for themselves”.

In the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not only been used to justify excessive budgets dedicated to defence to the detriment of education, health, or employment, but also and particularly, to reduce criticism and the opposition or to legitimise the state of emergency.

Difficult nevertheless to be a dictator without a “mission”

The anti-terrorist struggle has however been well used by the regime of Ben Ali to justify the eradication of the Islamist movement En-Nahda, to rage against the lay opposition, and

finally to impose the state of emergency. Without an identifiable enemy, the regime itself nevertheless forged an “interior enemy”: militant Islamism. This is, however, the case in other regimes of the Maghreb and the Mashrek.

An army fraternizing with the population

Not having to deliver a “frontal war” with an identified enemy, the Tunisian army remained enclosed in its barracks. Furthermore, it is essentially an army of conscripts, very often descending from the lower end of society. It is rather the police and the services of information that were focused on the regime and to whom were assigned the most ungrateful tasks of surveillance, censorship, control and repression. It is all the same symptomatic that the army is constituted of hardly 40,000 soldiers, whereas the police enrolled over 130,000 people without accounting for all secret services and “informers”, at the expense of the regime. This explains the particular goodwill demonstrated by the police and the loyalty of the regimes during the most recent events, killing more than 100 Tunisians. In response, acting out of desperation, Ben Ali made a call to the army, but the chief of the Army refused, precipitating the dictator's flight.

It is necessary to keep in mind the junction between youth and an army at the service of the country not subdued to a regime, which undoubtedly permitted the routing of the Tunisian regime. One would ask whether this is possible in another Arab country. It all depends on the place the army occupies in each of these countries. In Jordan, it is the pedestal of the monarchy. In Algeria, it is the main support of the regime, often merging itself with it and, in any case, it is the main beneficiary of pension distributions. In Morocco, it remains faithful to the monarchical system and presents itself as the “rampart” of territorial integrity. In Saudi Arabia, it is the very essence of the system and the main recipient of purchase contracts of weapons, for tens of billions of dollars.

In the light of these elements, one is right to wonder about the possible role of Arab armies in the hypothesis of a popular revolution. My feeling is that the Tunisian case, and I dare say the Egyptian case, remain exceptional. I do not know if in other national contexts, the army will know how to fraternise with a people in revolt. I could even bet that, in some countries, popular revolutions having as an objective the fall of a regime would end in a bloodbath. One may recall the massacres committed by the Syrian army in Homs and Hama in the eighties, or the bloody events in Algeria in the nineties. It is true that in both cases, it was about cutting the wings of Islamic movements that did not hide their intention to gain power using violence.

Great maturity of the Tunisian people

Besides the civic behaviour of the Tunisian army that fraternised with the popular revolution, there are grounds to underline the great maturity which the Tunisian people gave proof of. No party attempted to frame the movement, or even to recover it to partisan ends. In an abrupt manner, one could even say that the people were more daring than the parties, and even took the parties by surprise. They chanted slogans which were “modern”, and even “lay”, concerning dignity, freedom and work. The Islamists adopted a low profile and at no moment did one hear a slogan of a religious nature, along the lines of “God is great” or “the Koran is the solution.” This attests the “modernity” of the Tunisian revolution and its nearly exceptional character. All those that saw as an alternative to the authoritative regimes only the bearded Islamists, found in the Tunisian revolution a biting denial of their thesis.

Low profile of the Islamist movement

There were certainly several demonstrators identifying themselves in the En-Nahda movement; but this movement is no longer as it was in the seventies, where it was close to the Muslim

Brotherhood. First, the movement was decapitated and its leader exiled to London. Secondly, the movement holds a discourse imprinted in realism and moderation and calls for a democratic Tunisia and not for an Islamic Republic. And finally, the Tunisian youth has also changed, having become more educated, better trained and better informed, which is overall more in phase with the modern world with regards to the individualisation of religiosity. Naturally, one cannot say that the Tunisian Islamist movements will not be part of tomorrow's Tunisia, but, obviously, they will not be the dominant actors of the political stage. And if they succeeded in occupying the front of the stage, it is more the Turkish model that would be their source of inspiration, rather than the "wahabite model" or "the Iranian Shiite model".

