

The Arab Ordeal: Between Democratization and Islamization of the Region

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1. Introduction:

1.1. Political philosophy:

“God knows I fear the destruction of the world by the atomic bomb, but there is at least one thing I fear as much, and that is the invasion of humanity by the state” (qtd in Foucault 75).

Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), an American art historian who specialised in the Renaissance art, while approaching death at almost 100 years of age, expressed his worry that the “state” would be the new form of invading societies and destroying humanity. Looking back through history, and living through both World Wars and the colonial era, Berenson had the right to question the legitimacy of the state over society, the role of the state, and the relation between its sovereignty and the freedom of societies. It seems that in the 21st century fear can be represented by a new paradigm in political philosophy, in which “the state” as an entity of authority and sovereignty, as it has been known in the last century, will no longer function in globalized cosmopolitan politics, where international interventions are the most problematic features of international relations, regarding the dilemma of legitimacy.

The second half of the past century has been characterised by social and political instability and the phenomenon of unclearly defined civil wars, which occurred around the Global South, known also as the Third World which were viewed as intrastate conflicts or wars. Despite the nature of domestic wars or conflicts, the question of the role of the dominant political and economic power in creating and fueling these wars was always there, (for example the theory of conspiracy in understanding Middle East politics, which includes theories of colonialism, the war on terrorism, Zionism, interest in oil, geopolitical interest, and all that have been seen as tools to justify the Western war on Islam, as Arab Muslims try to understand the relation between international power

relations) and the possibility of correlating these wars with a power shift from intra-state to interstate interests.

Due to the political and economic dependency of the South on the Global North, which is the developed part of the world, an international intervention was needed for both regions, for the South to catch up with the development process, and for the North to be privileged as an international model and power holder. But this raises the question of the nature of state sovereignty and the legitimacy of this international intervention. This dichotomy that worked to keep domination and hegemony in the 20th century, will not stand the international changes in politics. The global vision of this era will assign another relation to the two parts of the world.

The global intra- state relations of this century propose themselves under the philosophy of producing more global justice, through reconciling the two parts of the globe into a more social-cultural, economic, political and ecological (Thompson 232). In the 2000 Brahimi report, a United Nations diplomat, used the term “peace-building” which is a recent term that defines activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war (Brahimi 10), in accordance with the idea of perpetual peace.

The approach of liberal peacebuilding, in post-conflict settings, is predicated on the notion that “conflict is the result of a ‘breakdown or collapse in the “normal” evolution of “modern” social institutions’, for to create peace one simply needs to reconstruct the institutions of the state and successfully promote capitalist economics” (David 3). Historically the MENA region didn’t develop a normal evolution for a “modern” type of social institution, the reason why it was a perfect target for the peacebuilding projects. But will these projects lead to this

goal, the normal evolution of liberal countries? Are these interventions and peacebuilding approaches legitimate politically?

The Arab revolution in the second decade of the 21st century, or what has been labeled as “The Arab Spring”, is a useful socio-political phenomenon for those studying political transformation and the need for a new “order” that keeps the power relations under control. This phenomenon reflects the complexities inherent in defining state sovereignty, and the struggle between keeping the old political order of state sovereignty, the zero sum game (after the treaty of Westphalia which kept the balance of power in Europe), and the need for political transformation and creation of a new definition of the state and its sovereignty after the neoliberalism project of governance in the 1970’s. This model that does not politics, but uses market models to reframe politics and reorganize governance as a pursuit of “the bottom line” (Dahl and Soss 497).

Maybe what was seen as “the end of history” in the 1980’s, and the victory of the “last man”—the rise of liberal democracy—was nothing but the start of globalizing the concept of a special paradigm of governance, neoliberalism. This rebuilding of state from sovereignty to biopolitics, as identified by Foucault, is based on the art “of governing less” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 141), with less politics and more economy, in which the state through open markets, “actively creates markets and works to foster market modes of subjectivity and governance” (Dahl and Soss 297), and the creation of concepts such as political economy, human capital, and enterprise in the social sphere (Foucault 297). This understanding is clearly presented in his lectures on the birth of biopolitics, which concern the change of sovereignty to “state” formation, and the appearance of the market as the ‘*veridiction*’ at the middle of the eighteenth century, and as a source of power, governance and public relations.

Biopower is the right to life not the right to take life, it's the "objectification" of the population in the fields of medicine, psychology, education, in which the discourse itself is turned the human into an object for study (Foucault 138). It's now the art of less governance politically, but more governance through the social sphere, civil society, and the creation of domestic powers that could contradict each other and conflict with each other's interests.

Despite this model of "less government", with a reduced emphasis on politics as a direct player in internal or external relations, and the turn toward economy, the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, have been understood as the result of an opposite ideology, one with "more government" more politics and less economy. The concentration of power in the hand of political leaders and the army, resulted in the adoption of authoritarian regimes, and a minimal influence for the market or the social sphere, all of which is beneficial for international missions, from developmental programs, to security missions, democratisation campaigns and military interventions. This model of governance has turned the states in the Arabic region into oppressive and autocratic entities with centralised power and states of emergency.

The same could be said regarding the concept of the "Islamic Awakening" that has been exemplified in the Arabic region (the MENA region includes non-Arab countries such as Iran and Turkey) by the flourishing of Islamic political parties in the last decades (starting in the 80^s) of the last century. These fundamentalists propose a kind of governance which denies the legitimacy or sovereignty of the secular, state, and ascribes legitimacy only to Islamic governance, which is a type of theocracy rules by the order of Sharia Law. The leading doctrinal parties in the Arabic region as documented by Sharabi, the Syrian National Party (PPS) and the Muslim Brotherhood, allow for a closer look at the types of political thinking and philosophy in

the Arab countries. Though diametrically opposed in their philosophies and their goals, these two parties have many basic characteristics in common. The ideas of their founders, Antun Sa'adah and Hasan al-Banna, respectively are the logical conclusions of the main streams of thought of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly those of Islamic reformism and secular nationalism (Sharabi 480).

