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Why Revolutions (Do Not) Succeed?

The Case of the Arab Spring Countries

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List of Abbreviations

AU: African Union

BAT: Brigades Anti-Terrorisme

CDR: Constitutional Democratic Rally

EGP: Egyptian Pound

FSA: Free Syrian Army

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

NDP: National Democratic Party

NTC: National Transitional Council

SCAF: Supreme Council of Egypt

SMO: Social Media Optimizations

UNSMIL: UN Support Mission in Libya

I want a future where my children feel safe and appreciated and proud to be who they are. My heart is one with all the Arab Spring heroes, no matter how small they think their role is. I know they believe, like me, that we are working for a world whereby an Arab can live with the other in a dignified way.

- Tawakkol Karman

Introduction

In the spring of 2011, protests began to spread in Arab countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain. These events came to be known as the “*Arab Spring*”, a group of protests that ultimately resulted in major regime changes in some of the aforementioned countries. Not all of the movements, though, could be deemed successful. In fact, while some countries experienced a regime change, for many others the period has been marked by increased instability and oppression. Starting from the protest of a single vegetable seller in Tunisia, the revolution swept across the Arab world in what became known as the Arab Spring of 2011. Millions of people took to the streets to revolt against their governments; while some – like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya – fell, others remained embattled, and still continue to try and build democratic institutions (Noueihed and Warren, 2012). The causes of the explosion of the revolution in the countries are of various types: structural, that is long-standing and underlying factors that led to the build-up of popular anger and frustration in the population, and proximate and more immediate factors which transformed the localised protest in a nationwide movement (Idris, 2016). The literature has found common factors between the various countries of the region, but it is also true that the uprisings had also been influenced by domestic issues, such as the 42-year-old rule of Gaddafi in Libya. Therefore, the structural and proximate factors can go only so far in the explanation of the causes and the timing of the revolution. As Dalacoura states: “*Ultimately, we may have to accept that the rebellions were spontaneous popular events*” (Dalacoura, 2012).

There are also various reasons on why the Arab Spring did not see a success in all countries which are all related to various factors that have affected the social instability of the country, but also the historical, cultural, socio-economic and political processes in the various parts of the region. These factors are the ability of the government to reduce social tensions and the presence of “immunity” to internal conflicts (Korotayev et al., 2014). These indicators, though, turned out to be less significant in a context such as that of the Arab Spring. The research led by Korotayev et al. is therefore fundamental in understanding the socio-political instability level in the Arab countries and the effectiveness of the measures used in order to reduce social tensions in them. The focus of this dissertation will be on the dynamics that became the common denominator of the Arab uprisings, their success, like in the case of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, or their incompleteness, like what happened with Syria. In doing so, we will analyse the events that characterised the Arab Spring in the four countries aforementioned and will give an explanation of the different factors that brought to an eventual success or failure of the different states.

In the first chapter, the events of the Arab Spring will be traced starting from the start of the protests in Tunisia, then moving towards the region to Egypt, Libya and Syria. In doing so, we will see how the uprisings all shared common objectives such as the removal of the dictators in the four different countries and their struggle to obtain more political and civil rights. The Tunisian revolution, most importantly, is of fundamental

importance as it acted as the event that kick-started a revolutionary period that lasted just a few years for some countries – namely Tunisia itself as well as Egypt and Libya – while for others it proved to be an ongoing process – that is, Syria.

Subsequently we will examine the theories which have revealed to be most useful in understanding the phenomenon, as they provide different perspectives on the topic and guided the research to a deeper understanding of the situation. Our attention will be focused on three main approaches: firstly, the structuralist theory, highlighted by the thought of Theda Skocpol; then, we will look at James Davies and Ted Gurr, who based their theory on the role of the agencies, and, finally, a third and alternative approach theorized by Asef Bayat. Our emphasis will be posed on two common elements in all four revolutions: the Military-Government relations and the role of social media as a tool of spreading of information.

In the third and final chapter we will see in fact how these two commonalities of the revolutions were employed in each of the four countries by leading an analysis firstly on the militaries' behaviour during the revolution based on their level of political institutionalization in each country, then by analysing the mode of use of social media and how the news were shared through the cyberspace. The third chapter will therefore attempt to draw some conclusions to our research question on why some countries did succeed in their revolutions and why others did not.