A crouching capitalism

The Tunisian revolution also benefitted from a particular context marked by the exposure of the myth of the "famous Tunisian economic miracle". It is not that this was not real, at least between 1970 and 2000, with a good growth rate, important foreign investment, and a real modernisation of the country so much as regards infrastructure, and on an educational or health level. No one can indeed deny that, during these decades, Tunisia developed a textile subcontract industry, encouraged the installation of offshore industry, and promoted tourist activity. Certainly, Tunisia took advantage of a favourable conjuncture and benefitted from transfers of its immigrants and the Arab and non-arab investments. But it especially benefitted from European aid: 100 million of euros per year on average since the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in 1995, the signature of the association agreement in 1995, followed by the Neighbourhood Policy between 2004-2005.

This led all to believe that Tunisia was on the way to an economic takeoff. On the contrary, however, Tunisia's model of growth endured a number of serious handicaps, including excessive specialization of sectors with a weak value-added and a

weak technological content and low-skilled workers, especially females, in the textile and the confectionary sectors. All in all, it was too dependent on only one market- the EU- where around 80% of Tunisia's exchanges were made. Tunisia also experienced severe unsuitability between an increase of the level of education and the demand for qualified workers.

To these handicaps was added an unequalled level of corruption especially from the year 2000, with the development of a "capitalism of cronyism" (*ra'smaliyat al habayib wal nasayib*) organised around Ben Ali's family and a clique of "profiteers" who revolved in the orbit of the regime. It is this system of organised and generalised corruption that began to jam the whole machine losing a substantial amount of investors, while consequently warding off its partners, particularly the Europeans. There was a 4 to 5% growth rate per year on average, but without development. One encouraged coastal tourism but impoverished the hinterland. Real estate prices experienced a sharp rise, enriching some and returning access to property, which had proved to be very difficult for the majority. The increasing inflation impacted on household budgets and a number of jobs of "survival" were created, but only a few opportunities were made available to the qualified young.

Certainly, some elites were so satisfied with this situation that they harvested some of its dividends. However, it is clear that the system was corrupt and consequently discouraged initiative and entrepreneurship in the private sector to such an extent, that only a few large enterprises could succeed in Tunisia. It is therefore the small domestic structures that predominate in Tunisia, as they are the only ones to be able to escape the rapacious eye of the heads of power. One estimates that only a minute number of Tunisian enterprises (0.4%) have more than 100 paid employees, as opposed to around 75% of Moroccan enterprises. This poses a problem in terms of access to bank financing and of modernisation of production, which also reduces the availability of qualified employment for young graduates, while discouraging partnership with large foreign enterprises. It is nonetheless striking to note that

out of the 40 large French enterprises (of the CAC 40), there are only 3 or 4 present in Tunisia, whereas 38 are stationed in Morocco.

However, it is this Tunisian model that the West and the big banking institutions, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, lauded. Even in 2010, when the Tunisian economy showed obvious signs of slowing down, the World Bank praised “the macro-economic stability” of the country. Ben Ali played on this image “of a good pupil” to perpetuate his repressive practices. However, all development theoreticians know that although an authoritative modernisation can operate for a while, but rarely for a long time. The separation between economic growth and political reform always ends up producing toxic effects: development of a clientelist and predatory capitalism, lack of transparency, lack of legal security, and finally erosion of the efficiency of the system and its attractiveness to outside investors.

