**GLOBALIZATION, ARAB SPRING AND THE CHANGING SOCIAL VALUES**

**By**

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**ABSTRACT**

The tumultuous and eponymous events that set-off socio-political changes in the Maghreb from November 2010 were a confirmation or, better still, manifestation of a lager process which had gradually but steadily emerged a major factor in the socio-economic formation of the globe. This factor is no other than the process of globalization; a process that was heightened by the revolutions in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the emergence of the New Media. Until the days of the social media, strong men who held authoritarian sway in the Maghreb carried on without any qualms as to the security of their political formation. But the New Media revolution changed all that. This work captures the role of globalization in the revolutions that swept through the Maghreb which have come to be known as the Arab Spring.

**Introduction**

As the year 2010 gave way to 2011, the world witnessed a surge of activism, nay, a revolution in unexpected quarters – the Maghreb. It is a region whose history has been a tale of suppression and fundamentalism. A region that has been home to long term strongmen rulers; a region alien to the spirit and ethos of democracy. It is a region in which free thought had been held at bay by strongmen in power from Ben Alli’s Tunisia to Mubarak’s Egypt, from Gaddafi‘s Libya to Algeria and Morocco. The zeitgeist crossed into the Middle East and sprang off a challenge to the old order. From Syria to Yemen, Bahrain to Jordan, the old order of shepherding affairs of men could not suffice anymore. Change was in the air. The Arab Spring was born. How could this have been possible in the Arab World?

Since the collapse of communism in 1991, a process of paradigmatic change has been sweeping through the globe. It is a process which is shaping events in the world and is itself shaped by events in the world. The world seems to be converging in almost every facet of existence. Values flow without borders. The barriers of time and space keep shrinking; local events keep assuming global significance. The web has become the order of the day. Human activities are increasingly interwoven; trade, politics and social relations not only continue to cross borders but are often regulated by forces outside national boundaries. Some institutions emerge and direct human affairs on a global scale. Communication has conquered space and time and interpersonal interactions are universal and instantaneous. The globe has been digitalized. Welcome to the new world order. The era of globalization.

Globalization has been contentiously defined by many an author or commentator. The ambivalence that surrounds the phenomenon is evident in the variance of definitions authors have bequeathed it. While some authors have seen it as salutary process to be hastened and imposed all over the world, others have seen it as an instrument of Western domination. Still some see it purely as an economic phenomenon. But it could be argued that globalization is the world order that succeeded the Cold War as a global order.

For Gautam Sen, globalization ‘pertains to integrations between economies of all types, at different levels of development and encompasses developed and developing countries.’1 For him, globalization is an economic activity hence he characterizes it as a process involving the absorption of developing economies into the world economy dominated by developed countries. For Stephen Castles however, globalization is ‘a process of change which affects all regions of the world in a variety of sectors including the economy, technology, politics, the media, culture and the environment’2. Evidently, Stephen Castles sees globalization as an all-encompassing phenomenon, permeating every facet of human existence. Even though Justin Rosenberg pointed out that the very idea of globalization as an explanatory schema was fraught with difficulties, he did note that the theory of globalization cannot be faulted as the term ‘globalization’ can be viewed as a descriptive category denoting either geographical expansion of social process or the intensification of worldwide social relations.3 His opinion is so apt today as social interactions are increasingly expanding and intensifying on a global scale. The Arab Spring to a great extent is a by-product of this global intensification and expansion of social interactions. While Josef Stiglitz views globalization from the prism of the unhealthy relationship between the West dominated global financial institutions and market regulating bodies4 Thomas Friedman views globalization as the succeeding world order that is so dynamic that it is changing the world faster than the world can comprehend it.5 For Friedman, "globalization is not simply a trend or fad but is, rather, an international system. It is the system that has replaced the old Cold War system, and, like that Cold War System, globalization has its own rules and logic that today directly or indirectly influence the politics, environment, geopolitics and economics of virtually every country in the world."6

**GLOBALIZATION 3.0 AND ARAB SPRING**

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the ending of the Cold War, the collapse of communism and the subsequent triumph of liberal democracy were to Francis Fukuyama, momentous events that have altered decisively, not just the history of the world, but also the global modus Vivendi. Hence, Fukuyama declared the end of history and the manifestation of the last man; that is: the manifestation of the final form of social existence. For Fukuyama, the triumph of liberal democracy was the globalization of a culture and a global order he considers the highest historical evolution.

