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Editoriale

5 Gabriella D'Agostino - Mondher Kilani, *Presentazione / Présentation*

Ragionare

9 Francesca Maria Corrao, *Arab Revolutions: The Cultural Background*

17 Samia Mihoub, *Le cyberactivisme à l'heure de la révolution tunisienne*

33 Seima Soussi, *Comment faire la révolution à l'heure d'internet?*
Regard sur le rôle des médias sociaux dans la révolution tunisienne

41 Nabih Jerad, *La révolution tunisienne: des slogans pour la démocratie aux enjeux de la langue*

Documentare

55 Emir Ben Ayed, *Luttes pour la liberté et la dignité. Témoignage post-révolutionnaire d'un photographe tunisien*

Raccontare

73 Mondher Kilani, *Une expérience de la révolution tunisienne.*
Réflexions recueillies par Gabriella D'Agostino

Ricerca

79 Habib Saidi, *Parcours de la mort subite d'une dictature: Tourisme de colère, façadisme corrompu et révolution touristique*

89 Paola Gandolfi, *Etnografie e lavori sul campo in Maghreb e in Marocco: prima e dopo le «rivoluzioni»*

105 Joni Aasi, *Israël face au Printemps arabe: La force des mouvements populaires*

115 Leggere - Vedere - Ascoltare

127 Abstracts

Francesca Maria Corrao

Arab Revolutions: The Cultural Background

“If a people one day wishes to live fate must answer its call
and the night must fade and the chain must break”
Abu l-Qasim al-Shabbi

The Premises

These verses by the celebrated Tunisian poet al-Shabbi (1898-1930) were the slogan of the revolution that broke out at the beginning of the 2011 and led to the resignation of the President Ben Ali. Political and economic considerations have been taken into account to understand these historical events. Here I will bring the focus to bear on the important role played by education and culture in supporting the Arab awakening of these past months. As the Japanese philosopher Daisaku Ikeda's believes, “nothing exists in complete isolation, everything is related” (Ikeda 1989). Hence I will present, together with an historical introduction, the cultural and social changes that have led Arab societies to the recent historical events.

It is generally recognized that the new media have played an important role, but the general intellectual progress achieved with the spread of the education and empowerment of women should also be taken into account.

As from December 2010, from the apparently calm and uncomplaining Arab society numerous revolts broke out as a young man set himself on fire to protest against the policewoman who seized his merchandise because he had no permit to sell it. The poor man had a university degree, his parents had made many sacrifices to give him a better future, but there was no job for him. The international financial crisis had not spared him, like thousands of other young people; soon photos of his burning body were being sent all over the country and even abroad through mobile telephones and internet. A huge mass protest called upon the corrupt President Ben Ali to leave his post; in less than a month he left the country. Soon after the flames of revolution spread to Egypt, where a protest movement had been contesting Mubarak and his corrupt system for years; in Egypt, as elsewhere in Tunis and Damascus, the presidential oligarchy composed by

his family and the high ranks of the army owned most of the industrialized private sector. There a young veiled woman was calling people to protest, from her blog displaying a verse from the *Quran* that says:

“God will not change your condition unless you change the attitude of your heart” (*Quran*, 13: 11)

She meant that the responsibility to change the situation was in the hands of simple people: they must protest (Corrao 2011: 61).

In Tahrir Square thousands of young people and women arrived chanting and reciting poems against the corrupt system, demanding the resignation of the old oligarchy; soon all the country supported them and they did not move away from the square until the president had abandoned power. The event was contagious: thousands, at first, and then millions, of students and unemployed people burst into in a peaceful protest. All the main squares of the Arab capitals were invaded for months, with simple people demanding justice and freedom.

Thanks to the images sent through internet and the mobile phones, all of a sudden the western journalists discovered that the Arabs were calling for liberal rights, they were not burning the American flag, but just asking their leaders to fight corruption and implement a better policy to address the economic crisis.

In the last few years use of internet, facebook and twitter has spread among simple people, opening up a virtual forum where they can discuss, exchange their opinions and build a movement of solidarity among groups normally divided by social barriers and the heavy censorship. The net has thrown an important bridge between those who remained at home and the emigrants. When the political police in Egypt tried to shut down the web, many Arab students in Europe helped their young Egyptian friends break down the virtual wall raised against their communications.

Years of fear, political repression and total censorship could not prevent the growth of a political conscience. Improvement in the school system, the spread of international literature festivals, proliferation of theatre activities and large-scale distri-

bution of films and music had educated a peaceful new generation. These young people are aware of what their rights should be and ready to give their life to obtain them in order to build a better future. The Iranian student revolt of June 2009 had offered an important example: they knew they could use that mean to express their solidarity and organize a movement. The police were aware of the risk, and in fact one year earlier an Egyptian blogger was killed in the attempt to put an end to his activity. The shock of his death and the sacrifice of Bouziz touched the heart and the pride of young Egyptians; finally they moved to give practical effect to the plea for individual responsibility made in President Obama's speech at Cairo University.

Today's events are the results of a weft of elements threading through centuries of intelligent and tenacious work. To understand the present and imagine the future is useful to have a rapid overview of the background: the key moments, the main actors and crucial trends

East/West Interaction

From the above-mentioned events we can see how important are the interaction and exchange between Eastern and Western thought and technology. This was not the first time: earlier revolutions had been triggered by positive impact with modernity. In the Arab world modern ideas came from Europe during the colonial occupation. The ideals of the French revolution drove the young Arab revolutionaries to pave the way to change in the old Ottoman system; they were aware that the decadence of the sultanate was the cause of the foreign occupation. The Ottoman ruler faced with military defeat decided to improve the military and educational systems. The diffusion of modern ideas through the press influenced the growth of national awareness among the young generations. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries intellectuals in the Arab world have striven to create the cultural background to promote political awakening. Translations, adaptations and creative works of literature and philosophy supplied the words and the ideas to express the feeling of the young generations of Arabs fighting to be emancipated from the medieval Ottoman system.