A capitalism that turns the back to the young

The specialists of the demographic transition in the Arab world created the concept of a “demographic gift”. They refer to the demographic transition under completion in most countries of Maghreb and in some countries of the Mashrek, with the demographic subsidence provoked by the decrease of fertility indications. The population is increasing less quickly than in previous decades; the pyramid of ages, in particular, gives them a considerable advantage since the bottom 20% represent between 45 and 50% of the population. Facing a “wrinkled and old” Europe, as Alfred Sauvy so describes it, a young Arab world is a window of opportunity, indeed a demographic gift, according to demographers. Tunisia, that has practically undergone its demographic transition, is referred to as an example. The average age of the Tunisian population is not over 28 (against 38 in the EU) and its population is, moreover, highly educated.

Everything appears reassuring, except for the fact that the unemployment of young graduates in Tunisia and in all Arab countries beats world records to such an extent, that one wonders if it would not make more sense to speak of a “demographic burden” instead of a “demographic gift.” Indeed, when a country educates its population, it simultaneously deludes its expectations. However, as the economic system cannot meet these expectations, the frustration becomes overwhelming. It is the reading that I make of the immolation of Bouaziz: he did not give himself to death to defend “the Islam”, or “the consecrated reasons of the Arabs”; he sacrificed himself through frustration. It is an individual gesture; a personal choice. If he became an “emblem” or an “icon” in Tunisia, in the Maghreb and in the whole of the Arab countries, that is because the same feeling of frustration is shared among all young Arabs, from the Atlantic ocean to the Gulf. By his immolation, Bouaziz was, in a way, the interpreter and the translator of all the frustration of young Arabs.

Unemployment must not be confused with poverty. Poverty is widespread in the Arab world, but it did not trigger a revolutionary movement. When coupled with injustice, disparities, waste and also with the predation of the regimes, poverty, however, becomes explosive.

So if the question of youth unemployment was an important factor in the outbreak of the Tunisian revolution, it is because the Tunisians realised that unemployment was not a sort of “fatality”, but that it is the product of an unjust, repressive political system, and of an economic dysfunction. It is, therefore, this connection between dictatorship and social injustice that constituted the catalyst.

The problem of the unemployment of the young is certainly constant and rather general. It took a troubling turn, however, during the last 20 years. To explain myself, I shall broaden the analysis in all countries of the Maghreb and the Mashrek.

Let us take, as an example, the case of the countries of the Maghreb. In the first two decades that followed independence, the public sector almost absorbed all graduates in the fields of administration, teaching, the public sector, and the army. It is true that these countries had just acquired independence (1956 for Morocco and Tunisia, and 1962 for Algeria) and were decidedly committed to the “reconstruction”, but they also needed to equip the administration to constitute modern armies, and to get the public corporations going. There were therefore sufficient employment opportunities for the young school leavers. It is, however, important not to forget that the population of the 5 Maghreb countries barely reached 40 millions inhabitants (as opposed to 90 million today) and that the total number of graduates in all the five Maghreb countries was hardly 50,000 a year, as opposed to the figures of over 500,000 today.

Since the eighties, unemployment of the young and of young graduates in particular, began to take a troubling turn as a result of the democratisation of the higher education and the demographic growth, the saturation of the public sectors and the cutback of the public jobs, particularly since the imposition of the structural adjustment programs by the International Monetary Fund. Thus, employment within the public sector in Algeria has changed from 56% at the end of the 1980s, to 28% in 2010. In Tunisia, it decreased from 25% to 21% in 2010 and in Morocco from 13% to 9%. Libya is an exception since the public sector continues to use more than 70% of the active population.

Alas, the private sector did not take over. In Algeria, it remained disadvantaged because of a rent-based economy; in Tunisia by the domestic structure of enterprises and the seizure of the regime on the economy of the country; in Libya by the ascendancy of the State; and in Mauritania by the small size of the market. Overall, Morocco does better than all the other countries, but the sector still needs to be invigorated again to create layers of jobs of quality. In all Maghreb countries, and Arab countries in fact, the private sector did not diversify sufficiently and it did not

increase its range of products (new technologies) sufficiently to absorb young graduates and offer them decent wages.

