

1 **The Arab Revolutions of 2011: Revolutions of Dignity**

Zaid Eyadat

I. Introduction

The first half of 2011 witnessed some of the greatest social and political transformations in the Middle East in recent history. Beginning with Tunisia's protests and ousting of Ben Ali in early January, the momentum of the "Arab Spring" soon spread to Egypt, Yemen and Libya, eventually encompassing most of the Arab world. While these sweeping revolutions throughout the Arab world took many nations by surprise, an examination of political indicators would have told otherwise. An utter lack of democratic practices and a politics of fear long employed by these Arab regimes led to growing resentment, and even hatred, toward the corrupt governments. As some countries are in the process of democratic transition, others continue to struggle against their brutal regimes. It is clear that throughout the region, the rationale supporting these regimes effectively collapsed. At this point, it is critical to understand the timing of the Arab revolutions. It is true that presently a positive end is not in sight for many of these struggling nations. As we have seen, however, change in this region has been momentous and, at times, unexpected. This paper explores the complex dynamic between regime policies, the value of dignity in Arab culture and the speed at which changes occurred.

This paper will present an overview and analytical framework of the Arab Revolutions of 2011, as well as explore these uprisings in several significant ways. Existing policies of the incumbent regimes on the eve of the revolutions will be assessed, in order to determine true motivations on the Arab Street. The austere economic conditions, public processes that marginalised the masses, corruption, and a politics of fear, employed by these

Arab regimes will be analysed. The sociocultural importance of dignity will be examined, in order to explain the modality of changes. The examination of these two aspects combined in turn assist in explaining why individual grievances turned into collective, sweeping action throughout the MENA region. Together, these policies and sociocultural foundations are essential in explaining why the revolutions became contagious throughout the Arab world. They may also assist in predicting possible future outcomes for democratic transitions and the fate of peaceful Arab States.

As will be evident by the end of this paper, the Arab revolutions of 2011 revolve around the growing issue of a lack of dignity in personal lives. Quite simply, dignity is the feeling of being worthy of esteem or respect. From the aforementioned data, it is clear that the Arab regimes paid little attention to the needs of their public. Many have been stuck in a cycle of poverty and inability to obtain fulfilment in life. Masses of educated youth felt constant humiliation and frustration, with an inability to control their destiny. Methods of oppression and the vast secret police forces prevented any opposition from gaining momentum. The Arab youth felt no sense of dignity, or worth, which was reflected by their governments. The online social networks utilised by youth “have no formal ideology”, but they were able “[...]to transform humiliation into self-esteem”.¹ Following the death of Bouazizi, the Arab youth began to realise online that they had been standing on the sidelines of their own lives for too long.

Literature on these revolutions thus far is scant, due to the uncertain aftermath on both the national and international level. The majority of what has been written covers only one of the aspects listed above. News articles mainly provide updates on current political tensions or instances of violence in countries such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Many concerns about the role of Islam in these movements, and fears of the rise of Islamists, have

¹ Cohen, Roger (2011, January 24). Facebook and Arab Dignity. *The New York Times*. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com>.

also been addressed. It should also be noted that prior work on Islam, democracy, and the Arab world fails to apply to these 2011 revolutions. Due to an urgent need for this evaluation, this paper seeks to synthesise this previous work and go beyond it. Analysis of the individual (psychological and rational bases of behaviour), regimes (nature, structure and policies), and sociocultural foundations of Arab societies and polities can help us understand why these revolutions occurred, how they proceeded, and what timeline for democratic transition, if any, can be expected.

II. The Eve of the Revolution

To say the very least, the public and political outlook in the Middle East was dismal at the beginning of 2011. The lack of democratic practices and progress in human rights in the region became increasingly unbearable over the years, leading to these massive uprisings in January. For over two decades, the growing populations of the Middle East have held large urban riots to protest for secure jobs, better housing, and better human rights protection. As wealth disparities deepened throughout the Arab world intensifying relative deprivation, Arab regimes only sought to fulfil their own economic and security objectives.² This section will explore in depth the state of the Arab world on the eve of the revolutions. Using political, economic, and social indicators, a clear picture of the brewing frustration prior to the 2011 protests will emerge.