In Cairo al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) translated into Arabic the concept of country, motherland and freedom, spreading new ideas through the press and enhancing the feeling of belonging, composing the national anthem with modern verses inspired by the French anthem. The empire was huge, and while in Egypt the government adopted the Arabic

language instead of Turkish in administration and education, in Algeria the colonial power adopted French. The reaction to colonial power prompted different behaviours: some people adopted French or British manners and customs, trying to integrate into the new system, while others, more attached to the traditions and religion, refused any contamination, asserting their Islamic cultural diversity

In Syria, Lebanon and Palestine Christian schools educated the new cultural élite and, notwithstanding Ottoman censorship, the intellectuals opened newspapers and promoted translations of European masterpieces. Butrūs al-Bustānī (1819-1883), together with others, forged (1863) the national ideal, fostering the development of freedom movements. Readings, discussions and writings on western ideas stimulated the cultural awakening, awareness of Arab identity and the need to defend their rights. Schools were also opened for girls and Universities admitted women whose rights had been claimed in Cairo by Qāsim Amīn (1863-1908) and Hudā al-Sha'rāwī (1879-1947) (Allen 2000), and in Tunisia by Tāhir Haddād (1899-1935), whose ideas were so influential as to be adopted by the fathers of the Constitution (1959).

The rapid spread of modern thought and ideas among the urban ruling class was not followed by an equal distribution of wealth and benefits among rural people. A patriarchal society, fatalist and misogynous, dominated social relations. Novels like *Zaynab* (1913) by Huseyn Heykal (1888-1956) and *Yawmiyyāt nā'ib fi'l-aryāf* (*Diary of a Countryside Attorney*, 1937) by Tawfīq al-Hākīm (1898-1987) describe a world hostile to change and modernity. The tragedies of immigrants are narrated in the novel by the Syrian Mikhā'il Nu'aymah (1889-1989) in his novel *Abun fi Amrīka wa abun fi 'l-samā'* (*One Father in the Sky and Another in America*, 1917), described misery and injustice with strong realism hoping to touch the heart of the aristocracy, indifferent to and remote from the sufferings of the poor. During the two great wars in the suburban area and in the countryside only the solidarity network of relations created by the Muslim brothers' charitable association were giving some help to the poor.

The international crisis (1928-34) had a negative influence in the whole area, and even if oil exploitation had begun to change the destiny of some countries it had yet to affect the Arab world. The Iraqi poet al-Bayyatī described the misery in the countryside where people had little food and not enough money to buy clothes.

Revolts and revolutions against the colonial powers exploded in the area until the final uprisings that brought many countries to national indepen-

dence (Iraq in 1932, Egypt in 1936, Lebanon in 1941, Libya in 1951, Tunisia in 1956). In this phase cultural awakening was spread through the powerful means of radio, and the wonderful voice of the famous 'Umm Kulthūm sang Nasser's dream of the "Arab unity" (1956). Television and films showed a wider Arab public the dramas and cultural progress of Egyptian society, which soon became a model to imitate. In Cairo the first film production industry in the Arab world was created. The Nobel prize-winner Najīb Mahfūz (1911-2006) had a prominent role in the adaptation of his novel to the screen, and his famous trilogy became the symbol of the transition from the old to modern society: different generations of noble, poor and the new emerging class of bureaucrats were represented in their daily life. Progress and emancipation seemed to be at hand, with the building of the Aswan high dam. The event became an epic tale in *Jawabāt Hirājī al-Qutt* (*Letters of Hirājī al-Qutt*, 1969) by the vernacular poet 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Abnūdī (1938), where he described the effort made by the thousands of poor men coming from all the regions of Egypt to build the monument of modernity.

The industrial development following upon national independence was similarly interwoven with the international market, as it had been in the late Ottoman phase. For example, the Soviet Union economic system was influential in Algeria, Egypt and Syria. The building of the high dam in Aswan was carried out with international funds and mostly Russian technology.

In the Eighties, after the Camp David agreement, Sadat opened the doors of the Egyptian economy to the foreign investors whose capital contributed to the creation of modern industrial structures and the tourist resorts. The same policy followed by the Tunisian and Algerian governments with a view to creating new jobs for the growing population.

Education and The Army

The army has historically played an important role in the revolutions in the Middle East, because the officers have always been the first to receive a modern education in order to improve the military performance of the state; but history tells that once the young officers became aware of the need to change the system, in order to promote a real improvement of the country, they acted to change the rulers. As an example we may recall the Ottoman reform of the Tanzimat (1774-1861), which paved the way for an emerging class of civil servants and officers – the future leaders of revolutionary movements. Much the same happened in Egypt when

Muhammad 'Aly, (ruler of Egypt from 1805 to 1849) created the school of officers, and the Alsun school for translators; the new generations of military and intellectuals were the leaders of the 1882 revolution (Schulze 2000; Lutsky 1969). In the 20th century the officers represented the only emerging social class sufficiently organized to lead the country in the aftermath of the revolutions and substitute the old and corrupt leadership. Once established in power their cooperation with the intellectual supporters came to an end; they abrogated the political parties and opened the way to authoritarian involution.

The military were trained by European experts and the influence of these contacts affected the future international relations of the new Arab leaders with the Western world, as for example the Turks with the German, the Egyptians with the British or the Lebanese with the French.

After the revolution, Nasser brought in free education for the Egyptians and provided all the graduates with jobs in the public administration. A similar plan was promoted by both the Tunisian president Burghiba and the Syrian Asad.

The political crises that followed the military defeat of the Arabs in 1967 opened the way to an economic crises. The intellectuals migrated for the first time to the rich Arab countries where oil income had created the need for an educated middle class to run the new structures (medical, engineers, teachers, lawyers, journalists). The Nobel prize-winner Mahfūz wrote the dramatic story of the young civil servant whose salary was too poor to maintain his family, leaving him wishing he had studied engineering to be able to migrate to the oil countries (*The Day the President Died*, 1985).

The Tunisian government has always supported students but the greater the number of graduates grew the less chances there were for them to find jobs. The economy was under the control of the President's family and the development of the country was paralysed by corruption.