It is therefore not surprising for one to witness the explosion of unemployment among young graduates. The numbers are eloquent: if the middle rate of general unemployment oscillates around 14% in Tunisia, 66% of the unemployed persons are young, 37% out of which are young graduates. In Algeria the situation is similar, and is not much better than in Morocco.

It is suggested that all Arab Maghreb countries should create over a million jobs annually to absorb the young entering the labour force, as they create only one quarter of it. According to a report of the World Bank, Tunisia should create nearly 140,000 jobs per year to satisfy the demographic growth, but only creates 40,000 in reality.

Tunisia therefore shares with its neighbours from the Maghreb, but also with all other Arab countries, a major problem: that of youth unemployment. A growth of an average of 7% per year would be necessary to improve it and reduce it by 10%. It is a huge challenge, which is in the range of only a few emirate petroleum engineers.

The closing emigration valve

In the past, emigration served as both a valve and an opportunity. Nowadays, however, the multiple sanitary cords of the countries of the European Union render emigration perilous, expensive and uncertain. It is only the luckiest and most daring who succeed in foiling all controls to enter clandestinely, while other youngsters are condemned to idleness. The Algerians refer to these idle youngsters as “Hittites” (from the word Hit that means wall in Arabic) as they spend their days leaning against a wall smoking a cigarette. Others fall in the casual economy. It is not surprising for one to contribute to an increasing “informalisation” of the Maghreb economies. However, if the

casual sector provides a loophole for the youngsters from the Maghreb, and a way out for non-satisfied social needs due to the decay of the public services and the anaemia of the private sector, there is also a high risk that it would undermine the economic and financial bases of the States.

A blocked regional integration

All this is to be considered in relation with the absence of regional integration in the Arab world in general, particularly in the Maghreb countries. It is interesting to recall that the Arab world, and the Maghreb in particular, constitutes the least integrated region of the world. Hardly 10% of the total Arab exchanges, but only 3.36% of the Maghreb total (2006), within the Maghreb region. However, studies have shown that the absence of regional integration made the Arab region lose between 3 to 4% of its gross domestic product. In the event of a full integration of the Maghreb, the combined increase of GDP between 2005 and 2015 has been estimated at 24% for Tunisia, 27% for Morocco and 34% for Algeria respectively.

Economies directed only towards the European market

In all the Maghreb countries, there is an added risk of having their economies heavily dependent on only one market: the EU. This extensive verticality of exchanges increases the exhibition of these economies to the risks of the European markets. Tunisia is, in this regard, an emblematic case with 80% of its exchanges with the EU. The percentages are less important for Morocco (60%) and Algeria (56%).

The EU remains the main customer and supplier for the Arab countries of the Mashrek (35 to 45% according to the countries), but a diversification of the markets is in progress.

Income and authoritarianism

All Arab countries are, to varying degrees, income countries. Income can be of a different nature, such as income from the export of raw materials or agricultural goods (gas, oil, phosphate, potash, ores of iron, cotton), returns from the tourist sector, transfers of the immigrants, international or Arab help, and rights of transit (the Channel of Suez). The income can be a godsend when it is managed by a democratic country: it is then distributed in the form of social services. But an income captured by authoritative regimes produces many perverse effects: it discourages productive activities (since one can buy everything); it serves to create a plethoric and inefficient public service; and moreover transforms the population into a “client”, “docile” population which is “reluctant to protest.” In other words, income allows the States to buy the consent, or at least the silence, of the population.

But Arab countries are not all in the same situation: some are big income countries and have important financial reserves, or even sovereign funds, and are producers of natural resources, notably the countries of the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Algeria. Poorer countries, on the other hand, receive a lower income through transfers, aids, rights of passage and tourist returns. It is interesting to note that all have developed insatiable societies of consumption of all kinds of products, but remained incapable to sustain themselves (more than one calorie out of two is imported) and incapable to produce a GSM, a car, a weaving machine or all the more a computer. This gap between consumption and production may explain the inability of these countries to hoist themselves to the rank of real emergent economies and, therefore, to offer to their young something other than that of the unappeased needs.