In 1992 however, in response to Francis Fukuyama’s prognosis, Samuel Huntington declared that the fall of communism and the triumph of liberal democracy did not usher in uhuru as such in the global order but only signalled the death of ideology and ushered in a new form of conflict – the clash of civilizations. For Huntington, the end of the Cold War signalled the end of the clash of ideologies but engendered the clash of civilizations which was hitherto subdued by the clash of ideologies. Summing his position, Huntington wrote,

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will mark global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.7

The crux of Huntington’s thesis is that globalization engenders a conflict of cultures which will engender clashes of civilizations and religions. He wrote at the demise of Cold War. Echoing the same sentiments, Benjamin Barber, in his McWorld vs Jihad states that globalization, represented by the neologism ‘McWord’ is in conflict with forces of tradition, religious orthodoxy, nationalism and theocracy. As globalization imposes a culture of its own on a population, the tribal forces feel threatened and react. More than just economic, the crises that arise from these confrontations often take on a sacred quality to the tribal elements.8 This was the crises Thomas Friedman captured in his earlier book, The Lexus and the Olive Tree, where he ‘posits that the world is currently undergoing two struggles: the drive for prosperity and development, symbolized by the Lexus, and the desire to retain identity and traditions, symbolized by the olive tree’9.

But globalization has taken a new dimension. A process of levelling is taking place, hence Friedman has declared that the world is flat. In his book, The World is Flat 3.0: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century, Thomas Friedman put forth a theory of three eras of globalization. The first era of globalization according to Friedman lasted from 1492 1800. In this era globalization was championed by nation-states. It was a case of nation-states globalizing. It manifested in nation-states extending their influences internationally in colonization and commerce. The era was led by the British. He called it globalization 1.0. “You went global through your country”10 . This era of globalization shrank the world from size big to size medium.11 Then entered the era of globalization 2.0 which lasted from 1800 to 2000. It was an era of globalization driven by multinational corporations. “You went global through your company”.12 Companies went global in search of cheaper labour and better markets. Then the last and the most significant era globalization is what Friedman termed globalization 3.0, stretching from 2000 t0 date. Without the indices of globalization 3.0, there would have been no Arab Spring. It is an era of globalization championed by individuals. In this era of globalization, the individual person can act directly on the global scene. There seems to be a level playing ground where the individual can act on scenes previously exclusive to nations-states and multinational corporations. This was made possible by revolutions in internet technology. The invention of the commercial browser and the personal computers enabled individuals to tap into the internet technology achieve an interconnectedness which resulted in a global pool and meshing of billions of people, making irrelevant the barriers of geo-politics, culture, space and time. It was made possible by the installation of optic fibre cables all over the world which made communication so cheap and almost free. Thus, in the dynamics of globalization 3.0, the individual had the reach, virtually of the whole world on the screens of the internet enabled mobile phone in his hands. With this, he can broadcast himself, his world, his immediate environment horizontally across the globe. There was virtually no restriction on whose influence he can come into and whom he can influence in the world. He can publish himself to the entire world through a website. He can proselytize whatever political opinion or action he advocates on person to person level across the globe on profiles of twitter and Facebook at practically little more than zero cost. Come to think of it, Facebook alone has over 750 million users. There are an estimated over 3 billion internet users worldwide. This means over 3 billion people interconnected, networking, exchanging ideas and moving actions without boundaries.