The authoritarian kind of political regime and its concentration of power leads to the state's oppression of Islamic political parties, thus leading to the rise of Islamic movements in the MENA region (Al Tahrir party and Al Takfeer w Al Higraph for example), which worked secretly and started to promote ideas that stress the need for Dawlat Al Khilafah, an Islamic State, and cast the secular state as an absolute enemy.

The politics in the MENA region have been affected by the shift of power from a bipolar world during the Cold War (Islamic parties like Al- Qaeda helped the US in its war in Afghanistan against Soviet Union), to a unipolar world led by the US (now viewed as enemy), to a kind of diffused power through international institutions like, the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOS). This is in addition to the effect of the Islamic revolution that succeeded in Iran in 1979 (creating another enemy in Shiite Iran) and provided a further motive for the Islamist parties to dream about religious states all over the MENA region. This change in power relations between states will propose new roles for the political game and the legitimacy of any external or internal interference with the state sovereignty. This was supported by the “domination of neoliberal ideology and structures of globalization, which have generated increasing levels of political and socio-economic chaos in the Middle East” (Mark 394).

1.2. The Arab Spring Phenomenon:

In this paper, the term “Arab Ordeal” will refer to the political dilemma in the MENA region. Beside all types of underdevelopment and economic and social issues, the type of political regime in the region was always at the core of all existing problems. The concentrated authority and power of these regimes, among them authoritarian and autocratic governments and monarchies, had a suppressive and oppressive effect on social and political life. As a result, the social strata in the MENA region has experienced many dilemmas regarding the type of governance that could resolve the power concentration and provide space for freedom and a kind of democracy in places where the democratic model of some of the Arab countries didn't flourish and the Islamic model was not a promising project to be repeated.

Because Islam as a religion and a culture is always present in the Arabic social and intellectual strata and due to the long history of colonisation of the region, by the Ottoman empire (some elites and intellectuals view this period of colonization as one that had a lot of upheavals and revolutions against the Ottoman empire), then by the West, the proposals for political reform have been divided between two main projects, the democratic liberal and the religious Islamic, which would unveil itself clearly in the phenomena of the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring phenomenon is a revolutionary action that took place, in a historical moment, in parts of the Arab countries of the MENA region, a movement that has been described as the awakening of the civil societies, a public and youth revolution (Hussain & Howard 50–51). It was led and managed by the public sphere, as seen in the beginning of the act, as a spontaneous movement carried by the civil society and youth activists. The role of the intellectual elites or the political and Islamic parties in these upheavals was not clear, either in

calling for or in leading the movement. This resulted in a state of chaos and uncontrolled movement.

Despite the short history of this social and political movement, which started in 2011 in Tunisia (and continued in Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria) the number of articles that have been written, and the number of books published about it, reveals the importance of this historical event (Magdi 60, Mark 394, Bulleit 66, Aras and Falk 234), in changing the political orders in the MENA region and the consequences that could be seen from this action at the international level.

A preliminary literature review shows great attempts to better understand the causes and factors that led to the Arab Spring (Akin and others 1, Tottens and others 25), starting from internal factors such as the characteristics of the Middle East's political and social culture. The authoritarian and autocratic political regimes (eight monarchies including the six gulf countries plus Morocco and Jordan, six dictatorships, one military regime, one or two distorted democracies in Tunisia and Lebanon) that deprives the people of their rights, have been seen as the most important factor in triggering upheaval in the region.

The multiple ethnic groups and religious sects that influence the type of political order in each country, tribal identity, discrimination against minorities, economic problems, underdevelopment, unemployment and illiteracy, have all been discussed, in the literature, as triggers in the revolution. Beside the feeling of frustration and need for change at the level of the civil societies, one must also include the external factors that focus on the role of the West, (especially American political agenda in the Middle East, and its allies in the region, Israel and the Arabic political leaders), the war against terrorism, Orientalism and the cultural hegemony, the effect of the mass media, the democratization plans of the United Nations, and the role of

think-tanks and NGOs in advocating ideas of democracy and civil society (Yaacoy 278, Arasa and Falk 323). This external role could be depicted by some liberals' argument that the "non-violent" nature of the revolution in Tunisia, but especially in Egypt, was largely influenced by the fact that some individuals involved in the revolution came to the U.S. for training in the methods of non-violent activism and peaceful transformations (Magdi 62).

One may agree that all these factors have played an important role in the uprising of the Arab Spring, and created a need for change and revolution for social justice, but what will be of interest in this paper is understanding this phenomenon in relation to the global change in power relations and political philosophy. The use of utilitarian ethics to analyze this phenomenon could bring together the main dominant player in the region, the Western liberal democracies and their values, with their version of democratization, and the terrorist's version of Islamic ethics, Islamization, in the formation of the Arab Spring. It's to say how the adoption of certain kind of ethical theory could explain the socio-political changes, as a kind of shift of power and need for new political order in the region.

The change in the discourse of the power relations between states is not just a change in the political paradigm but is directly related to the social and cultural narrative change in the world. The narratives of barbaric East and primitive Arabic culture and modernized West, which legitimized colonization in the past, will not be justified any more in the realm of "the global village", in which the world is connected at many levels, and when theories like cultural relativism could argue for more cultural tolerance and defeat ideas of the supremacy of one nation over other. When the power relation now is moving from between states to intrastate; between many different elements in the internal sphere, military colonization is no longer ethically justified, if it ever was, but under the ethics of utility it was used for centuries.

Now what could control the relation between the Global North and Global South is a new kind of power, what has been known as "Soft Power" (according to Josef Nye the shift of power from transition between states to power fusion within states, with soft power, you make people speak your narrative and adopt your plan. So another type of hegemony). Two narratives for salvations have been proposed by intellectual elites and civil society, at the domestic level of the MENA Arabic countries, democratization or the Islamization of the political regime. Both projects are played domestically but have been supported by external interests.

The era of the neoliberal model of governance, and "zero-sum game" politics, should be changed to a state of "creative chaos" and "proxy wars", which can rearrange power for the benefit of the strong politics, but the tool now may well not be military hegemony but cultural hegemony, with changed accomplished by "intellectual" campaigns [which are] another form of western terrorism (Magid 61). The problem here is whether these values of democratization is seen as "Western values" that could not claim universality and are culturally relative, which make them perceived as foreign doctrines in the MENA region.