But income did not only perpetuate some authoritative regimes and discourage the spirit of enterprise and innovation; it played a particular role in financing the multiple security devices intended to protect the regimes and to muzzle the movements of

contestation. In countries such as Algeria or Libya, the countries of the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, it also enabled the purchase of weapons beyond the real needs of the countries, to guarantee the support of the regimes' armies in place.

Another element deserves to be underlined. The monopolisation of an important income, such as that from gas and oil exports, empowers the regimes in relation to their "outside" criticism and their "interior" enemies. The outside actors (let us take the case of the EU or the United States) cannot do without the energy resources of these producing countries, and can tend to tone down their "criticism." On the other hand, the interior opposition can easily be weakened, either by a "selective co-optation" or by a targeted repression (against Islamists for example or against organisations defending human rights), or finally by a controlled opening (parliamentary inclusion).

It is clear that Tunisia is a low income country depending on transfers, tourist returns, and international aid. Thus, unlike Algeria and Libya, Tunisia's income does not come from the export of strategic resources. The army and the people have benefitted less from them: the defence budget oscillates around 1.38% of the GDP, as opposed to 3.29% for Algeria, 3.35% for Morocco, 2.15% for Libya and only 0.67% for Mauritania. This allowed the empowerment of the population and the army in relation to the regime. The fraternisation of the Tunisian army with the people, a scenario reproduced in Egypt, appears to be excluded in the Libyan or Algerian cases and even in Saudi Arabia, where the revolution, if any, would necessarily be a "palace revolution" or a simple "military coup".

The case of Morocco is more complex. While it is true that the country also has some income from phosphate, fishing agreements, tourist returns, transfers from immigrants, and international aid, this income is far from reaching the 55 billion of US dollars of income stored by neighbouring Algeria. It probably explains why the public sector is the weakest of all countries in the Maghreb, increasing the empowerment of the population in

relation to the State. This in no way means that a popular revolt capable of leading to revolution is possible, because it is necessary to also take in consideration other variables: the reaction of the army and the close ties between the population and the monarchy.

The Moroccan army is certainly important in strength, but it is not as corrupt as in the other oil-producing countries. Morocco dedicates 3.35% of its GDP to defence (due mainly to the Western Sahara issue) but this only makes \$ 99 per capita, whereas the defence budget is \$ 155 per capita in Algeria, \$ 127 in Libya, and \$ 1436 in Saudi Arabia. There was certainly the “Skirat” coup in the 1970s, but it seems, up until now, that the Moroccan army has continued to sustain the monarchical system, thus making it difficult to predict its reaction in the case of a generalised revolt.

A priori, Algeria, in spite of its income regime, is more exposed to a popular revolt. Former Algerian Prime Minister Ghazali, even speaks of the “political Tsunami” to come. In the Middle East, Syria, Yemen, Jordan and Bahrain are weakened by social contestation and a dismissal of the authoritative practices. But here too, some nuances must be mentioned: one must not hope that the Jordanian army can overthrow the monarchy. Indeed, it is its main support and Jordan dedicates 7.17% of its GDP to defence, nearly \$ 422 per capita, whereas the people have few resources. Besides, the composition of the army, would make it difficult to overthrow the monarchy. If need be, the army is ready to drown all revolutionary movement in blood. The key lies in who would trigger it; moreover, who would frame it. In 1970, King Hussein did not hesitate, in order to protect his throne, to throw his troops against the Palestinian Fidayinses during the famous Black September, causing thousands of deaths. It is of interest to note that Jordan is a main piece in the chessboard of the Near East, and one cannot doubt that the United States would not remain impassive if faced with a general revolt capable of evicting the monarchy.