In Egypt there was a similar situation: the writer al-'Aswani tells many stories in the book *Yaqubian Palace* illustrating the situation. He tells of a young man who had studied hard to get a diploma to become a policeman, but has no one to support him, and so fails the exam. From the book emerges an obsolete public service, the same that gave salaries to the graduates in Nasser time, now unable to absorb any longer the growing number of graduates. Due to the financial crisis of the state the salaries are low and many civil servants take bribes to survive. The system of corruption is so widespread that it has got out of control everywhere, not only in Egypt: therefore the sole solution left for many young people is to emigrate. Unfortunately, the cur-

rent international crisis has reduced the demand for employees both in the oil countries and in the west. The higher expectations of the young graduates are not satisfied but the competences acquired have become a boomerang for the ruling class. The students know where the government has failed, demanding more political freedom and equal rights in order to put an end to corruption (al-'Aswani, 2011).

Women's empowerment

Women had played an important role in the modernisation of these societies; education and work were important tools for their empowerment even if the social system is still dominated by a patriarchal mentality and the legislation is backward compared to the cultural standards they have achieved. The educational system has given women many opportunities to work but the percentage of women with a university degree still remains low (Hopkins - Ibrahim 1997).

These societies still maintain traditional social codes, such as the family law, with a conservative interpretation of the Islamic faith that clashes with the needs of the modern working woman. An important exception is the Tunisian Constitution and the new Moroccan family code, the *Mudawana*.

The situation in Egypt is particular. Nasser had provided women with some rights but the gap between the rural areas and the big cities remained huge. Immigration in the big cities has led to a new marginalisation for women who, having lost their jobs in the countryside, had difficulties in finding work in the industrial area. The new generation with a school degree had to fight against the archaic mentality and many had to accept to wear the veil in order to be free to go to school or work.

The almost total absence of social welfare prevents many women from even looking for a job; for a young woman only strong familiar support can give her the chance to work. It is mostly women of the well-off middle class who can manage a job and realize their empowerment, although in recent times as soon as the crisis broke out women were the first to lose their jobs.

The improvement in the educational system and the diffusion of films, theatre, newspapers and radio has greatly influenced the cultural growth of women. Films can influence public opinion, as for instance "*I want a Solution*" by Sa'īd Marzūk (1974); it tells the story of a woman ill-treated by her evil husband; she is unable to provide a living for herself and her children, and demands the right to divorce. The impact of the film was so strong in Egypt that the divorce law was changed, granting

more rights to women (Nicosia 2008).

Another interesting example comes from the Gulf countries, where a recent film tells of three women looking for jobs who finally decide to open a service station. They have to fight against a group of fundamentalists but in the end, thanks to the solidarity of friends and family, they succeed in keeping their jobs.

The NGOs created by women to help women have played an important role supplying many social and health care services. The first to create such an institution was the Egyptian writer Nawāl al-Sa'ādawī, and her example has been followed by others and now in many countries women have the chance to organize themselves in order to implement healthcare, or sell their products, one example being *Caravan*, the ONG created by the Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi. It is still very difficult to get a permit and often these activities are under attack from the fundamentalists. These two examples demonstrate that education can provide the instruments to improve people's conditions. The two writers are just leading examples of how an educated class can improve general social conditions.

From Arab Nationalism To Liberal Islamism

Since the end of colonialism, in most Arab countries the military elite that had won the battle against the foreign rulers had systematically cancelled the few liberal rights acquired under foreign rule. The political parties were dissolved, the militants of the oppositions were imprisoned and whoever was critical of the government was imprisoned. For the sake of nation-building the leaders called for solidarity to implement the structural changes needed to improve the economic conditions of the country. Important changes took place: in Egypt industries created the possibility to develop the country, but soon the working class realized they were producing objects they could never buy.

The Egyptian, Syrian and Tunisian systems granted free education to everybody, creating a new wave of hope. The general progress did not last long, for Egypt was engaged in many wars (Palestine, Yemen and Sudan) and as a consequence of the oil crisis in the 1970s the state started cutting back on welfare considerably (Schulze 2000). The Arab socialist dream slowly lapsed into endless crisis.

Given the failure of Arab welfare, people felt the need to look for new ideologies to promote the development of the country. By the end of the 1970s the Islamic trend started gaining credit, and people thought it could be a right answer to change the corrupt system. When the Islamic revolution was at

its peak the propaganda spread all over the Islamic world. The Saudi Government gained credibility in the face of the crisis of the Nasser model.

With the end of Nasser's dream and the rise of the nationalist one party/one family dictatorships there was a gradual turn to liberalism. Countries like Tunisia (1972) and Egypt (1977) opened up to privatization of the national industries and foreign capital investments. The oligarchy in power took advantage of their position to become lords of the new capitalist phase of development.

The industrial boom produced wellbeing only for a small elite, and the poor people soon realized that they were producing goods they could never buy. The failure of the capitalist project of development in promoting widespread welfare caused riots and protests, over the last twenty years violently repressed with bloody persecution and imprisonment in every country of North Africa and the Middle East. Political repression and economic crisis in the 1970s drove many to emigrate to the Gulf countries, where they could see an apparently less corrupt Islamic system producing more wealth than in their secular homeland. On the other hand, those who emigrated to the West witnessed the end of an illusion: liberal, democratic society was selfish, racist and unjust as it considered immigrants second class citizens.

The tragedy of 9/11 in the United States and war in Afghanistan, first, and then in Iraq, marked the peak of the crisis. The ever-growing violent attacks of al-Qaida revealed the evil intent of the radical fundamentalist, and simple people started turning their backs on them. In many countries groups of pacifist were starting working with the people in different fields, beginning with human rights. The conviction slowly spread that the army was not the right answer.

These in short are the main lines of the historical evolution that opened the path to today's protests. I will now outline a few important elements to understand the social and cultural transformation.

In the last fifty years some countries of the Arab world have achieved considerable goals, improving their economic status and thus achieving the standards required by the World Bank in order to obtain important financial aid to create new structures to fight unemployment. These improvements have not helped protect these countries from the negative effects of the world crisis. Furthermore, the crisis also reduced the need for manpower, with the consequent halt to North African immigration in Europe. These events had a twofold effect: fewer entries by the immigrants and fewer job opportunities in the country. In fact, with the immigrants' money their families had been able to open shops

or set up small businesses at home.