The Arab Spring should be interpreted in relation to what has been known as the "War on Terrorism" after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Here, in this new international relation the "Other" will shift from the barbaric civilization, that needed in the past, to be colonized to reach the status of civilization and to adopt liberal constitutions from the West (as Lebanon's and Tunisia's constitutions are based France's) the terrorist identity, and since this situation creates a status of emergency, a cross-border terror, so the "state of exception" (as defined by Schmitt and used by Agamben) becomes the legitimate form of political intervention and hegemony.

This state of emergency and the legitimization of international intervention under the name of protecting the "perpetual peace" (which could be followed by the UN projects of peace-

building, peace keeping, and sustainable development. As examples, the interventions in the first and second Gulf war, the war on Iraq in 2003, the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon, the mission of NATO in Libya) will give the terrorists the perfect opportunity to legitimize their Islamization project in the MENA region. The shift of power, the chaos, and the fragile states, has led some of the Islamic parties, to compare the situations of their movements to the situation of Al- Qaeda, and the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, as powers that can vindicate and legitimize themselves, to create a type of power that is beyond state borders (Naji 8).

This “war on terrorism” which was declared by Bush administration, has violated state sovereignty and created new division in the Arabic region, the “blood- borders”, as they have been named by Bernard Lewis (and could be seen as the ability to divide the Arab countries to fighting entities based on religion and ethnicity), will lead the terrorist to apply their hegemonic project, which will follow the same political game, through social and political destruction and chaos, the use of power fusion, and then legitimization of certain type of political hegemony.

1.3. The State of the Question and Ethical Theory:

The research problem in this paper will focus on the legitimacy of political reform in the MENA region, in the form of two projects, the creation of “The New Middle East”, which is carried out by the West on the so-called “barbaric East”, and “Al Khilafa” the religious state, held by Islamic fundamentalists. Both projects failed socially and politically, to create stable states in the MENA region. The term project has been used to stress the presence of certain ethical references, political agendas, and practical interventions in both proposals.

These two models, democratization and Islamization, have used the same ethical philosophy; “the ends justify the means”. That doesn’t mean both projects are morally equivalent, but to say that for both to reach their “ends”, (New Middle East, or Dawlat Al Khilafah) will justify any means. So calling for democratic and civil society will be equal to calling for religious and conservative society, if the tools used in both are hegemonic and carry out a top-down approach, inasmuch as the people in this region could hold different values even regarding the same concepts of democracy and Islam and different way of application. In this paper, we will try to critically analyze why both projects could not make a real political change in the region, what was common between both philosophies, and the narratives and rhetoric both carry in advertising their projects. The paper will examine the democratic and terrorist ethics under the principles of utilitarian ethics.

Despite the difference between democratic values and Islamic values, between what is secular and what is religious, both of them propose their political and social philosophies as the only solution for the deformed Arabic political system. The ethical question of this paper is the question of trying to compare the two, apparently contradictory ethics, democracy based on liberal theory, and terrorism based on Islamic discourse by the lens of utility.

The history of both projects in their hegemonic activities, in their just wars versus holy wars, could be seen as being founded on a “call of duty”, and the concept of objective truth, so deontological ethics is more used, despite it could be understood under the consequentialism theory in both cases. However the use of utilitarian approach allows us to examine the common utility of both types of ethics, and the hegemonic strategy which characterized both ethics. Forced democratization and Islamization, (for a hegemonic end and through a great propaganda about the salvation of the region by adopting one of the projects) of the MENA region is

illegitimate political reform, and it violates both state sovereignty and freedom, so the Arab Spring could be analyzed as a result of distorted power relations in the international sphere that led to interstate wars, or proxy wars, to keep the balance of international power. This change in the international political philosophy, results in depriving the state of its old role as a system of legitimacy, which allows for the possibility of ethical justification for both projects!

2. The Ethics of Cultural Hegemony

2.1. The Arabic Islamic culture

“Social facts can never be conceived of as true or false. It is the discourse itself that creates the truth about a particular topic and competing discourses create competing truth” (Foucault 27).

The analysis of the Arab Spring as a phenomenon or social fact, could lead to superficial understanding if we did not touch base on the changing discourse in the political philosophy, and without deep understanding of the powerful discourse which led to this type or form of political regime. This phenomenon will be judged according to the dominant political philosophy, which as we mentioned before will create a new understanding for state sovereignty and freedom. But before understanding this social fact, it is important to understand the intellectual formation of the Arabic culture.

In the core of studying any culture and its representation in reality, is the understanding of the intellectual apparatus that form this type of culture or other, and we mean by that the intellectual formation of the Arabic mind or intellect, the most powerful or dominant discourse.

Despite the domination of a specific features of Arabic culture, this culture was not isolated from others, on the contrary it was affected by the surrounding cultures like Greece, Persian and Roman. And beside this interaction, each culture and according to its intellectual formation, will produce a different types of knowledge, philosophy, and science.

The Arabic intellectuals have always accorded a great importance to the Arabs' lives as tribes in the desert, their forced travels to maintain their basic life needs of water and food, and for their trading activities in the formation of the Arab mentality. Al Jabery, Mohammed, said that "the desert environment has shaped the Arabs minds and ways of thinking, [...] and shape it in a separatist and not communicative features" (Al Jabery 24). The sands in the deserts are separated particles, and thus intellectual production was associated with the science of physiognomy, prediction, and divination, in which there is no need for any rationalisation or causality relations.

Socially, this hard desert environment and the fight to survive will lead to the creation of what Ibn Khaldun (1332- 1406), an Arabic sociologist, called '*Asabiyyah*', "the term emerged from the word '*ta asub*' literally means bounding the turban round his own head,[...] or could be interpreted to 'group feeling' or solidarity" (Abdul Halim and others 4-5). This type of belonging will create a kind of partnership or strong association that holds number of people based on the same interest or opinion. This Arabic identity will not be formed in a meaning of unity, but in a figure of clans with hierarchal societies according to power and money. This fragile unity based on hegemony and power of the clans, and mainly centered power around the head, resembles the political system in the contemporary Arabic region. In which we can find monarchy and authoritarian forms of political systems.