As for the Syrian army, it has proven to be passive and remarkably docile since the 70s. Controlled by the Alaouite clan

of Hafez el Assad and his son Bachar, it is nowadays confined to the barracks and is on stand by to crush all rebellion when the need arises. In the 80s, it did not skimp on the means to harshly eradicate the Moslem movements of Homs and Hama.

On the other hand, the Egyptian army has come to a decision. Following a period of intense hesitation and intense internal proceedings, it pushed for the resignation of Mubarak while he is, as his two predecessors Nasser and Sadate, descendant of its ranks. The chiefs of the Egyptian army were undoubtedly corrupt and numerous generals took advantage of the system. Its main strengths come from the underprivileged classes and from the educated middle classes that were in the Place Al-Tahrir of Cairo asking for the “change of the regime” and the head of “Mubarak.” At the time, the Egyptian army refused to “shoot on the demonstrators” to impose order, but it is now up to the Egyptian army to prepare for the transition.

Today it is Yemen that appears to be the most fragile. The regime must face a *Houthite* rebellion, temporarily subdued, in the North, while being exposed to a risk of separation in the South with the reconstitution of the Al-Qaida networks in the mountainous and tribal regions. In this country, the army is exhausted and the social contestation is particularly daring in the South. It is in Yemen where the ingredients of one popular revolution are united, but where, paradoxically, the geopolitical interests of the west are most obvious. The geographical localization of Yemen to the entry of the Bab Mandeb el on the Red Sea, and the geostrategic interests of the outside actors, would probably play against a Tunisian-style revolution. The western countries fear the thought of a disintegrated Yemen, delivered to centrifugal forces, and possibly an easy prey for the terrorist groups.

III. Conclusion

In many ways, as this analysis wishes to highlight, the Tunisian revolution is unique. Indeed, it arose as a result of an exceptional conjunction of factors and actors, namely educated youth but up against a rampant unemployment, a spontaneous organisation of the revolt, an economic context marked by a “growth without development”, a fossilised and repressive political system, generalised corruption, and a frustration of a situation blocked at all levels.

One finds all these explosive ingredients in all Arab countries, where street demonstrations against the increased cost of life and the lack of liberty and perspectives are on the increase. But, apart from Egypt, in no other country, at least until today, could these demonstrations have led to the leader's overthrow or a reform of policies, other than a “cosmetic” one. Certainly, the regimes had to make concessions on issues concerning prices, subsidies, income, work, but the political demands were, on the whole, remote or even simply unknown.

Therefore, one must not hope for a sort of reform from the top, other than a cosmetic one. Indeed the authoritative regimes share the same characteristics: they are autistic, deaf and blind. Can one now expect a revolution from the bottom, as in Tunisia and in Egypt? Theoretically it is possible, but the analysis above shows how different the realities of the Arab countries are. In some - Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Algeria – there is a real “risk of islamisation” of the revolt, which was not the case in Tunisia or Egypt. In Jordan, there is a real Jordano-Palestinian divide that complicates the deal. Elsewhere, in Yemen or even in Algeria, for example, there is a risk of “regionalisation” of the revolt. In Syria, the clannish and sectarian element could also play a part.

The behaviour of the armies will necessarily be different according to the different national contexts. In some countries, the army is the pedestal (Jordan); the frame (Libya); or the rampart of the regimes (Yemen). In Algeria, it merges with the regime. But in

other countries, as one has seen in Tunisia, it is more or less “autonomous” in relation to the regimes. Besides, it is this relative autonomy that permitted the army to fraternise with the people, and finally cause the overthrow of the regime of Ben Ali.