It is beyond our scope here to describe all the major events, so I choose to confine attention here to Tunisia, because it has always been the first country to approve modern reforms, starting with equal rights for women (like the right to divorce and to work), and then creating the tourist industry, television programmes, cultural festivals and the hi-tech industries. Egypt has been the pioneer of the cultural renaissance for two centuries, the breeding ground of political and religious thought of the modern Arab world. The Moroccan writer Muhammad Barrāda wrote in his novel *Like a Summertime that will Never Come Back Again*, that there lived in Cairo many protagonists of the last century's history: world-known artists like the Nobel prize-winner Najīb Mahfūz, and the film makers Yūsuf Shahīn, politicians like the Palestinian leader Yāsir 'Arafāt (1929-2004) and the Algerian president Ben Bella (1918), poets like the Iraqi 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī (1926-1999) and the Sudanese Muhammad al-Faitūrī (1936), Islamists like the al-Jazeera television shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī (1926) and extremists like Ayman al-Zawāhirī (1951), the companion of Bin Ladin, just to mention the most famous.

In Cairo, and also in Tunis, were educated the leaders that have influenced cultural and political events in recent history. The ideals of the new generation were fed with the culture and the dreams of the past generation, the past failures were the engine for the present revolts.

Arab Revolutions: work in progress

Many revolutions took place in the last thirty years, in 1977 in Cairo, in 1982 in Hama, and in 1984 in Tunis, all violently repressed with hundreds of dead, thousands injured and many imprisonments. The media were completely under control of the Government; when Europe called on them to grant freedom and open up to a "democratic system" the ruling class gave the chance to some political parties to run for elections, even though a policy of intimidation and persecution prevented real political activity. In Tunis the famous human rights activist Moncef Marzouki was arrested many times. He reported that there were at least 30 thousand people in jail by the end of the last century. In the Arab world, after 9/11, repression of the Islamic opposition became more violent. At the same time the president Ben Ali had created a chair for human rights and organized international congresses to show the western partners that there was freedom of speech in his country. In Tunisia, as

in Egypt, the government had created a sort of pact with some intellectuals, giving them the possibility to organize some cultural activities. International films festivals, book fairs, and theatrical events were used to show a normality that was only apparent. These intellectuals used these occasions to keep people aware of their rights, using literature and films to express their protest through metaphors. For example, the Tunisian filmmaker Nouri Bouzid in the film *Safā'ih min dhahab* (*Golden clog*, 1989) narrates his humiliating experience in jail when he was imprisoned because of his political ideals. Yūsuf, the hero, is disillusioned: seeking his identity, he feels he has failed as a father, husband and politician. He is unable to find a place for himself in society and decides to commit suicide. Rising on the ashes of his failure, symbol of the leftist intellectuals that were too far from the real country, appears his brother the Islamist proposing an aberrant moral and cultural model, unknown in the tolerant and multicultural history of Tunisia (Nicosia 2008: 94). The filmmaker believes that man must free himself from this collective alienation that makes him passive and fatalist; he must take action starting from his personal revolution.

In the last twenty years the ruling classes had become ever more distant from real society, unable to govern transition from dictatorship towards modernity and democracy. The most difficult task was to grant equal rights and duties to the different political and cultural realities of the country. Renowned philosophers have investigated the best path to follow in order to move on from a traditional society to a modern one. For example the Syrian Philosopher Sādik al-Azm proposes following the Turkish secular model, while the Egyptian Hasan Hanafy considers the opportunity to reform some aspects of the Islamic tradition (Corrao 2011, 46). Writers like Khālid al-Khamissī in his short stories collection entitled *Taxi* (2007) denounced the corruption of those in power and the desperation of the poor. It would have been easy to understand what was going on by reading the novels or taking into the due consideration the criticisms of the filmmakers.

The political circles, both Arab and European, were deaf to the people's protest as they were used to dealing only with political leaders, and considered strikes and demonstrations as expressions of a small marginalized opposition. Some sociologists had on the base of accurate analysis predicted that the conditions were unbearable and a courageous change of economic direction was needed to avoid the eventuality of an explosion (Hopkins - Ibrahim 1997). The interaction between foreign capital interests, the pressure of the World Bank with its western standards and the greed of the leaders,

sure of their police control over protest, eventually led to overestimation of the people's apathy. The complete control of the media had created a virtual reality that did not correspond to the effective dramatic and hopeless conditions of thousands of young unemployed. This generation had been brought up with the ideals of freedom and the frustrations of their parents' failure in the protest of the late 1970s. The link between the different generations was evident; suffice it to recall that the organizers of the Tahrir protest gave their movement the name "6 April" to commemorate the date of a workers' strike in 2008 (Gervasio 2011). In the past twenty years hundreds of strikes have taken place even though not reported: young workers were taking up the heritage of the old movements with the support of intellectuals and witnesses of the past political experiences.

Other countries have been, and some still are in revolt. I will start by recalling Syria because it is a key country. It has an important cultural history, a strong intellectual class, partly emigrated to Lebanon or Europe, like the famous poet Adonis. Since the 19th century major political and philosophical theories were born there, from the "Baath" political party (1936) to the Islamic illuminism of Sadik al-Azm. Syria's national unity is important for the stability of the area; in fact, its borders touch the turbulent area of Iraq, from where many refugees arrived escaping from Saddam Hussein's persecutions, 2003 war and present disorders. A crucial ground of conflict is mount Golan, from where Israel threatens Damascus's security. Also Saudi Arabia is considered to be a dangerous neighbour as it is known to be a strong supporter of the Sunni against the Shiite leaders of the country. Lebanon is even more critical because of the years of the Syrian military influence during the civil war in the country: the anti-Syrian political groups accuse the military of having some responsibilities in the murder of the former Lebanese president Harirī. On the contrary, the Hezbollah party, together with the Iranian government, are supporting the Syrian government in their anti-Israel policy. A clear picture of the different Lebanese factions is traced in the novel *Beirut "Nightmares"* (1975) by the Syrian writer Ghāda al-Sammān. The book narrates the conflicts among the rival ethnic, religious and political groups that are fighting one against the other in the name of freedom. A social presentation of the modern history of Syria is offered in a novel by Rafik Shamy, *The Dark Side of Love*. The Syrian writer exiled in Germany describes the socio-political life of the country narrating the saga of a Christian family from the time of Ottoman rule until the present time.