Chapter I: The Birth of the Arab Spring

In 2011, the majority of the States in the Middle East and North Africa faced the beginning of a process of political, social and economic change. What the media and scholars then named “the Arab Spring”, started in Tunisia and then spread throughout the whole region, resulting in different outcomes despite the common objectives, such as the removal of corrupt dictators and the will to obtain important political rights (Noueihed and Warren, 2012).

1.1 Tunisia

Tunisia had long enjoyed the best educational system out of the Arab countries, they had the largest middle class and had a strongly organized labour movement (Anderson, 2011). What was hidden behind it, though, was a government of tightly restricted free expression and corrupted political parties (Noueihed and Warren, 2012). Ben Ali manipulated the country’s image, transforming it in a modern and technocratic regime.

In addition, his own family was traced with corruption: as WikiLeaks, the notorious whistle-blower founded by Julian Assange, had revealed, the US ambassador to Tunisia reported in 2006 that more than half of Tunisia’s commercial elites were related to Ben Ali through his three adult children, seven siblings, and his second wife’s ten brothers and sisters, a network which became known as “*The Family*” (Ibid.). Although there was corruption at the top, Ben Ali’s administration did not depend on small bribes. Tunisia’s government institutions were “healthy”, as Lisa Anderson, political scientist and president of the University of Cairo from 2011 to 2016, affirmed, which contributed in creating a safe space for a new technocratic government to be born even after Ben Ali (Ibid.).

It is important to remember that Ben Ali was the only second President Tunisia has had since it won independence from France in the mid-1950s. In fact, Ben Ali gained his office in 1987 after a coup against the 84-year-old Habib Bourguiba, who had damaged his status of one of the founding fathers of modern Tunisia (Schraeder and Redissi, 2011). He had built an authoritarian regime (Redissi, 2007, pp.89–117) which adopted “*le changement*” (the change) as its mantra and marked the November 7 anniversary of his putsch every year to celebrate Tunisia’s “democratic transition”. Mark Gasiorowski affirmed that the “failure of reform” in Tunisia meant that there was a missed “opportunity” to establish a democratic regime and would “*not appear again for quite some time.*” (Gasiorowski, 1992)

Before December 2010, the last major manifestation of discontent had come in 2008 in the southwestern region of Gafsa. The target was the state-owned Gafsa Phosphate Company, the main employer in a poor area with very few jobs (Allal, 2010). The company had announced plans to add 350 workers after shedding posts for two years, but what transpired from the publication of the results of the formal employment competition was

that the new hires turned out to be people that had no ties to the region but had a strong political link to Ben Ali and his regime. The locals were infuriated and launched a series of demonstrations in the mining towns. Massive police cordons surrounded the towns and put an end to the protests, arresting and prosecuting hundreds of people, with some receiving prison sentences of up to eight years. The achievement of the regime was able to portray them as the isolated problem of a single region and industry, even if it was the start of a deepening socioeconomic crisis (Schraeder and Redissi, 2011).

The start of what came to be known as the “*Jasmine Revolution*” is signed by the dramatic suicide of the Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi who, on 17th December 2010, set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid to protest the confiscation of his products by a police officer and the harassment faced. Bouazizi had been supporting his family by selling fruit from a cart and had been enraged with the local officers’ constant demanding of bribes and the subsequent confiscation of his merchandise when he refused. After the authorities refused to hear his numerous complaints, the young man decided to douse himself with gasoline and set himself on fire.

His was not only a reaction to an arbitrary measure, but also a symbolic protest to the poor living conditions that forced educated young people to sell fruit in the street to survive in Tunisia. The act touched off a protest movement, which became known to the media as the “*Jasmine Revolution*”, and which led a series of protests in most Tunisian central squares, with millions of people being mobilized to avenge not only a person’s death, but years of unjust ruling under Ben Ali’s government. People were protesting against the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions they were facing, the lack of jobs, and the unfair treatment the local administrators and police reserved them. Differently from the Gafsa protest, the unrest spread throughout the country giving rise to demands for Ben Ali’s departure and the creation of a government more responsive to the people (Schraeder and Redissi, 2011).