The majority of the Arab world was in the hands of a few powerful dictators, who employed countless authoritarian policies. These include Qaddafi of Libya, al-Assad of Syria, Egypt's Mubarak, and Saleh of Yemen. Citizens often had little or no

² Bayat, Asef (2011, April 26). The post-Islamist revolutions. What the Revolts in the Arab World Mean. *Foreign Affairs*. Available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com>.

political rights, illustrated clearly with the banning by Gaddafi regime's of political parties for over 35 years.³ The regimes throughout the Arab world have been characterised by some as "sultanistic" dictatorships.⁴ Neglecting the channels made by formal institutions, these dictators only concerned themselves with expanding their personal power at the expense of people power. On the surface, these leaders seek international support and roles for themselves by promoting economic development through industrialisation, education, and commodity exports. Many of these Arab regimes are guilty of "neo-colonisation by invitation". These regimes offered "land for military bases and collusion in financing proxy mercenaries against anti-imperial adversaries" to multi-billion dollar firms and dominant world powers, notably the United States.⁵ Many become rentier states, simply distributing resources to the masses but allowing no representation on the political scene.⁶

Understanding the political climate of these Arab regimes, one can begin to see the economic effects on the masses. The seven major oil-exporting countries in the MENA region, Kuwait, Qatar, U.A.E., Bahrain, Libya, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, fall under the "High Human Development" section in the Arab Human Development Report of 2009. The rest of the Arab world's economic, health, and education indicators lead the remaining countries to be classified under "Medium Human Development" or "Low Human Development". Gross domestic product (GDP) in the MENA region is extremely high in a few countries and extremely low in others. For example, the GDP is over 300 billion

³ Freedom House (2011, May). *Worst of the Worst 2011: The World's Most Repressive Societies*. Available at:

http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/101.pdf.

⁴ Goldstone, Jack A. (2011, April 14). Understanding the Revolutions of 2011. *New York Times*. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com>.

⁵ Petras, James (2011, March 3). *Roots of the Arab Revolts and Premature Celebrations*. Available at: <http://lahaine.org/petras/index.php?p=1842&c=1>.

⁶ Lucas, Russel, 2004: "Monarchical Authoritarianism: Survival and Political Liberalization in a Middle Eastern Regime Type", in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36,1: 103.

USD in Saudi Arabia, while it is 4 billion in the Israeli Occupied Territories. These disparities can also be seen in 2005 GDP per capita calculations. These values range from \$27,664 in Qatar, to as low as \$930 in Yemen. The majority of state revenues in these Arab countries are provided through oil, gas, and mineral exports and tourism.

While these fields employ a tiny fraction of the labour force, this specialised economy is controlled by “foreign multi-nationals and expats linked to the ruling class”.⁷ Available data shows that the richest 20% of the MENA region populations had nearly 50% of total income or expenditure. On the other hand, in many of the Middle Eastern and North African countries the unemployment rates ranged from about 3-26% between 1996-2005. Furthermore, up to 45% of some populations in the Arab world worked in the informal, non-agriculture economic sector.⁸ In many of the Medium Human Development countries a middle-class is unable to form, and citizens are almost completely incapable of attaining better economic opportunities. Public sector employees, such as teachers, police officers, and health professionals, are barely able to survive on their meagre salaries.

In addition to the unfavourable economic and national policies outlined above, corruption and human rights violations plague this region. Libya, Syria, and Saudi Arabia received special mention in Freedom House’s 2010 report on the least free countries in the world. Several Middle Eastern countries, Egypt and Syria for example, have had enforced emergency laws almost without interruption since the 1960s. In direct violation of human rights, these emergency laws give security officials freedom to suppress demonstrations and public meetings, and to detain people indefinitely without charge.⁹

⁷ Petras, James, 2011, art.cit.

⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009: *Arab Human Development Report. Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries* (Beirut: UNDP)

⁹ Human Rights Watch (2010, November 23). *Elections in Egypt*. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2010/11/23/elections-egypt>.