Turkey had a strong influence in Syria during the

last century, until the end of the Ottoman Empire; recently the two governments had started on renewed economic cooperation. Now Ankara is looking to find a peaceful solution, and therefore helps the Syrian oppositions to find a common platform of discussion in order to move to a peaceful solution of the conflict; the interest also lies in the fact that the Kurds' opposition is dangerously active on the Syrian borders. The area is highly problematic and therefore a positive solution takes time and a different approach than the one adopted in Libya.

In the other states the situation is slightly different; in Bahrain, for instance, the revolution has been firmly repressed with the help of the Saudi army. Saudi influence is strong also in supporting the Yemenite regime, where even if the president Sâlih has long been in a Saudi hospital the government is still fighting against its own people.

In all these countries there are similar characteristics: a traditional system standing in the way of empowerment for women, the lack of a modern constitution and a structure of solid state institutions able to implement and grant same rights to all citizens, and the lack of freedom of opinion and expression. As mentioned before, in Tunisia and Egypt the economic crisis has destroyed the welfare system that had been created in the 1960s. In these countries the Muslim brothers, thanks to their network of solidarity, have built a system of social aid for poor and old people; for these activities they have gained significant popular support. The secular opposition groups have more difficulties in creating support networks; only recently have their social activities gained visibility with the help of the NGOs. In many countries, where a real multi-party political system has not taken off, the state structure is weak and in many fields the logic of family cooptation or corruption still prevails over meritocracy; outside the urban area a strong clan structure still predominates. This system has completely paralysed the economy, with the result that there is lack of competition and opportunities for the emerging class of new graduates. It is a hopeless situation and for this reason they keep fighting: they don't want to live without hope, and faith in the possibility to create a better condition for themselves and future generations.

Real democratic elections, as took place in Tunisia, will bring about the challenge that is to keep a democratic debate alive. What really matters now is if the winners manage to maintain a democratic and secular state. The revolution had proved that the people are ready to discuss and respect the different groups of opinion: for example, in Tahrir Square the Muslims were protecting the prayer of the Copts, and vice versa. The question now is

whether the political parties will be up to the situation; in fact, if the majority is gained by an Islamic party or by the old party supported by the army, the new parliaments first and the governments later should be strong enough to respect the opinion of the oppositions and create institutions that grants rights and respect to all the citizens.

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Arab Revolutions: The cultural Background

Arab Revolutions are the result of a long process of cultural growth: the need to address world economic crisis made evident the clash between expectations and the inadequacy of the political elite. Looking back over the historical crises in the Arab world we recognize similar patterns. The Arab awakening has, since its early days, shown the presence of few common elements: education and military reforms, spread of new ideas, demographic growth and a new generation with high expectations. In the past either the ruling class had repressed the revolutionary movements (Ottoman, Colonial powers) or the army had put their governments to an end (Nasser and Asad). In the present experience there are new elements: women's empowerment, new media and the growing role of civil society with both secular and Islamic trends.

The critical elements are economic, social and also legal: in fact, the revolutions have shown up the fragility of societies that still maintain traditional social codes, like the family law, with a conservative interpretation of the Islamic faith(s?) that clashes with the needs of the modern working woman.

Furthermore, the Governments were not able to answer to the higher expectations of the young graduates, and their competences became a boomerang: a ruling class that proved unable to govern transition from dictatorship towards modernity and democracy. The new media helped to bring together the different groups of young people that had already worked to change the situation in the past years. The most difficult task now is to grant equal rights and duties to the different political and cultural realities of the country. This paper will examine these elements with a view to understanding the changes taking place in these countries through the lenses of the socio-political actors that emerged in the region and that are likely to play an increasingly prominent and assertive role in the future.

Keywords: Culture; Gender; Secularism; Education; Media

Le rivoluzioni arabe: Il background culturale

Le rivoluzioni arabe sono il frutto di un lungo processo di crescita culturale che si è trovato in conflitto con una inadeguata classe politica, incapace di rispondere alla crisi economica internazionale. Uno sguardo alla storia moderna del mondo arabo evidenzia alcuni fattori ricorrenti nelle fasi rivoluzionarie: la riforma dell'educazione e dell'esercito, l'innovazione nella comunicazione, la crescita demografica e ambiziose giovani generazioni

animate da nuovi ideali. Le esperienze pregresse hanno visto concludersi la fase rivoluzionaria o nella sanguinosa repressione da parte dei regimi (Ottomano, coloniale) o con la fine di questi *manu militari* (Nasser e Asad). Le rivoluzioni in atto aggiungono delle novità: l'*empowerment* delle donne, l'internazionalizzazione dei *new media* e il ruolo crescente della società civile rappresentata sia da gruppi laici che religiosi.

Gli elementi critici, oltre alla crisi economica, sono di natura legale e sociale. Il cambiamento che si sta compiendo nella regione ha evidenziato la fragilità di società che ancora mantengono codici tradizionali di comportamento – come la legge dello stato di famiglia in cui prevale un'interpretazione conservatrice della *shari'a* – che contrastano con le esigenze della donna lavoratrice moderna.

Le ambiziose aspettative della giovane generazione di laureati sono state disattese dai governi mentre le competenze acquisite si sono rivelate dei boomerang poiché hanno reso evidente l'incapacità della classe al potere di gestire la transizione dalla dittatura verso la modernità e la democrazia.

La sfida consiste nel garantire uguali diritti e doveri alle diverse realtà culturali e politiche locali. I *new media* hanno agito da catalizzatore tra le varie forze presenti associando giovani che già da anni si muovevano alla ricerca di spazi per promuovere il cambiamento. Questi elementi saranno qui esaminati per comprendere i cambiamenti in atto nei paesi toccati dal vento della rivoluzione a partire dalla visione degli attori socio-politici che le hanno promosse e che avranno un ruolo preminente in futuro.