The Arab Spring was a Facebook and twitter revolution. The long ruling dictatorships across the Maghreb and most of the Arab world maintained a stranglehold on the communication content an individual can either access or broadcast. Dynamics of globalization 3.0 crashed all that. In pre-revolution Egypt, Mubarak had cool control of the indices of globalization 1.0 and 2.0. To the West, he was the face of stability. He was the quintessential ally who helped the US and the West achieve set objectives in the Middle East. Since his was a dictatorship, Egypt was him. On the international scene, he was the voice of Egypt and no voice of dissent was admitted. Thus what he wished was what Egypt willed in the comity of nations. He had the indices of globalization 2.0 in his hands. He had interests in the multinational corporations in Egypt. He maintained a West friendly economic policies and arduously courted the multinationals. He controlled the corporate media. Hence, he controlled what could be said or what could be heard in Egypt. There was virtually no official opposition. But his undoing were the dynamics of globalization. The internet communication explosion undid him. Since, the dynamics of globalization 3.0 were individually controlled, his attempts to curb them were futile. At the dawn of the revolution, he attempted to cut off internet access in Egypt but was outsmarted by use of proxy servers.

The Arab Spring was a revolution mobilized on the internet via social media, namely, Facebook and twitter. Arab youths broke the barriers of geo-politics and tradition and came in contact with Western political order via Facebook and twitter. They like any other social network users, had friends all over the world and were informed of happenings all over the world. Naturally, they got infected and attracted to the Western political culture of freedom and liberty. As Francis Fukuyama, noted, every revolution takes place in the head first by way of consciousness. There was a revolution of ideas hence the question, ‘why can’t we live like the people in the US?’ Just as the Egyptian January 17 Movement echoed, they wanted to be like the people in the West. If the West could have it, why not Egypt? As soon as Mubarak, Ben Alli and Muarma Gaddafi lost the battle of ideas, it was only a matter of time before they lost in the physical order. Lose, they did. By the use of same social network, youths mobilized the citizenry to demonstrations and political actions. It is practically impossible to control what passes from mobile phone to mobile phone. And it has no boundaries too. That was globalization 3.0 at work. The revolutionaries were able to reach out to like minds all over the world. They accessed both moral and financial support all over the world a la internet enabled facilities. The world has been flattened. In the case of Mubarak, they were able even to move the populace of the West to move their leaders whom in most cases had cosy relationships with Mubarak to move against him. That is the globalization 3.0 world, the individuals controlled world.

The case of Libya was no different. Gaddafi effectively suppressed dissent. What the rest of African countries saw was a pan Africanist big brother always handy to support African causes. They could not see the brutal suppression and vertical inequality in Libya. Instruments of globalization 3.0 gave them a voice. The world heard them. It gave them a platform, they mobilized. The rest is history. The case in no different from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Iran, Bahrain and Iraq. There is a silent revolution in the world of values, happening noiseless on person to person levels on the interfaces of social networks and internet applications.

**THE CHANGING SOCIAL VALUES**

The war against Islamic extremism is not likely to be won in the battlefield with drones and bullets but on the interfaces of social media and social networks. Facebook and Twitter exposed Arab youths to the values of liberal democracy. Ideas direct the social order. The fundamentalist elements are not necessarily always in the majority. But most of the time are rather, a radical minority. Because they are always aligned covertly with the establishment, their voices are heard and their actions felt. Until the Arab Spring, the general image of the Arab youth especially after 9/11 to the average Westerner is a potential suicide bomber. But on the contrary, the average Arab youth wants to be as free as his counterpart in the US. They have risen to condemn fundamentalism and backward conservatism. The Arab Spring is a product of this paradigmatic shift in values. The suicide bomber is no longer held up as a hero. The usual tired anti-West rhetoric of the leadership is no longer catching on. They see the problem for what it is: poverty and corruption. They are looking up to the success of Turkey and wondering why they can’t have a progressive nation whose citizens practice Islam. There is a radical shift from the clamour for an Islamic state to a secular state. The political values are fast changing. Theocracy is fast losing appeal to the populace. Another dimension is the growing progress and triumph of the culture of liberal democracy. In Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, dictatorships gave way to democracies. In Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, there were reforms. In Syria, impulses of liberal democracy are in deep conflict with dictatorship. There seems to be a shift in the values consciousness of the people. There is a growing focus on freedom and personal liberty. Regional nationalism seems to be receding fast. There seems to be more secularization. Arab women are finding their voices. The opportunities provided by the indices of globalization have made for wider socializations and wider cultural interactions. Parochial values are giving way to global values.