The appearance of Islam as a new religion with ‘Arabic prophet’ and ‘Arabic scripture’, the Quran, will create a new domain for power to the Arabic clans. Now the identity could be uniform under “Arabic Islamic identity”. The determination of this identity means the presence of “the different other”. Edward Said claims that “the development and preservation of any culture, requires the presents of ‘the other’ who is different and comparative” (Said 45). This will lead to the development of the main elements in the political Islamic discourse, and “reshaping for mentality and reality according to forces relation in its three dimensions, based on knowledge, wealth, and power” (Hareb 19). That will not only shape the relation with other cultures, but unfortunately, will internally divide Arabic Islamic culture. It will form a paradoxical identity, one that both cannot reject Islam (because the latter is a source of unity and power) or accept it as a political and social theory, but will shape it according to the Arabic culture, all of which will lead to the failure of Islam to propose a clear philosophy for the legitimate form of political philosophy.

Neither the Islamic empire nor the modern Arabic states will fulfill the dreams of the Arabic elites, from liberals to communists to Islamists intellectuals, which is to have a “civil society” based on freedom and equality. Hence, two types of intellectuals will arise: the Islamic intellectuals with their nostalgia for the “golden age of Islam” and the Arabic intellectuals with their dreams for ‘Arabic union’, with different agenda and different approach, leading to neither secular nor religious societies in the Arabic countries, but the failure of both to build a state according to their ideology (if it is correct to make this duality between these concepts, since it is difficult to say that this society is absolutely secular or religious). The problem of the Arabic Islamic culture, was always in the “type of Arabic culture, [that] was at the first level a culture of the prevailing system, which is a culture [...] that asks to hold on assets, and to keep the

inherited values” (Adonis 22), to say that it has great resistance to change, and to create a kind of dynamic social and political reality.

Arabic identity as well as Islamic identity, will remain as “throne of sacred”, as taboos, that we are not allowed to decipher, and emancipate our intellect to rediscover the importance of both of them, for our present and future. Barbara Di Poli focuses in her article, *Arab Revolts and the Civil State*, on the use of term ‘civil state’ by both Islamism and secularism or liberals in the Arab countries, and she states that “an unresolved ambiguity concerning the nature of the state emerged immediately after the fall of the regimes [...] where conditions for democratic reconstruction appeared to be more favorable” (De Poli 96). Here the old and new conflicts revolving around the options of either secularism or Islamization will emerge to the surface after the Arab revolts, as seen in Egypt and Tunisia. This fragile identity did not allow the Arabic countries to adopt a specific form of political system, the usual barrier that prevents these countries from forming any Arabic union that could cooperate and create a kind of homogenous power in the international sphere.

2.2. The Western Rhetoric about Arabic Culture:

Beside the huge literature about the “global village” era and the international relations, the practical side of political affairs still emphasise the dichotomy of the world, the division into developed versus developing, Global North versus Global South, and liberal v/s illiberal, privileging one over another. Thus the international relationships between the states are no more seen as just or equal, but as relations enforced by power relations, and legitimized by international intervention. In the theoretical frame of western political philosophy, democracy, as government of the people by the people, or self-rule, was the corner stone to turn the sovereignty from the king to the state, and to control inter and intra state conflicts.

Therefore, this kind of political reform in the west was developed historically and it has been believed that it will work effectively in reforming the world despite the social, political, economic, and ideological differences between the regions (Cooper 16, Jacob 222, Aras and Falk 234). This objective is informed by the belief that, to have legitimacy, the state must be organized around liberal-democratic principles, and that because liberal democracies are respectful of their societies and peaceful toward their neighbors, they are the foundation of a stable international order (Barnett 88).

Modernity and liberal democracy was going along with the narratives of the orientalists about the Arabic and Islamic culture, and have reached in most cases the same conclusions concerning the presence of the “Other” in relation to the self, and the necessity of the “clash of civilization” (with Huntington) and the victory of the “last man” which is liberalism (with Fukuyama). “The domination of the concepts of modernity, Orientalism, and Euro-centrism [that] have been at work in combination since the ascendance of West to global hegemony” (Magdi 60), are the kinds of soft power that will try to create a culture in the MENA region that seeks these models for salvation.

What has been used here is the advertising of certain notions concerning the type of states in the MENA region, like “defective state”, “weak”, “failed” or “collapsed”, in which this rhetoric will have an obvious advantages for the West. It offers an explanation for the faults of the state in question that does not implicate outside forces, [...] and it justifies external action to intervene in the internal affairs of domestic regimes (Jacob 215). Not ignoring the role of the narratives in creating self- image about being weak or defective states, but it is also important to understand what other internal factors make these states defective or weak and how this will establish an intervention that leads to a certain project of political transformation.

Gerhard Endress in his 2004 book about “Islam, An Historical Introduction” tries to reflect part of the Western understanding of the cause of defective states in the Arabic region, which is related to certain inherited culture. He writes that “because of their savagery, the Arabs are the least willing of nations to subordinate themselves to each other, as they are rude, proud, ambitious, and eager to be the leader” (Endress 74). This is the same culture that Edward Said tried to do justice to, by focusing on the imperialism of the West toward the East. He emphasised the power of Orientalism in shaping the West’s politics toward Arabic and Islamic culture as the old place of “Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies”, but also “the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other”(Said 1).

The power of narratives and “who is telling the story” is a basic form of soft power, the ability to make others believe your story and work toward achieving it. “The two main fundamental sources of soft power are domestic policies and actions and international policies and actions” (Gallaroti 236). Both of these shape the formation of the two hegemonic project in the MENA region.

2.3. [Terrorist Rhetoric about Islamic Culture](#)

The weakness of the Arab countries’ model of political systems lies basically in the difficulty of having a clear Arabic philosophical background for the type of governance that is homogenous with the social and cultural context of the Arabic region. Usually, the advocates for democratic political reform, Arab liberals, are looking to breaking the tradition of authoritarian government and import the Western model of democracy, rather than having a clear agenda for

what they need and what could work efficiently in the region (and maybe this was one of the main problem in our distorted form of democracies that we had in some Arabic countries).