The behaviour of the regional and international actors is to be taken into account. The Americans, *a posteriori*, praised the “courage and the dignity of the Tunisian people”. But in the case of Egypt, there was a lot of hesitation, first praising the “stability” of the Mubarak regime, before calling to a transition in “good order” (orderly transition), to end up requiring a “fast exit” of the crisis while probably placing pressure on the Egyptian army to push Mubarak to the exit. How would the Americans react if a popular revolution threatened the regime with Saleh Ali in Yemen, given the geostrategic importance of this country, or if the Monarchies of Bahrain and Jordan were put to the test? One knows the logistical help that the Americans bring to Yemen to contain the danger of Al Qaida, their “traditional friendship”, with the Jordanian Monarchy, and the importance that they attach to their big naval basis in Bahrain.

Tunisia has a lesser geostrategic value and the change of regime in Tunisia does not pose any major problems to America. Egypt is otherwise more important in the United States strategy on the Middle East. It granted the departure of Mubarak, after having been assured by Egypt’s Chief of State Regimental Adjutant that Egypt would respect the international interests of the Israeli-Egyptian peace Treaty. The Americans still hold their breath because if the change of regime in Egypt had to lead to control of the country by the Muslim Brothers, it would provoke a real regional earthquake that would threaten all pillars of control in the entire region. In the case of Egypt and Jordan, it is peace with Israel that could be frozen or even questioned. In the case of Yemen, it is the bankruptcy of the State that could be a matter of concern.

There will undoubtedly be change in the other Arab countries. However, one asks under what shapes, with what actors and with

what blessing will change occur. No one, at this stage, is in a position to say for sure. What is certain is that the Tunisian revolution - followed by the one in Egypt a month later- shattered to pieces several myths notably those of the “intrinsic despotism to the Islam” and “the Arabian exceptionalism” which intended to demonstrate that “Arabs and democracy is a contradiction in terms”. The Tunisian start also revealed the deceptive character of the separation between economic modernisation and political reform. It has also demonstrated the emptiness of the arguments constantly harped on, according to which the authoritative regimes are the only ones able to “contain the surging Moslem” and defend the geostrategic and economic interests of the West. Finally, what happened in Tunisia proved the futility of some axioms such as “Tais-toi et consume”, “shut up and consume”, or “authoritarian regimes are the guarantors of stability.” Thus, the Tunisians have proved that consumption does not guarantee docility, and that an “authoritarian regime is steady until the day where it is no longer”.

Finally, Tunisia indicated a path to follow but it is not the only one: it is up to other Arab countries to choose their path towards democracy, according to their history and strengths.

Finally, one must not delude oneself. We are facing a “revolutionary process”, because the revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt are still going on. It is therefore an incomplete process and it is safe to bet that the path of the future will not be sowed with Jasmine petals.

Subsequently, other less rejoicing possibilities are not to be ruled out, among which are:

- a. Some neighbours could try to stir up ill-feeling and support some actors (Moslem or other) provoking a civil war;
- b. The former recipients of the fallen regimes could think about taking back the initiative;
- c. The political parties would not appear to measure up to the task and would take control of the popular revolution;

- d. If the Tunisian and the Egyptians do not immediately put the economy back on track, the countries could sink in the chaos. In this scenario, the army, itself, could be tempted to institute “a military regime”, with the obvious risk that the saviours of the nation do not turn into “destroyers of the democracy”.

The worst possible outcome is that the Arab revolutions “make a mountain out of a molehill” and consequently abort, or that “religious parties” or “regional actors” tempt to monopolise them to their own profit.

If this nightmarish scenario had to come true, the revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt would produce a “deterrent effect” throughout the Arab world accrediting the thesis of the regimes for which “the strong State is preferable to anarchy”.

But the worst is not a fatality. The Arabs “today standing” have the right to hope. Young Arabs have shown a lot of courage, an extraordinary sense of dignity, lucidity and maturity. Perhaps even, indirectly, they have hurled a beautiful lesson of liberty, to all those who in the West believe that democracy is not made for Arabs and Muslims, and who continue to look at the Arab world through the prism of old clichés, constantly agitating the scarecrows of “the fanatic Islamism” vowed to the hate of the West.