As a result, democratic institutions and processes, such as free and fair elections, are unable to function properly. On the ground, these dictators control elections and provide subsidies for necessary goods, such as food, electricity, and gasoline, in order to keep the masses unorganized.¹⁰ Torture is an unspoken, accepted means for security officials to obtain confessions in many of these countries. The majority of the time, as was the case in Egypt under the Mubarak regime, torture went unchecked and unpunished. Out of fear of reprisal or lack of faith in the government, victims of torture often do not submit complaints or report the incident.¹¹

The corruption of the Arab regimes has an effect on the population at large, especially as a result of government policies toward media and education. Demographic contradictions tie into the increasing economic woes caused by regime policies. 50%-60% of the population in the MENA region is composed of people under the age of twenty-five. Of this young population, most are educated, yet underemployed or unemployed and forced to work in the “informal” economic sector.¹² In recent years, more government funding has gone toward military spending than education. This is revealed by an adult literacy rate, ranging from 52% in Morocco to 93% in Kuwait.¹³ In several of these countries there is no independent press. Where the press is independent, it must heavily censor itself so as to avoid repercussion from the government.

Societies in the Arab countries are segmented along tribal, communal, sectarian, and regional lines.¹⁴ While the “sultanistic” dictators have maintained firm control of their governments, the micro-politics of failure “bounded consociationalism” has been prevalent. In this system, the regime “legitimizes and sustains itself by an ongoing process of explicit and implicit bargaining

¹⁰ Goldstone, Jack A., 2011, art.cit.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, 2010, art.cit.

¹² Petras, James, 2011, art.cit.

¹³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009, art.cit.

¹⁴ Eyadat, Zaid, 2007a: “The Calculus of Consensus: an Alternative Path to Arab Democracy”, in: *Oriente Moderno: Islam and Democracies*: 371-381.

with the communal elites”.¹⁵ The prime example of this issue is Yemen. Protestors have been divided over ideological lines, particularly over the dominance of the conservative Islamic point of view, *Islah*.¹⁶ Completely separate from these protests are the continuing tribal war in the north, shadows of a secessionist movement in the south, and pockets of al-Qaeda influence throughout the country.¹⁷ This is also especially true of Libya, where before and during Gaddafi’s rule the three loosely-connected autonomous provinces were divided among feuding tribes and local power brokers.¹⁸ Syrians are also divided among sectarian lines, where some still claim that al-Assad’s rule is the only way to hold together Syria’s different groups and sects.¹⁹

III. Existing Literature: Too much bad theorizing

Previous literature on democracy in the Middle East and democratic transitions has not been able to predict or explain the recent changes in this region. More often than not, the macro-level and governmental perspectives are focused on and ultimately do little to explain the current micro-level sub-group movements occurring on the Arab street. It is evident from international surprise over the uprisings, that previous literature on democracy in Arab countries has been insufficient in predicting the current situation in the Middle East. During the revolutions, accounts focused on the immediate causes of the revolutions, participation of the educated youth and their utilisation of the internet, and the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ al-Sakkaf, Nadia (2011, April 27). The Politicization of Yemen’s Youth Revolution. *Arab Reform Bulletin*. Available at: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2011/04/27/politicization-of-yemen-s-youth-revolution>.

¹⁷ “Building Up”, *The Economist* (February 2011).

¹⁸ Cordesman, Anthony H. (2011, March 22). *Libya: Three Possible Outcomes and the Roles of Governance. Money, Gas, and Oil*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. Available at: http://www.csis.org/files/publication/110322_Libya_ThreeOptions_cordesman.pdf.

¹⁹ “A Golden Opportunity”, *The Economist* (April 2011).

possible prevalence of Islamic extremists.²⁰ Significant literature analysing Islam's compatibility with democracy and democratic transitions pertaining to the Arab revolutions of 2011 is not yet available.