On December 28, Ben Ali gave a nationally televised speech in which he charged the protesters with hurting the economy and threatened to deal with them severely – but the speech did not bring any result. On January 10 he once again addressed the protestors and painted them as “terrorists” serving foreign masters, and then vowed to create 300.000 new jobs. Even this promise did not stop the protestors, which brought Ben Ali to give a third and last appearance on January 13, where he stated that he “heard” and “understood” the protestors and promised not to run for another term – his sixth – in October 2014 (Ibid.).

On 14th January 2011, the Tunisian people gained the upper hand, but not without a cost: hundreds were the bodies made vulnerable by the defiance, and, as stated by Butler (2011), whose deaths at the hands of state security apparatuses forced the “*legitimacy of the state to be brought into question*” (Sadiki, 2014). Ben Ali fled the country to Saudi Arabia with his family after the largest antigovernmental demonstration known to Tunisia, ending twenty-three years of power. The prime minister of Tunisia, Mohamed Ghannouchi, assumed

the duties of president but was soon dismissed by the people who demanded, and obtained, free elections in October 2011, which were won by the Islamist Ennahda Party. On December 12, Tunisia's new assembly elected Moncef Markouzi, former doctor and human rights activist, as president (Al-Saleh, 2016).

Even if the situation seemed one of unity of the population, a solution was not reached without the absence of issues: on July 25, 2013, a Salafi¹ extremist assassinated Mohamed al-Brahmi, member of the National Constituent Assembly. The response was a mass withdrawal of fifty members from the assembly, who demanded the dissolution of the existing government and the formation of a new technocratic government that could lead a country continuously transitioning. On January 26, 2014, the national assembly ratified a new constitution, creating a technocratic, caretaker cabinet; the new government was the result of a political compromise which governed until the following elections.

During all this time, the Tunisian army remained committed to its role, refusing to intervene between the opposition and the government (Swartz et al., 2013). The government, instead, held talks with all parties to try to end such standoff; they offered substantial concessions, like the formation of a national unity government and the suspension of the Constituent Assembly, which was a demand of the opposition. Furthermore, the fact that the two main parties had ultimately agreed on the need to form a new technocratic government made way for a new remarkable model to be developed in the post-Arab Spring Middle East. Additionally the most powerful party in the Constituent Assembly, that is the Islamist Ennahda party, led the coalition troika to step down in order to work with the opposition and maintain the transitional model in order to allow a plurality system (Villa-Vicencio, Doxtader and Moosa, 2016). Even more, the Ennahda decided to not nominate a candidate for the new government and chose to support Ahmed Mestiri, the candidate of Ettakatol, its coalition partner's candidate.

Tunisia's Ennahda Party won 41% of the seats in the Constituent Assembly in the first post-Ben Ali vote (Amara, 2013). Ennahda politicians joined in a coalition troika with the Ettakatol Party and the Congress for the Republic, both members of the centre-left group. They also decided to support the nomination of the secularist Moncef Marzouki as president. Marzouki, human rights activist and detained under Ben Ali's rule, headed the Congress for the Republic, which received 13.4% of the assembly seats. Despite the clear ideological differences, the coalition held together for two years. Marzouki, moreover, became of further importance as he managed to guide the coalition but did not establish himself as an especially powerful leader on the national level, particularly in a period of political crises.

¹ *Salafi movement*: reform movement led by Jaamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh at the turn of the 20th century. Emphasized restoration of Islamic doctrines to pure form, adherence to the Quran and Sunnah, rejection of the authority of later interpretations, and maintenance of the unity of ummah. (Esposito, J. L., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2004)

After few years of seemingly peace inside Tunisia, where a more democratic government had been granted, as of July 2021 it seems as if the situation has faced a sudden downfall. After ten years from the Arab Spring, on the 25th of July the President of the Republic Kais Saied decided to suspend the Tunisian parliament and fire the Council of ministers, Prime Minister included. Saied did not stop only at this but got some among the most important political leaders arrested, justifying himself through the decision of invoking Article 80 of the country's constitution, which he had already threatened to do for a while: the article, in fact, allows the president to take “*necessary measures*” when the country is “*in a state of imminent danger*”. Prior his decision, Saied had stated on numerous occasions that Tunisia's 2014 constitution is flawed, and that the distribution of powers can only lead to a political deadlock, and that the country's worsening economic and public health challenges, incremented by the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, are caused by the corruption and recklessness of the biggest party in parliament, the Ennahda (Guesmi, 2021).