In the Arab countries the governments were “often wrongly defined as secular, since they were run by non-religious and often military leadership, and mostly took on an outwardly republican appearance” (qtd. in De Poli 96). On the other hand Islamic normativity in the form of ‘*Sharia*’ has never been the base of any legal formation, and most countries restrict *Sharia* to a more or less reformed family law. In the Islamic University of Al Azhar, Ali Abd al Raziq, in 1925, conferred legitimacy only on the ‘secular state’ in his work, *Islam and the Foundation of Authority*, he stated that “since the Qur’an and Sunna were lacking in any clear instructions concerning possible forms of Islamic power, the death of the prophet could only be followed by a secular government, and hence Muslims had always been free to govern themselves according to the needs of their times” (qtd. in Di Poli 95).

The kind of discourse that separates religion and the state is not approved by all Islamic scholars and thinkers, and a group of Islamic fundamentalists, like Salafists groups, would argue the opposite, claiming that Islam and *Sharia* law are the only legitimate type of politics in the Arab Islamic countries. Sayyed Qutb (1906-1966) in Egypt would pioneer the idea of “*Hakimiah*”, i.e., governance, in the public sphere. This concept would eventually form the main ideology for Al- Qaeda and ISIS. This kind of ideology separate the states and the civil societies into believers and non-believers, Muslims and non-Muslims, and argues for the necessity of clashes between nations, giving the privilege to Islam to govern and force its ideology on others.

In this gray culture of political philosophy in the Arabic region, this kind of project would be adopted at the level of the public sphere easily, since Islam is the dominant cultural ideology in the region, and this region has never known any kind of political or social stability. “Islam is

the solution” is the slogan carried by many Islamic parties, among which some entered the political life to change it from within (The Muslim Brotherhood for example and Al Nahda in Tunisia), while others prohibited political life and called for the formation of an Islamic state first, “Dawlat Al khilafa” that will rule the people by the Islamic law.

The rhetoric of these groups of Islamic fundamentalists portrays the region as defective and weak, because it has deviated from the only legitimate power, Islam. When Islam was applied during history as a ruling power, this region conquered half of the world under the name of Islamic empire (Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman caliphate), and was that time an international power that could influence the power relations of the world.

The label of ‘terrorist’, of which there is not widespread agreement upon defining, has been given to a group of thinkers and their ideology, that are viewed by the West, and view the West, in terms of “absolute enmity”, according to Schmitt, who distinguish between absolute and relative enmities (Lievens 920). The war on terrorism, or what will come to be referred to as (with Obama’s administration) "Overseas Contingency Operations" was a clear demonstration of a shift in political theory, with the need to create an atmosphere of emergency and phobias at the global level, to the level that any exception to the rules could be legitimized as the working rule. As Munster clarifies when describing the change in the politics of the US, “the points at a significant shift in US’ discourse on security permanent state of exception, in which distinctions such as inside/outside, peace/war, friend/enemy and rule/exception are blurred to the point of indistinction” (Munster 142). The same discourse justified the terrorist’s power in the MENA region.

3. The Arab Winter and the New Middle East

3.1. The Fundamentalism and the Neoliberal Project

The previous discussion could direct our attention to a commonality between the two projects held by the west and part of the Islamic fundamentalist wing usually labelled as terrorists, regarding the kind of political reform that should be implemented in the MENA region after the revolt. The justification that has been used in both projects reflects a kind of hegemonic ideology which has tried to develop a new discourse regarding the meaning of state sovereignty, power relations, absolute and relative enmity, terrorism and anti-terrorism interventions, and what could legitimate or illegitimate any internal or external interventions.

The shift in political discourse could be seen as the application of preventive, action rather than reactionary behaviour toward the region from both sides. “Security discourses”, in other words, are increasingly dominated by the logic of risk management, a logic which calls for the management and government of potentialities of ‘risky’ populations by means of (statistical) calculations and proactive management rather than through the reactive management of real events and threats (Munster 147). Maybe the definition of sovereignty given by Carl Schmitt which regards the “sovereign [as] is he who definitely decides if this situation is actually effective” (Schmitt 13), and the shift of the meaning of “regular” and “exceptional” situation can clarify Western discourse and its role in the proposal of the birth of the New Middle East project.

The Arab revolt in the region has been captured by Islamic political parties, as well as by terrorist groups, as the “golden moment” to propose the solution through Islam, depending on the collective consciousness of the people in the region of the need to change these malfunctioning authoritarian regimes. In countries like Egypt and Tunisia where the situation led to public

election, the Islamic parties have won the elections, and in other places like Libya and Syria, terrorist groups flourish and work to establish the Islamic state. This is what have been seen by some of the Arab intellectual elites as the “Arab Winter” in which the victory of Islamists and proliferation of the terrorist’s Khilafa project, has taken the region backward instead of promising possible progress in the region.

The project of “Khilafa” proposed by terrorist groups like ISIS shares many similarities in its discourse with the democratic one, which we will try to relate through this paper. The new discourse will be designed to manage a state of emergency that took place after the fall of the authoritarian regimes, a discourse that change, the meaning of sovereignty and the meaning of state power or authority. This project under the authority of ISIS should be understood in part as a radical rejection of sovereign states as the basis of political community and legitimate international authority in the Arab world (Aras and Falk 325).

What are these projects, the New Middle East and the Khilafa, their discourses, ethics and strategies, and how could they relate to hegemonic ideology in the MENA region?

3.2. [ISIS and The “Management of Savagery”](#)

“This is the permanent state of affairs which necessitates the continuity of Jihad until all submission is made to God alone”. (Qutb 220)”.