Recently, many scholars have questioned the persistence of authoritarian regimes throughout the Arab World. Many have also pondered on whether democracy is possible in a society with Islamic values. It is extremely likely that Islam will play an important role in many democratic transitions throughout the Arab world. However, none of the previous literature predicted these revolutions or the place for Islam in them. An extreme critic, notable political theorist Francis Fukuyama, predicted in a recent interview on his upcoming book that within several years the Arab revolutions will flounder.²¹ Due to the pre-existing lack of political culture, some scholars such as Lewis (1996), Kedourie (1994), and Huntington (1991) claim that Islam and tribalism in the MENA region are incompatible with developing democracy.²² Others, such as Esposito and Piscatori (1991), conclude that democracy and Islamic values can co-exist, depending on the interpretation of religious texts.²³ Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger (2004) have argued that external Western support and attempts at internal legitimation, through religion and economic development, have kept Arab regimes in power.²⁴ Several studies do explore the corrupt "tactical democratisation" of Arab regimes to ensure their own survival, but they fail to include the micro-level analysis of rational choice or the place of Islam. Empirical data on democratic transitions throughout the

²⁰ Petras, James, 2011, art.cit.

²¹ Bast, Andrew (2011, April 18). The Beginning of History. *Newsweek*. Available at: <http://www.newsweek.com>.

²² Kedourie, Elie, 1994: *Democracy and Arab political culture* (London: F.Cass); Huntington, Samuel P., 1991: *The Third Wave. Democratization in the late twentieth century* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press).

²³ Esposito, John; Piscatori, James, 1991: "Democratisation and Islam", in: *Middle East Journal*, 45,3.

²⁴ Albrecht, Holger; Schlumberger, Oliver, 2004: "Waiting for Godot: Regime Change without Democratization in the Middle East", in: *International Political Science Review*, 25,4: 371-392.

world is also difficult to apply to the Arab regimes. Kugler and Feng (1999) have compiled various macro and micro-level approaches on factors contributing to the likelihood of democratic transitions in authoritarian countries.²⁵ It is argued that modernisation and economic development can lead to democratic transition, while on the micro-level political agents are seen to bring about democracy. Scholars such as Jakub Zielinski (1999) have explored the relationship between democratic protests and authoritarian military intervention.²⁶ In all of these works, the uncertainty associated with democratic transitions and elections is highlighted and related to possible violence. While Adam Przeworski (1991) compiles a wealth of information on liberalisation and democratisation of authoritarian regimes, his case studies focus on examples throughout Latin America and Eastern Europe.²⁷ Altogether, it is overwhelmingly clear “that few studies have effectively specified, formalised, and statistically analyzed the dynamics of democratic transitions”.²⁸ These major case studies that focus on democratisation and violence on a macro-level, during and after the Cold War, do little to explain the Arab Revolutions of 2011.

IV. Bringing People Back into Politics: Rational and psychological motives

In this paper, the label “Arab Spring”, commonly used throughout international media sources will not be employed. Anyone living in or visiting the Middle East knows that spring is a beautiful, yet short season. In this line of thinking, an “Arab Spring” signifies a short-lived success in the MENA region countries, with no chance to make actual change. Simply, “Arab

²⁵ Kugler, Jacek; Feng, Yi, 1999: “Explaining and Modeling Democratic Transitions“, in: *The Journal of Conflict Resolutions*, 43,2 (Spring): 139-146.

²⁶ Zielinski, Jakub, 1999: *On political parties in new democracies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press)

²⁷ Przeworski, Adam, 1991: *Democracy and the Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

²⁸ Ibid.

revolutions” labels events for what they are, and signifies the difference and varying uncertainty of democratic transition from country to country. As this paper is being written, spring is nearly at its end, while the conflicts in Libya, Yemen, and Syria persist.

With the death of Tunisia’s Muhammad Bouazizi on 4th January 2011, protests shook the foundations of the Tunisian government.²⁹ The public frustration over economic stagnation, police brutality, and political corruption quickly ousted Ben Ali and sparked the revolutions throughout the Arab world. Egypt’s Police Day on 25th January began a nearly month-long series of protests calling for the end of former President Hosni Mubarak’s long reign. Protestors in Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen quickly followed suit throughout February, hoping to follow in the successful footsteps of Egypt and Tunisia. President Bashar al-Assad of Syria swiftly sought to break up protests, beginning in the southern city of Deraa on 18th March.³⁰ Throughout this period, smaller protests occurred in Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, and the West Bank but have not yet taken a strong hold. By the beginning of June of 2011, intense fighting, suppression of protests, and an increasing death toll have continued in Yemen, Libya, and Syria with little hope of any improvement on the horizon.