**FACT LINE ON ARAB SPRING**

Tunisia: 18 December, 2010 protest is sparked off by Mohammed Bouaziz’s self-immolation in protest against police corruption. Within days, the president Ben Alli flees into exile, the prime minister resigns, the political police is disbanded, the ruling party is dissolved and liquidated and elections held on 23 October 2011. The protest ended on 14 January, 2011.

In Algeria, protests last from 28 December 2010 to January , 2011 and result in the lifting of 19 years old emergency laws. In Jordan, protests begin in January 14, and result in King Abdullah dismissing the prime minister, reshuffling the cabinet and instituting reforms. In Oman, protest begins on January 2011, ends in March and results in economic reforms and the granting of law making powers by Sultan Qaboos to the elected legislature. In Saudi Arabia, protests begin on January 27, 2011 and result in male only municipal elections in September and the granting of women the right to vote and be voted for in 2015. In Egypt, protests begin on January 25 and bring down the government on February 11, 2011. The ruling party is proscribed, constituent and presidential elections hold and Mubarak faces trial. In Yemen, protests begin on January 27 and end on February 27 2011 and result in the overthrow of the government. In Bahrain, protests begin on 14 February, 2011 and result in economic reforms and freeing of political prisoners. In Morocco, sporadic protests begin on 20 February 2011 and end in November 2011. The results are political concessions by the king, referendum on constitutional reforms, respect to civil rights and end of corruption. In Libya, protests begin on 17 February, 2011, skyrockets into a civil war, driven into and international conflict by forces of globalization as NARTO weighs in on the conflict. The government is overthrown on 23 August 2011, the Libyan strongman and African maverick, Muamar Gaddafi is killed and an interim government is formed. In Syria, protests begin on 15 March, result in release of some political prisoners, dismissal of provincial governors and end of emergency laws. All to no avail as protesters demand the ouster of the president.

Conclusion

These revolutions happened at the same period. The effects and forces of globalization made it possible. The citizens of the affected countries watched the revolutions unfold in neighbouring countries and made use of the same apparatus - social networks to mobilize the people in their own countries. The effects of globalization made it impossible for the rulers to shield these events from their citizenry. The consciousness of the people has been altered with the flow of information. Exposure to liberal values through the networks made them challenge the political process in their respective countries. This was possible because of the enormous powers the current globalization has placed on the individual to act on his imaginations. The world has so to speak been flattened. Of course, inequalities remain but the global playing ground has been in principle leveled. Global relations are no longer vertical but horizontal. The revolution in the Arab world was a move to level the political process in their respective countries. The example of the Libyans stands out. Their economy was not bad, but they wanted the political playing ground leveled. A different value system had taken hold of them. They admitted that Gaddafi was doing well economically but demanded the power to choose their leaders. They wanted freedom. In other words, they wanted a level playing ground. The prediction of Fukuyama is coming true, liberal democracy is on a triumphant march. No corner of the world can be isolated from this paradigm shift. The flow of history is directed not anymore by strongmen in power, usually called ‘the great’ but by the citizens armed with internet enabled personal computers or internet enabled mobile phones. Welcome to the era of globalization 3.0.

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