The Islamic discourse of ISIS has its roots in written Islamic historical texts and the interpretation of some of the Olama, religious figures, for the chapters of Quran and Sunna. For example, the writing of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263- 1328) and Sayyed Qutb (1906- 1966) are known to be the source of main ideology and practice of Al Qaeda and ISIS. The analysis here will

depend on the one book, “The Management of Savagery” that has been known as the functional manual of ISIS in their project in the region after the Arab revolt. A critical analysis of the main ideas of this book reveals the faces of similarities between the western and the terrorist project, the same ethics of utility, which could accept any means to reach its hegemonic end under the propaganda of the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

3.2.1 The Terrorist Hegemony:

The nostalgia for the Islamic empire and the “lost glory” of the past, is part of the rhetoric in the Arab Islamic region, not only that of terrorist groups but also many Arab intellectuals and some political Islamic parties. What make this kind of narrative important is that it transformed public perception and continues to be part of the dominant culture.

The demotic Arab upheaval in the MENA region, with the absence of any kind of political or intellectual leadership in the movement, gave the Islamic extremist movements the perfect opportunity to put their theories into practice (the phenomenon of “Al Afghan Al Arab” in the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989), in which many Islamic soldiers volunteered to participate, could be another example).

The political philosophy and ethics in this book could be classified by three main ideas. The first starts by dividing the world into Muslim and non-Muslim lands (rather than using developed and undeveloped, or Global North and Global South as in the liberal rhetoric). This idea developed by Sayyed Qutb to describe all lands that are lands of disbelief or known as “Jahiliah”, a concept used to describe Arabic culture before Islam. This concept leads to the second idea, which is the “necessity of clashes between these two different identities, believers

and nonbelievers, and the importance of Jihad as the only way to win the war. The third and most important idea is the classification of enemies or enmity to absolute and relative, near and far, which maybe one of the strategical differences between Al Qaeda and ISIS. For ISIS the near and absolute enemy is the local government in the Arabic states, and the far enemy, the one could be seen as a relative enemy in this stage, is the West.

3.2.2. The Illusion of the West's Power:

This term, the illusion of West's power" is used in the book to claim that the power of America and the Soviet Union is just based on a power illusion built by a deceiving strong media system (Naji 7), which draw a picture for great power supported by the developed world and its population. For Abu Baker Naji in this book, the American civilization is carrying the elements necessary for its own destruction, as an unethical individualistic civilization. For this illusion to be destroyed, the Islamic State should work on the following objectives, use the media to give an opposing message that portrays America as a weak state, and change the strategy of America in its war at Islam from proxy wars to direct war with the Islamic soldiers, to prove to their followers that it is possible to defeat America and the allies' regimes in the region (Naji 9).

The main aim as stated in this part is to create a places of instability and chaos in the region or as they describe it "places of savagery". Here, the hegemonic ethics reveals itself clearly when the terrorist suggests that in these places of savagery the people will be living at a primitive life stage, in need of a government to lead this savagery. As Naji then narrates the ideal picture of this management, leaders begin by creating internal security, providing food and medicine, protecting the area from any incursions, grafting legislation according to Sharia law,

and forming alliances with those whom they could benefit from in this period, and so prepare the community to be a community of believers and fighters (Naji 11).

3.2.3. The Islamic State Project: Islamic State in Iraq and Sham

The Islamic State under the management of savagery provides an example of a new type of state that resembles the “state of exception” that functions effectively in a state of emergency and chaos. The map of Sykes Picot agreement in 1916 for the MENA region will be changed to a number of scattered “areas of savagery” connected by one “Khalifa” Islamic leader, so that type of power relation will be one of power fusion within the borders of “Dawlat Al Islam”. The map of the Islamic State suggests a number of candidate countries for the continuation of this project, such as the land of Hijaz (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), Jordan, the land of Magrib (North Africa), al Yemen, Pakistan and Nigeria.

What is surprising is that Iraq and Syria are not candidates among these lands. The reason could be related to what is written in the book regarding the characteristic of these candidates geographically wide land, so that areas of savagery management can be built, weak or fragile governmental systems, specifically in rural areas, the nature of people and availability of jihadi Muslims, and the spread of weapons in the hands of people (Naji 16), may be these characteristics would not be applicable to them.

The destruction of the national military, social, and political institutions would be the second step in this project. To attain this objective, the terrorists should attack many targets especially economic targets and oil, foreigners such as tourists, and national leaders, and touristic and entertainment places (for example what happened in Egypt, Tunisia, and Iraq). In their mind,

this will weaken the military causing the number of the army to decrease because of the need of the soldiers for protection services.

Now the areas of savagery will be able to form an Islamic state and move to another stage which known as “Al Shawka” which means “loyalty based on believes”, and the loyal, according to this project, includes any individual or group of people approved to be under the law of Islam and those who have shared the jihad activity with them on the base of “blood-blood, destruction - destruction” (Naji 34). This state is an un-stable one, since it must be in a state of emergency all the time, and the need for jihad will never end. This is reflected in the plans that are recounted in the book for this kind of state to survive. The priority is the deep understanding of the “other” political strategies, and the immediate response to them, according to the situation.

In order to accomplish this, spies would be a very important player in this period for control and surveillance (this reminds us of the panopticon proposed by Bentham, the founder of utility ethics, for centralised observation and control). Besides that, they focus on the type of education system that should be designed according to the era of the prophet Mohamed’s teachings. That means that it would be based on education through advice, habitual behaviour like praying, obedience, and role modeling for the kids and youth. What is important here is that type of education, they believe that to be effective it should be learned during jihad, when there is wars and fights (Naji 56)

Ironically, what we are narrating now is what happening in the MENA region after the Arab spring phenomenon since 2011. How could ISIS have passed through all these stages from chaos to destruction to management of savagery to the last stage of declaring the Islamic state in a short historical period of five or six years? Why in Iraq and Syria which were not proposed as candidate places to start the project? The Arab spring was a helping hand for this state to apply

its last stage. The preparation of this project started after the invasion of Iraq by the American army in 2003, and the use of this historical moment to convey the people of the region by the rightness of their project, to stop the hegemony of the West in our lands.

3.3. The US's Use of "Constructive Chaos"

"The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it."

(Mill, On Liberty)

During the course of history in the West, and the struggle for freedom and prosperity, an individualistic discourse have been adopted, that is believed to be the salvation for all humanity in its path from slavery to liberty. Ironical that under this approach the just war, the war on terrorism, and the violation of the sovereignty of certain countries (for example the war in Iraq was justified on the basis of alleged chemical weapons) was justified.