While each country’s bout of protesting condemned the authoritarian leaders and their regime’s corruption, specific grievances were identified in each revolution. In Egypt and Tunisia, protests encompassed the frustrations over unaccountable authority, youth unemployment, and brutal police oppression.³¹ Yemenis, who took to the streets, decried the lack of freedom of the press, the absence of youth participation in politics, and the internment of political prisoners.³² With these demands bursting forth in a release of pent-up Arab anger, finding the true causes of

²⁹ “Sour Young Men”, *The Economist* (January 2011).

³⁰ “A Golden Opportunity”, *The Economist* (April 2011).

³¹ “The Autumn of the Patriarchs”, *The Economist* (February 2011).

³² al-Sakkaf, Nadia, 2011, art.cit.

these outbursts can be quite difficult. The many variables on the eve of the revolutions discussed above, can leave one puzzled as to where to start. We will now look at how the rationale behind the Arab regimes ultimately collapsed in 2011.

The policies of Arab regimes and their effects on society, described above, are very telling. These “sultans” employed policies to aid the already-wealthy and exclude the rest of society. Any semblance of democratic institutions were in fact heavily regulated and guarded by these dictators and their police forces. Unholy alliances between dictators, large businesses, and security firms channelled spending in a way that strengthened the regimes power base and marginalised its people. These alliances forced the educated young masses into low-paying positions or the informal economy. Any form of critical protest was repressed brutally. Many outlets for communication and raising awareness were also suppressed by the Arab regimes, often preventing meaningful organisation. Relationships with foreign countries sought to promise stability for aid and investment, none of which would be channelled back to the people.³³ In a Machiavellian sense, all of the Arab regimes imposed fear on their people, because their harmful policies could obviously not win support or re-election.³⁴ With the death of Tunisia’s Bouazizi, the entire rationale behind these regimes began to crumble. Elections and other democratic institutions were knowingly fixed, the masses knew of the networks of corruption, and physically felt the adverse economic effects. At the start of these revolutions, all of the corrupt Arab regimes lost their legitimacy, as a result of policies that fuelled a growing hatred towards the regimes.

One asks what subsequently motivated individuals on the micro-level? Online social networking websites, such as Twitter and Facebook, played a vital role in protest organisation and

³³ Goldstone, Jack A, 2011, art.cit.

³⁴ Howard, Dick (2011, June 5). The Resistance of Those Who Desire Not to be Ruled. *Raison Publique.fr*. Available at: <http://www.raison-publique.fr/article443.html>.

influencing revolutions in other Arab countries. As Philip Howard notes, it is extraordinarily important to realize that most reports from the ground identify these uprisings as mainly leaderless, and ignoring traditional ideology.³⁵ While the most immediate causes include political dictatorships, unemployment, and police repression, the theory behind the individual and group decisions must be explored. Rationally, it can be difficult to understand why many young men and women would risk their lives protesting under brutal repression.

Based on the micro-level gaming analysis, any form of democratic transition creates uncertainty, as only one of several outcomes can lead to a long-lasting, functioning democracy.³⁶ On the eve of the revolutions, with such extreme marginalisation, humiliation, and wealth disparities, the Arab street felt such desperation that it outweighed the uncertainty. As preferences are derived from self-interest, or maximisation of material gains, it is clear that the masses did not prefer to live under these Arab regimes any longer.³⁷ At this point, we must also take into account the aforementioned importance of dignity in Arab society; culture is deeply-rooted in Arab behaviour and history. Many also realised that despotism was beginning to sink into culture, as actions had to be censored to avoid the dictator and his secret police.³⁸ Governments lost their legitimacy after Bouazizi's death, due to a collective feeling of a loss of dignity. Most Arabs were, and still are, in Bouazizi's hopeless position of education, without possible societal advancement. It was either in January, or never.