Parole chiave: Cultura; Genere; Secolarismo; Educazione; Media

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Cyberactivism at the time of the revolution in Tunisia

In this paper, we examine the contribution of the social Web in the events that led to the fall of the regime of Ben Ali in January 14, 2011. We take an interest in cyberactivism during the revolution for thinking about the ways of writing and archiving of the collective memory of Tunisia. In addition, the role played by cyberactivists through censored social platforms and websites is especially surprising in the sequence of events leading to the collapse considering how strong was the repression. We study the tools, methods and procedures of the actions carried out by cyberactivists to bypass repression, highlighting how in social events the Web acted as a relay of information, a catalyst of contestation and, since January 15, 2011, an outlet of the trauma of Ben Ali's fall. We also investigate

about how coordination between the Web and the street took place in the mobilization of the protest. Finally, we reflect on the changing role of online activists in post-revolutionary Tunisia and the need to redefine their roles, their speeches and their goals. The debate about reclaiming the public sphere, a watermark of our analysis, permits to observe how the reconstruction process is at work. The learning of democratic public debate takes place in an context charged with conflict, tension and disagreements of various kinds.

Keywords: Revolution; Censorship; Public sphere; Tunisia; Social web

Il "cyberattivismo" al tempo della rivoluzione tunisina

In questo articolo si prende in esame il contributo del social web nella catena di eventi che porterà alla caduta del regime di Ben Ali, il 14 gennaio 2011. Il nostro interesse è rivolto al "cyberattivismo" al tempo della rivoluzione per riflettere sulle procedure di scrittura e archiviazione della memoria collettiva della Tunisia. Inoltre, il ruolo dei "cyber-attivisti" su piattaforme sociali e siti web censurati, è stato tanto più sorprendente nella sequenza degli eventi che hanno portato al crollo del regime quanto più forte era l'azione di repressione. Il nostro studio si concentra dunque sugli strumenti, le modalità e le procedure d'azione messe in atto dai "cyberattivisti" per bypassare le misure repressive. Questa analisi permette di evidenziare la funzione di trasmissione delle informazioni che il Web ha giocato in questi eventi, di catalizzatore di una parte della contestazione e, a partire dal 15 gennaio 2011, di sfogo delle reazioni seguite allo shock della caduta di Ben Ali. Ci siamo interrogati anche sulle modalità di coordinamento tra la rete e la strada nella mobilitazione della contestazione.

Infine, si è anche riflettuto sull'evoluzione del ruolo dei "cyberattivisti" nella Tunisia post-rivoluzionaria e sulla necessità di ridefinire i loro ruoli, i loro discorsi e i loro obiettivi. Il dibattito sulla riappropriazione della sfera pubblica, che appare in filigrana da questa analisi, permette di osservare il processo di ricostruzione che è in atto. L'apprendimento del dibattito pubblico democratico avviene in un contesto carico di tensioni e di divergenze di varia natura.

Parole chiave: Rivoluzione; Censura; Sfera pubblica; Tunisia; Social Web.

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How to make a revolution in the Internet age: The role of

the social media in the Tunisian revolution

The Tunisian revolution has surprised the whole world. First, because no one anticipated it. Second, because the overthrow of the dictatorial regime occurred in such a short time that the Tunisians themselves were amazed. To explain this phenomenon, the conclusion has emerged rapidly: Internet and specifically social media played an unprecedented role in the Tunisian revolution. Commentators, therefore, referred to it as «cyber-revolution», «Facebook revolution» or «2.0. revolution». However, after the fervor of events, analysts have changed their minds. Today, they tend to adopt a more nuanced tone and they relativize social media contribution to the popular protest movement.

For the Tunisian people, this revolution is basically a popular revolt against the social and economic injustice, a struggle for freedom and dignity. Yet, despite the rapid succession of events, a bloody repression took place. That is why considering social networks as the single explanatory factor of this protest movement is reductive. In the meantime, it's important to recognize the significant role they played in the information dissemination and the popular mobilization. The Tunisian revolution is therefore, the work of both protesters from the marginalized cities and neighborhoods who faced the police and also social media young users who challenged cyber censorship and joined the dissenters diffusing their cause into the entire world. During this popular uprising, Tunisians have changed their use of social media which have become a political activism tool.

Keywords: Cyber-activism; Cyber-revolution; Social media revolution; Online freedom of speech; Internet censorship

Come fare la rivoluzione nell'era di Internet: il ruolo dei social media nella rivoluzione tunisina

La rivoluzione tunisina ha sorpreso il mondo intero. Innanzitutto perché non era stata prevista da nessuno e in secondo luogo perché il rovesciamento del regime dittatoriale è avvenuto in tempi così brevi da stupire i Tunisini stessi. Spiegare questo fenomeno è semplice, poiché si arriva rapidamente alla conclusione che Internet e in modo particolare i *social media* hanno giocato un ruolo senza precedenti. Per questo motivo i commentatori hanno parlato spesso, in questo caso, di «cyber-revolution», di «Facebook revolution» o di «2.0. revolution». Tuttavia, dopo il fervore causato dagli eventi, gli analisti hanno cambiato opinione. Oggi tendono invece ad usare toni più sfumati e a relativizzare il contributo dei *social media* nel movimento di protesta popolare.

Per il popolo tunisino questa rivoluzione è fondamentalmente una rivolta contro l'ingiustizia economica e sociale, una lotta per la libertà e per la dignità. Una repressione sanguinosa della rivolta ha avuto luogo ancora

una volta anche a dispetto della rapida successione degli eventi. Questo è il motivo per il quale considerare i *social network* come l'unico fattore di questa protesta è riduttivo. Al tempo stesso, è importante riconoscere il ruolo significativo che hanno giocato nella diffusione delle notizie e nella mobilitazione popolare. La rivoluzione tunisina è perciò sia opera di dimostranti provenienti da città marginalizzate e dai dintorni che hanno affrontato la polizia sia di giovani utilizzatori dei *social media* che hanno sfidato la censura in Internet, unendosi ai contestatori e portando avanti la loro causa in tutto il mondo. Durante questa rivolta popolare i Tunisini hanno cambiato il loro modo di usare i *social media* che sono diventati strumenti di attivismo politico.