However these wars as social facts, can never be perceived as true or false, justified or not, unless we look for the "discourse that determines the truth regarding any fact" (Foucault 27) , as Foucault thought, in order to understand its value and representation in political life. The discourse regarding the adoption of a new type of politics by the West toward the East, could be justified by the change in power relations in the world's political order. The power concentration in the hands of US and its hegemonic discourse toward the Middle East, started by changing the geopolitical mapping of the region especially since the fall of the second pole of power (the Soviet Union) widened the geography of the Middle East, which would now include according to US discourse, states like Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The inclusion of these states (which were known to have terrorist groups like Taliban and Al- Qaeda) to the MENA region, was also done for political tactics, benefiting the hegemonic power by generalizing a new international view of the region. This concept of the “Greater Middle East” now will reflect a region of greater chaos, terrorism, lack of democracy, underdevelopment, and whatever could be narrated to justify the intervention in the region by the US and the international institution.

3.3.1. The Western Hegemony

No one could deny that the adoption of liberal democracy regime by the west have led to progressive movement of development and prosperity, and a high degree of organization and control. Unfortunately by carrying this project outside the borders of the west, Europe and North America, this project and this system of politics led to history characterised by hegemony, imperialism and colonization in the MENA region, as well as other parts of the world. This approach led to a status of mistrust and resistance in the Arabic region against all kinds of western hegemony, culturally, socially, and politically.

Despite the controversial writing and explanation, the most significant figure of hegemony, as was understood, in the MENA region was the establishment of Israel. In the year 1948, and upon the Declaration of Human Rights in the United Nation, millions of citizens have been expelled from their country Palestine, as refuges, and another state have been declared, by the assistance of the west, at the heart of the Middle East. At the moment of justifying this, action as giving a group of people their rights, they automatically deprive others from it without any justification. This is not a case of contradicting concepts, but it could be related to the

concept of utility as “The greatest good for the greatest number of people”, which is not either the case, but it seems to be utility of “the greatest good for the greatest power”.

Beside the culture of the west centrism, and its primacy to lead, which dominated the perception of the people in the MENA region, as a new type of colonization, “cultural colonization”, the support of the US to the newly established country was a clear indication for the continuity of western interest and hegemony in the region. The refusal to declare Israel as a country that leads to development of resistance groups (Arabic communist parties, and religious parties, like Hamas and Hezbollah) creates a status of instability and continuous emergency, an area characterised by wars, resistance, underdevelopment and dependence.

3.3.2. The “New Middle East” Project

The fall of the Soviet Union and its political regime, gave the primacy of power to the US for control over the region, with support from allies like Israel and most of the Arabic leaders. But for this primacy to be legitimate, for its policies to be adopted and accepted by the countries, Josef Nay suggests that they need to “embed [their] policies in multilateral frameworks that take the views of the people in these countries into account” (Nay 13). In order to understand this argument, we will refer to Foucault’s concept of governmentality and biopolitics under the value of utility.

In the explanation of the relationships between the subject, knowledge and power, Foucault says that “utilitarianism is a technology of government, [...] a juridical technology” (Foucault 41), in which the state now will legitimise its sovereignty by the action of utility, through juridical law. Therefore the change of the nature of the law from natural to positive law was based on the calculus of utility of the state, over the utility of the individual, which Foucault

calls “the art of governmentality” (the birth of biopolitics 32) this means the practicing of less political governmentality. So there is a new reality, a new form of state that regulates public authorities in terms of utility, “collective utility (rather than collective will) as general axis of the art of government” (Foucault 43) and the social sphere through the transformation of laws from natural to civil to international, to cosmopolitan, until it reaches the “law enforcement”, which is a “set of instruments employed to give social and political reality to the act of prohibition, in which the formation of law consists”(Foucault, history of sexuality, 254).

This type of “law enforcement” was applied by the establishment of an international organization, which is perceived by the people of the region as part of a nongovernmental type of power and a way toward decentralization of authority and more public freedom. One example could be the flourishing of the democratization campaign in the MENA region (an example of United Nation Developmental Program, United States Agency for International Development) which advocates for democracy, free election, and the need for social, economic, and political reform in the region. This kind of enforced law, could be seen as a form of soft power, as it is powerfully active at the level of civil societies, which adopt its ideology and started to advocate for it.

The project of the New Middle East, which includes the Greater Middle East, should be viewed as a normal historical development of this kind of political ethics based on utility, and it could be depicted early in the map of the MENA region suggested by the American British historian and expert in Oriental studies, Bernard Lewis in 1983 (before the idea of Greater Middle East developed by the Bush doctrine!). This map has divided the area into what he called “Blood Borders”, which divides certain states by sectarian or religious identity. For example it’s possible to divide Iraq into three counties, Sunnah, Shia and Kurds.

The “War or Terror” that was declared by the government of Bush after 9/11, has been followed by a new agenda for the region. The main official document that revealed the change in the U.S strategy and politics is the National Security Strategy of 2002, known as the ‘Bush Doctrine’. The importance of this document lies in the course of redefining enmity and risks by the US, and this was revealed by a change in ‘American geopolitical imagination, designating different countries as hostile or friendly, as well as by defining actions needed to achieve new foreign policy objectives’ (Güney 26)

The war on terrorism in Afghanistan and any possible wars in the Greater Middle East should be backed up and justified in the global level. Otherwise the legitimacy of intervention will not be given to America. The Greater Middle East which consists of “rogue” or “failed” states, according to US classification, will be dangerous to the stability and the interest of the democratic West and especially the US. This is discussed by Flint, in his paper, “How the United States Justified its War on Terrorism”, where he argues that “the power of the world leader rests not on its military strength alone, but rather on a package of innovations that it claims will benefit the whole world” (Flint 1382) so he emphasises that the imagined project of the Greater Middle East aimed to justify the presence of US in the region , as “both soft and hard power terms, in order to prevent the decline of the USA’s hegemonic role” (1390)

The development of this concept would take place during the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel, when the US secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, stated that this war and the failure of Hezbollah would change the reality of the region, “what we’re seeing here [in Israel’s war on Lebanon], in a sense, is the growing, is the ‘birth pangs’ of a ‘New Middle East’ and whatever we do we [the US] have to be certain that we’re pushing forward to the New Middle East [and] not going back to the old one” (qtd in Gulf news).