Looking at the rational thought of the protestors and the corrupt policies of the regimes, the timing of the Arab revolutions becomes clear. The dictators employed policies to empower

³⁵ Howards, Philip N. (2011, February 23). The Cascading Effects of the Arab Spring. *Miller-McCune*. Available at: <http://www.miller-mccune.com/politics/the-cascading-effects-of-the-arab-spring-28575/>.

³⁶ Przeworski, Adam, 1991, art.cit.

³⁷ Eyadat, Zaid, 2007a, art.cit.

³⁸ Ajami, Fouad (2011, February 6). Demise of the Dictators. *Newsweek*. Available at: <http://www.newsweek.com>.

themselves and used fear tactics to prevent any meaningful opposition. The vast wealth disparity was increasing and opportunities for the masses to lead a comfortable life were rapidly decreasing. In response to these macro-level policies, Bouazizi set himself on fire as a final act to resist being ruled.³⁹ The rationale of these regimes quickly collapsed, as the masses were able to relate to the feelings of hopelessness that led Bouazizi to act. On the micro-level, dignity had been offended by the regimes long enough.

V. Transitions Thus Far: Violence vs. Awakening

Although the events in Tunisia had a cascading effect throughout the Arab countries, it is obvious that the subsequent democratic transitions did not unfold identically. Why is it that Tunisian and Egyptian protests led to a relatively quick removal of the oppressive leader with less violence, than revolutions in Libya, Yemen, and Syria? The difference seems to be the mode of communication and mobilisation in each of these protests. Because Tunisia and Egypt have the largest number of internet users in the Middle East, it seems this speedy channel of youth mobilisation quickly created solidarity.⁴⁰ It is also evident that these more-peaceful transitions in Tunisia and Egypt utilised these organisational channels, to demand additional human rights, dignity, justice, and control of one's own life.⁴¹

There is a similarity between all of the countries experiencing brutal repression by their "sultanistic" dictators. The majority of the youth protesting in Syria, Yemen, and Libya have never participated in any "true" form of democracy. Yemeni youth have little organizational sense or experience in political program formation, and the few activist groups are still tensely divided over

³⁹ Howard, Dick, 2011, art.cit.

⁴⁰ Howard, Philip N., 2011, art.cit.

⁴¹ Friedman, Thomas L. (2011, May 3). Farewell to Geronimo. *The New York Times*. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com>.

intellectual and ideological ideals.⁴² This is also true of the revolutionaries in Libya. Since his ascent to power, Gaddafi succeeded in preventing the development of alternative institutions in the political sphere, through government control and brutal repressions.⁴³

Under the dictatorship of the Ba'ath Party since 1963, the people of Syria have been subjected to nearly 50 years of emergency rule and have little experience with oppositional political organization.⁴⁴ In all of these most-violent cases of the 2011 Arab Revolutions, the youth in these movements have little to no political experience or direction. Altogether, the intense societal divisions outlined above, have prevented the streets of Yemen, Syria, and Libya from uniting under one cause, to achieve a singular, beneficial goal. In turn, the “sultanistic” dictators have been able to exploit these differences and use brutal repression in an attempt to quell the young voices. The inability to swiftly and uniformly mobilize the masses, as occurred in Egypt and Tunisia, is leading to a cycle of violence in the rest of the rebellious Arab world.

VI. What Next? And Who is Next?

Many scholars have attempted, with much uncertainty, to predict the possible outcomes of the revolutions. While many abroad and in the Arab world remain concerned over the role of Islam in future governments,⁴⁵ most reassure it will likely not play a significantly radical role. Kodmani (2011) predicts that Egypt will become “less religious with less Islamic discourse,” as non-political Islam tends to cultivate intolerance and irresponsibility. Using the examples of the Philippines, Haiti, and Indonesia,

⁴² al-Sakkaf, Nadia, 2011, art.cit.

⁴³ Joffé, George, 2011: “After Gaddafi”, in: *ISS Opinion Paper* (April). Available at: http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/After_Gaddafi_01.pdf.

⁴⁴ de Vasconcelos, Alvaro, 2011: “Don’t Forget Syria”, in: *ISS Analysis* (March). Available at: http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Do_not_forget_Syria.pdf.