Parole chiave: Cyberattivismo; Cyber-rivoluzione; Rivoluzione dei *social media*; Libertà di parola *on line*; Censura in Internet

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The Tunisian revolution: from slogans for democracy to language as power.

This article proposes that the Arab revolution is first and foremost a speech event. Drawing on the case of Tunisia where the revolution began, it examines the slogans of the revolution calling for "liberty" and "dignity" and other words that made History. Then, the article considers some semantic questions related to the Islamist/secularist dichotomy that has taken center stage since the revolution in the political debate for elections and where words became cultural stakes. And finally, it explores the emergence of the issue of the maternal language, colloquial Arabic as a political action challenging transition towards democracy that moves against the use of classical Arabic, as it excludes many Tunisians in Tunisia and more particularly in the diaspora.

Keywords: Slogans; Islamist; Secularization; Diglossia; Discourse analysis; Sociolinguistics

La rivoluzione tunisina: dagli slogan per la democrazia alle sfide della lingua.

Questo contributo analizza la rivoluzione araba in quanto evento linguistico. Esso si concentra sull'esempio tunisino, poi imitato nel resto della regione, per studiarne in primo luogo il potere di mobilitazione di slogan semplici e pragmatici che hanno espresso rivendicazioni politiche di *libertà* e di *dignità* e che hanno avuto risonanza in tutta la regione araba. Queste parole e le altre, che hanno raccontato e fatto la Storia, sono analizzate come

atti linguistici che hanno abbattuto la dittatura, mentre reclamavano con urgenza l'accesso alla democrazia. Il contributo analizza anche alcuni problemi semantici posti dai termini del dibattito politico in vista delle elezioni della Costituente e di cui la dicotomia «islamisti/laici-modernisti» è stata interpretata come una posta fondamentale della società. Infine, si riflette sul problema della lingua madre che ignora questo vocabolario politico, e che costituisce la prima sfida della democrazia in un caso come quello dell'arabo in cui la lingua ufficiale, *fusha*, esclude una buona parte dei Tunisini di Tunisia e della diaspora, rappresentati per la prima volta nella Tunisia della seconda repubblica.

Parole chiave: Slogans; Islamista; Secolarizzazione; Diglossia; Analisi del discorso; Sociolinguistica.

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Struggles for freedom and dignity. A post-revolutionary account of a Tunisian photographer.

The text and the photos are a a posteriori subjective testimony of the author on the Tunisian revolution and its development, its causes and its actors as well as its outcome almost a year after its release.

Keywords: Revolution; Freedom; Tunisian youth; Dignity; Honor

Lotte per la libertà e la dignità. Testimonianze post-rivoluzionarie di un fotografo tunisino.

Questo testo e le foto sono una testimonianza soggettiva *a posteriori* dell'autore sulla rivoluzione tunisina, sul suo svolgimento, sulle cause, sugli attori e sui suoi esiti a quasi un anno dal suo scoppio.

Parole chiave: Rivoluzione; Libertà; Gioventù tunisina; Dignità; Onore

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Itinerary of the sudden death of a dictatorship. Tourism anger, corrupt facades and tourist revolution

This article looks at tourism and its link with the Tunisian revolution, both before and after it began. Consequently, the author adopts both a backward and forward looking perspective. In the first half, tourism is examined as one of

the major contributing factors to this revolution, especially as an economic sector that has been more beneficial for some regions than others, with all the social inequalities that engenders. In the second half, tourism is examined from the perspective of its potential to ensure Tunisia's progress in two ways: via a revolution in its tourism infrastructures and cultural potential, and by way of incorporating its new revolutionary image into its tourism. Accordingly, the article will discuss the aspirations for renewal in Tunisian tourism, which are being expressed in post-revolutionary discourse and museum exhibits.

Keywords: Tourism; Revolution; Dictatorship; Social inequalities; Crises

Itinerario della morte improvvisa di una dittatura. La reazione del turismo e la rivoluzione turistica

Questo articolo analizza le ripercussioni che sul turismo ha avuto la rivoluzione tunisina, sia prima sia dopo il suo inizio. Per questo motivo l'autore adotta una duplice prospettiva che guarda sia al periodo precedente la rivoluzione che a quello seguente. Nella prima parte del lavoro il turismo è visto come uno dei fattori che maggiormente hanno contribuito alla rivoluzione, soprattutto in quanto settore economico che, malgrado i disequilibri sociali che esso genera, ha portato più benefici in alcune regioni che in altre. Nella seconda parte il turismo è esaminato a partire dalla prospettiva del potenziale che esso assicura al progresso tunisino, in due modi: sia attraverso una rivoluzione delle infrastrutture turistiche e del potenziale culturale; sia attraverso l'inclusione di questa nuova immagine rivoluzionaria della Tunisia nel turismo. Infine sono discusse le aspirazioni di rinnovamento nel turismo tunisino, espresse nel discorso post-rivoluzionario e nelle esposizioni museali.

Parole chiave: Turismo; Rivoluzione; Dittatura; Disuguaglianze sociali; Crisi

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Ethnographies and fieldworks in Maghreb and in Morocco: before and after the "revolutions"

The Arab "revolutions" make us question about the dynamics of change, even the most complex and hidden ones, which have been ongoing in several Arab countries of the Mediterranean. As a matter of fact, only few ethnographic researches have been able to partially observe them. Here, we will focus on Maghreb, where the ongoing changes que-

stion us about the contribution of social and human sciences to the different modalities of observing and carrying out fieldwork, as well as to the multiple ways of narrating the complex heterogeneity and even the ambiguity of the contemporary context.