The failure of Israel's war on Lebanon to bring victory to US, by eradicating Hezbollah, and its failure in Gaza on 2008 (and the public election that brought Hamas to led the government), has given deformed birth to the imagined features of the New Middle East. These two Islamic political parties have changed the strategic plan of US politics, especially with the era of Obama, but didn't bring peace to the region, especially now that concepts like democratization and freedom, human rights arguments, empowerment and need civil rights, have started to turn into internal forces at the level of the civil societies in the Arab countries. And were the media have proposed for a huge propaganda against these resistance groups, like Hezbollah and Hamas, to create internal soft power, at the social level, that could refuse these groups and try to delegitimize their actions.

The Arab Spring movement was a perfect moment for the West to rebuild its New Middle East project, since the chaotic situation in the region would re- legitimize the "risk management project" needed to continue the West's hegemonic action in the MENA region. The war against ISIS, ISIL, and DAESH (all these abbreviations have been bestowed on that group by the west) will keep the primacy of power in the hands of US.

4. Conclusion: Evaluating the Legitimacy of the Political Reform in the MENA Region.

Revolutions, such as Arab Spring, have been always related to certain ideological apparatus, which propose its narratives as an ideal and only way of salvation and freedom. It can be seen as a reactionary act in response to social or political tyranny or despotism, for example the materialists could diagnose the problem in distorted power relations, and for that the solution will be always in resistance to all forms of power (Arkon 91). This ideology comes into action

and forms revolution when societies reach a state of collective awareness about the type of problem and the availability of solutions.

Usually revolutions gain their legitimacy from two directions, either epistemological, which is the theoretical framework of the revolution, the ideas and conceptions that it carries, or from the practical dimension, through evaluating the social and political effect of this movement. The Arab Spring as a revolutionary act has missed both legitimising points, in which neither Islam nor liberal democracy have been theoretically or applicably leading to a real political reform, that could flourish the Arabic region. For any political reform to be legitimate, it should come as a normal historical development, which is homogenous with the socio-political context of the region.

The New Middle East project and the return of Al Khilafa State, will share the same political ethics of utility and both would reflect the change in the international relations of power. These two projects can be visualised as follow:

The Western hegemony in the 21st century:

- Dividing the world, Global North and Global South.
- Advocating for modernity, democracy and globalization.
- Carrying narratives of Western centrism.

The New Middle East project:

- Flourish of democratization campaign in the MENA region.
- Create new map for the region “Blood borders”.
- Benefit from “Creative Chaos” strategy.
- Use of “Soft power” for intrastate conflicts

The Terrorist hegemony

- Dividing the world, Muslim and non-Muslim.
- Classifying enemies: The far enemies, the West, and the near enemies the local government in the Arab states.
- Advocate narratives of nostalgia for the past Islamic empire.

The Islamic State project

- Flourishing of Islamic political parties.
- Creating creative destruction for the national military and social institutions.
- Managing the situation of savagery.
- Declaring the formation of Islamic State: Dawlat Al Khilafah.

4.1. Arab Spring or Arab Ordeal; What Ends and the Good Of Whom?

“For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: A living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question”. (Foucault 143)

The “Spring” did not flower in the MENA region, and winter seems to be long. Chaos and destruction will never be constructive under any ethical justification. These means that have been used by both projects, forced democratization and Islamization, will never lead to a positive end. This global change in defining state sovereignty, the need for risk management, the war on terrorism, the use of soft power, humanitarian and military intervention, and the new geopolitical mapping could legitimize both projects for political reform in the MENA region!

The paradoxical situation that is taking place in the MENA political map after the upheaval, justifies questioning that whether or not revolt was spontaneous and if it was not just a result of triggering factors in the corrupted interstate powers. This paradox could be reflected by

assessing the results of elections that took place in Egypt and Tunisia after the Arab Spring, which brought victory to the Islamic parties in both countries, the Islamic Brotherhood and Al Nahda Islamic party, and through the form of rewriting of the constitution in both of these countries, that resulted in adopting a civil constitution with Islamic reference.

Maybe what was said by the German poet Henry Heine before more than one hundred years ago is absolutely true, regarding the effect of ideas “the philosophical ideas that are proposed by a man from his quiet office, have the power to exterminate a whole civilization” (qtd. in Manif 55), the fragile nature of building states is nothing but the reflection of the Arabic search for a modernized political, as well as social, model outside its reality. If concepts like democracy and civil society find their historical context in Western political and social development, this does not mean the same for the Arabic region, and therefore a deformity while applying the concepts is to be expected.

The argument should be about how to bring these concepts into practice in a particular culture, for the benefit of the people, and how to destroy any thrones of the sacred, in which the sacred could be more than religion. It could be believing that liberalism is the solution.

The political independence of Arab countries from colonization, did not help in the creation of civil states, and the “social texture that had been in a certain period convergent or unified, and has a degree of solidarity, freedom of movement and indwelling, transformed into a network of connections based upon division and diversity” (Manif 161). It is only by moving from intellectual development toward social, economic and political development that societies can civilize and flourish, and thus we could free ourselves from useless traditions and ineffective modernity.

If Mill's argument regarding the effectiveness of any intervention for humanitarian purposes should only be pursued with what he called "civilized" people not "barbarous" people (Mill 4-5), so the democratization campaign in the MENA region will never be effective if the people and their culture in this region continue to be stigmatized to justify other's actions. The same could be concluded regarding the terrorists project of Dawlat Al- Khilafa, since the people in the region, despite their religious culture, are not motivated to bring back this model of governmentality.

What is important in this paper is to show that it is not a conspiracy theory that we are trying to propose or to advocate for, it is more a way of showing that even opposite ideologies can hold the same ethics of hegemony and power, and that these concepts change their representation through history, proposing each time for a developed model of politics, without forgetting to understand what calculation of utility was behind each proposed idea.

Appendix

MENA REGION
(MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA REGION)





The Islamic map of ISIS for the MENA region.

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