⁴⁵ “Islam and the Arab Revolutions”, *The Economist* (April 2011).

Goldstone illustrates that “sultanistic” regimes overthrown in the last 30 years have more often than not turned to democracy. It must also be recognised that a different form of democracy may need to develop in order to be effective in a Middle Eastern cultural context. A ground-breaking survey carried out with 500 Arab youth from ten MENA region countries in February and March of 2011, reveals that the importance of democracy is particularly pronounced. However, this is countered with a strong desire to maintain stability.⁴⁶ Due to segmentation of Arab societies discussed earlier, it may be necessary to develop a form of consociational bargaining, in order to provide equal opportunities for all subgroups interests.⁴⁷ Others foresee the combination of Islamic values and nationalism, forming a similar Muslim nationalist discourse as in Turkey.⁴⁸ However, nearly all scholars analyzing the situation recognize the need for organisation and bridging of sectarian and tribal differences.

Another question that arises, concerns countries in the MENA region that have not yet erupted. Sudan gains a special mention in Freedom House’s list of least free countries (2011). Iraq was listed as the Arab country with some of the lowest human development reported in recent years.⁴⁹ Algeria uses tactics of fear, while Lebanon is marked by a vastly different sectarian structure. As we have seen from the rest of the MENA region, these are major issues sparking the uprisings in countries such as Yemen, Libya, and Syria. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman harbour small and usually controlled

⁴⁶ ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller (2011, March 15). *Overriding Desire for Democracy Tops Agenda. ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey*. Available at: <http://www.zawya.com/printstory.cfm?storyid=ZAWYA20110315103621&l=103600110315>.

⁴⁷ Eyadat, Zaid, 2007b: “The Rationality of Political Violence: Modeling Al-Qaeda vs. the United States”, in: *Il Politico*.

⁴⁸ Kodmani, Bassma, 2011: “The Middle East in the Aftermath of the Revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia”, *Mena Policy Brief* (February). Available at: <http://www.usmep.us/usmep/wp-content/uploads/2011-17-USMEPolicy-Brief.pdf>.

⁴⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009, art.cit.

protesting, when compared to the rest of the Arab world. Caught in the “king’s dilemma” of maintaining traditional roles, while attempting to adhere to modern political demands,⁵⁰ these extended families are allowed to rule thus far.

VII. Conclusion

2011 will be remembered long into the future as a year of dramatic political change and social upheaval across the Middle East and North Africa. Beginning with Tunisia in early January, the Arab youth effectively brought themselves back into their countries’ politics. By utilizing online social networking websites, individuals came together to protest against the “sultanistic” dictators in Arab countries. While in some cases, such as Egypt and Tunisia, it led to the regime’s demise, in others, such as Libya and Yemen, the revolutions have caused a near civil war. Previous literature on the region and on democratic transitions fails to explain, predict, or determine the possible future of the Arab Revolutions of 2011. On the micro-level, the Arab masses lashed out over their total lack of dignity and representation in politics. On the macro-level, Arab regimes long practiced corruption and employed policies of fear, eventually turning this mass fear into mass hate.

While the Arab revolutions of 2011 are feverishly discussed, this paper asserts that the situation is more complicated than previously portrayed. Arab regimes were corrupt, economically unfair, as well as unstable, and the Arab masses were frustrated with a lack of freedom in choosing their own destiny. Furthermore, these two levels must be combined in order to understand why Bouazizi’s death in Tunisia sparked revolution across the Arab world. An overview of democratic transitions and continuing revolts can assist us in predicting the outcomes for the rest of the region. Based on social conditions, Algeria, Sudan, and Lebanon may likely join the Arab revolutions of 2011. Many

⁵⁰ Lucas, Russel, 2004, art.cit.

monarchies in the Middle East have not witnessed massive uprisings, due to extended family ruling and incremental liberalisation. In order to predict and contemplate uprisings in the future, studies must cross dimensions in both the political and social world. This forward-looking method, if adopted, can aid in analyzing the future of democratic transitions in both the Arab region and across the world.