We propose to focus our attention on the Moroccan case study and especially on the history of social sciences in the Moroccan educational contexts, with the aim of grasping the complex interrelations between the history of these sciences and some key issues such as the weight of ideologies, the linguistic issue, the instrumental use of Islam, the conception of society behind the educational choices. In other words, we would like to observe the eternal relationship between research and politics, contextualising it in a specific national case. Within a historical perspective of the ethnographic research carried in Morocco, we will try to analyse some of the most recent works concerning the youngsters, their ways of expressing themselves, their artistic productions, the impact of the new media on their re-elaboration of the norms and on their daily behaviour, the emergence of social and political requests in connection with the lack of fundamental rights. Nowadays, some young Moroccan and Maghrebi researchers have chosen to observe the most recent ongoing events in Morocco and in Maghreb from inside and for many of them the theatres of the uprisings and of the demonstrations have become their fieldworks. Within this framework, we ask questions such as: what is actually changing in the subjects and modalities of their research, while such a fundamental socio-political change is going on?

All these issues refresh and renovate the debate between research and politics and oblige us to investigate the mobile relationship - within the Mediterranean area - between ethnographies and their fields, especially in contemporary Maghreb.

Keywords: Morocco; Social Sciences; Ethnographic revolutions; Anthropological research; Politics

Etnografie e lavori sul campo in Maghreb e in Marocco: prima e dopo le "rivoluzioni"

Le "rivoluzioni" arabe ci interrogano a proposito delle dinamiche di cambiamento, anche quelle più sotterranee e complesse, in atto da anni nei paesi arabi del Mediterraneo e che solo certe ricerche etnografiche hanno saputo parzialmente osservare. Il nostro sguardo si focalizza sul Maghreb, dove i processi di trasformazione in corso ci sollecitano sull'apporto delle scienze sociali e umane in rapporto alle modalità di osservare e di svolgere lavori sul campo, ma anche di narrare la complessa eterogeneità e ambiguità della realtà contemporanea. La proposta è allora di concentrarci sul caso marocchino e di ripercorrere la storia delle scienze sociali nei contesti di formazione, per scoprirne le complesse interrelazioni con alcune questioni chiave quali quella linguistica, l'uso

strumentale dell'Islam, il peso delle ideologie, i progetti di società nascosti dietro alle scelte educative e i principali processi sociopolitici. Tutti segni tangibili dell'etero rapporto tra ricerca e politica, che si concretizzano in uno specifico contesto nazionale. Partendo da una prospettiva storica dell'evolversi delle ricerche etnografiche in Marocco, si intendono analizzare alcuni dei lavori più recenti inerenti i giovani, le loro modalità di esprimersi e le loro produzioni artistiche, l'impatto dei nuovi media sulla riformulazione delle norme e sui comportamenti quotidiani, l'evolversi di alcune domande sociali e politiche in relazione alla mancanza di diritti fondamentali. Oggi, rispetto agli eventi più recenti in atto in Marocco e in Maghreb molti ricercatori hanno scelto di osservarli "dall'interno", i teatri delle rivolte e delle manifestazioni sono diventati terreno dei loro lavori sul campo. Come cambiano gli oggetti e le modalità di indagare con un così importante cambiamento del contesto sociopolitico? Tali interrogativi rinnovano il dibattito tra ricerca e politica (tra ricerca e centri di formazione alla stessa), invitandoci ad indagare il nesso mobile – all'interno dell'area mediterranea – tra etnografie e terreni su cui esse si realizzano, nei singolari contesti maghrebini contemporanei in divenire.

Parole chiave: Marocco; Scienze sociali; Rivoluzioni etnografiche; Ricerca antropologica; Politica

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Israel face to the Arab Spring: The power of popular movements

The Arab spring, defined in terms of popular mobilization against authoritarianism, represents primo a domestic change with regional impacts or with strategic implications at the regional level that can be described very well by the "end of the reduced siege". The trend of radicalization goes behind the cleavage radical and moderate regimes; it raises the fear from the emergence of a Sunnite majority's regime with a hegemonic position in the region. We are in presence of strategic thought of "Sykes-Picot style" (the cleavage minority and majority regimes). In the second place the Arab spring indicates a mobilization against the non-representation of the interest of the majority of citizens in the political map. By attacking the large gap between the governed and the governing, the Arab spring is a regional event. The mobilization of popular movements in the Arabic world has offered a repertoire of collective actions to be imitated by Palestinians and Israelis. Here, the Arab spring and in ideological terms provides an opportunity for the Pax democratica. The movements of protest in Israel can contribute to the integration of Israel in the region out of its "state of siege". But for the realization of that,

changes have to be effectuated also at the level of political symbolism of the Arab-Israeli conflict reflected in "essentialist" approach to Israeli democracy.

Keywords: Arab spring; Popular movements; Radicalization; Reduced siege; Democratization; Political symbolism

Israele di fronte alla Primavera araba: la forza dei movimenti popolari

La primavera araba, definita in termini di mobilitazione popolare contro l'autoritarismo, rappresenta innanzitutto un cambiamento interno con impatti regionali o con implicazioni strategiche a livello regionale che può essere descritto in modo efficace dalla "fine dell'assedio ridotto". La tendenza alla radicalizzazione è conseguenza della scissione tra regimi radicali e moderati che solleva dal timore dell'insorgere di un regime a maggioranza sunnita, con una posizione egemone nella regione. Siamo in presenza di pensiero strategico alla "Sykes-Picot" (scissione tra regimi di maggioranza e di minoranza). In secondo luogo, la primavera araba indica una mobilitazione contro la mancata rappresentazione degli interessi della maggioranza dei cittadini nello scenario politico. Si tratta di un evento regionale nella misura in cui si oppone al grande divario tra governati e governanti. La mobilitazione dei movimenti popolari nel mondo arabo ha offerto agli Israeliani e ai Palestinesi un repertorio di azioni collettive da imitare. In questo contesto, la primavera araba offre, in termini ideologici, un'opportunità per la *Pax democratica*. I movimenti di protesta in Israele possono contribuire all'integrazione di Israele nella regione fuori dal suo "stato d'assedio". Ma per la realizzazione di questo obiettivo, i cambiamenti devono essere operati anche a livello del simbolismo politico del conflitto arabo-israeliano che si riflette nell'approccio "essenzialista" alla democrazia israeliana.

Parole chiave: Primavera araba; Movimenti popolari; Radicalizzazione; Assedio ridotto; Democratizzazione; Simbolismo politico