It is safe to say that the difficulty faced by the institutions to revitalise the economy and respond efficiently to the pandemic convinced many Tunisians that a radical solution was needed, which made it easy for Saied to make his claims more believable. So, when Saied announced to invoke Article 80 and suspend the Parliament and the Council of ministers, hundreds rushed to the parliament building to celebrate or cheered on social media. A small portion showed some concern over foreign interference in the democratic process, while others delved into conspiracy theories, but overall the country was in jubilee, as the majority supported the president's decision to fire the Prime Minister.

The head of the Ennahda Party, Rached Ghannouchi, called the president out and defined his move a coup, but he was not alone: out of twelve leading political parties, six clearly opposed to President Saied's move and denounced it as illegitimate. In response, Saied decided to control the media narratives and cracked down on media freedoms: an example is the testimony of Al Jazeera, whose office in Tunis was shut down by twenty police officers who stormed the office (Ibid.). This only added more to the claims that the country was experiencing a coup, transitioning from a democracy to a, once again, more authoritarian system.

But even if faced with clear opposition, Saied's coup proved to be a success thanks to popular support and strong military backing. At the same time, the opposing political and non-political forces in the country started gearing up for a new struggle to establish a new balance of power, which signals a strengthening of Tunisia's political deadlock.

From the 11th of October 2021, Tunisia has a new government led by a woman, Neila Bouden Romdhane. Bouden declared that the mission of the new government will be “*to restore the faith of the citizens of the Tunisian state and of the foreign countries and fight against corruption*” (Simoncini, 2021). Though, the government has been working with considerably reduced prerogatives compared to the past governments according to the presidential decree n. 117 emanated by Saied on the 22nd of September 2011. The decree

concentrates power in the hands of the president, transforming the state's regime in a presidential one. Taking into consideration art. 8 of the Decree, it states that "*The executive power is exercised by the President of the Republic assisted by a government headed by a Head of Government*" (Ibid.).

1.2 Egypt

The Egyptian revolution in 2011, also known as the "revolution of the Nile", finds its roots in Egypt's past as well as in the Mubarak era. The government was holding on to the emergency regulations imposed in 1981 after Anwar Sadat had been assassinated, which brought Mubarak to a long-lasting power. In addition, there was no interest on the regime side to create a nurturing system that allowed a real political opposition or coalitions and partnerships that could improve the country's development.

In 2011, many young Egyptians became increasingly fed up with Mubarak's authoritarianism. The emergency laws denied people their basic rights and sent civilians to military courts with an absence of due process. Furthermore, the economic conditions in the country kept 40% of Egyptians living on less than \$2 per day and more than 3 million young Egyptians unemployed (Vargas, 2012).

To add to the problem, two events in 2010 had heightened the sense of crisis and of rage among the young population. In June, Khaled Mohamed Said, a young man, was brutally beaten to death by the police in Alexandria; Internet activists all over Facebook united to maintain the issue in the public eye, exposed the numerous official lies employed to cover up the crime and demanded justice (Pollack, 2011). In addition, during November, fraudulent elections took place: the National Democratic Party (NDP) won nearly all the seats in the People's Assembly. Once again, the rigging made on the NDP, and Mubarak's side was quickly exposed on the Internet (Ghonim, 2012a). This time, people took to the streets to protest the corrupt system, signalling troubles as the presidential elections were scheduled for the next year (Davis, 2013).

The Internet activists called for a Day of Protest on the 25th of January 2011, the National Police Day. They all reunited in Tahrir Square in Cairo, demonstrating their discontent with Mubarak's policies; the riot police used lethal force, turning a peaceful protest into a revolution to put an end to Mubarak's authoritarian government. The day of the protest, the government blocked the access to Facebook and Twitter, the two main platforms on which information about the protest had been shared, preventing people both inside and outside the country from following the events in Tahrir square (Ghonim, 2012b).

The largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, officially endorsed the protest and called on its young members to participate. This guaranteed a huge turnout and gave a new strength to the demonstrations. Soon, a peaceful protest turned into a violent confrontation due to the intervention of the police who used every tool

possible to stop them, including water cannons, tear gas and live bullets. Dozens of protestors were killed by the bullets or run over by armoured vehicles and hundreds were severely injured (Ibid.). In retaliation, the people burned the police stations and the ruling party's headquarters in many cities.

Rioting led the government to impose a curfew and the army deployed troops and tanks all over the country. The military had the aim of enforcing the curfew, protecting the people against thugs and making up for the police's lack of capabilities to deal with the unrest; they, though, refused to fire on the demonstrators, who in turn welcomed the army, giving soldiers flowers and chanting "*We're all Egyptians*" and "*The people and the army are one hand*" (Ibid.). Another turning point was the choice of using Mohamed El Baradei, head of the National Coalition for Change, as the representative of the protesters in the negotiations with the government; he called on Mubarak to quit and proposed a transitional government headed by a presidential council of two or three figures, including a military representative.

In the late evening of January 28, President Mubarak addressed the nation for the first time. He acknowledged the demand for political and economic reform and dismissed his cabinet. On January 29, he appointed Ahmed Shafik, Air Force Marshal and aviation minister, as prime minister with the order of initiating reforms, while General Omar Suleiman, head of the General Intelligence Service, was appointed as vice president: this position was filled for the first time in thirty years (Ibid.).

On the last day of January, the activists called for a million-man march on February 1 to pressure Mubarak to leave. The military assured that "*they understood the legitimate demands of the people and would protect the people's rights to peaceful demonstration*", once again proving the strong relationship between them and the people (Ibid.). However, the government took action to sabotage the protest by halting railway services across the country, cutting off mobile phone and Internet services, and pressuring Muslim and Christian religious institutions to discourage people from joining the marches. This did not stop the protesters, who reached a turnout of 200,000 people only in Cairo.

Mubarak once again addressed the nation announcing that he would finish his term and would not run for another term in the fall. He also acknowledged the "legitimate demands" of the people but blamed the unrest on political forces with special agendas (Davis, 2013). He then pledged the introduction of constitutional reforms, ensured an orderly transition in order to leave a stable country to the new government. The people in Tahrir Square opposed, enraged by the speech, while El Baradei stated that it was only a trick to stay in power. The protesters did not want Mubarak to continue staying in office for another eight months as they did not trust him to be in charge of a possible democratic transition.

On the 2nd of February, the regime put an end to the occupation in Tahrir Square. The supporters, together with plainclothes policemen, ruling party's members and hired thugs, came to the square and attacked the protesters, who tried pushing them back. The fight temporarily ended when the military fired into the air to separate the two sides; but during the break, protesters collected rocks, built barricades and put on hardhats or plastic bottles to protect their heads. In the evening, they once again were attacked by men throwing rocks and gasoline bombs. The clashes stopped when the army intervened in separating the two sides. Shafik apologized for the violence and admitted the attacks seemed to have been organized; in addition, he promised to conduct an investigation to determine the instigator and defended Mubarak's decision to finish his term. Internet services resumed again but its traffic was controlled, allowing only pro-government messages to be transmitted (Ibid.).

On February 10, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) convened an emergency meeting to discuss Mubarak's refusal to leave, which was even more unusual as the supreme commander, Mubarak, was absent. The group convened to sacrifice him and put the military in charge of the government in order to preserve order and protect its interests. The following day, Suleiman announced that Mubarak decided to quit as president and mandated the SCAF to run the state. Protesters were jubilant at the news, since the military had protected them during the protests, but other reactions were sceptical: STRATFOR, a US-based global intelligence firm, said that Suleiman's announcement seemed to point to a military coup engineered by Tantawi, who was not much different from Mubarak (Ibid.).

A newly formed jurist panel proposed 10 institutional amendments to the SCAF, which reinstated the two-term limits on presidency and removed Mubarak's restrictions. They also proposed a limitation of power of the president to declare the state of emergency by requiring the approval of the People's Assembly and a referendum for extending it beyond six months and required the next president to appoint a vice president within two months of office. Following the appointment of Essam Sharaf to oversee the transition to civilian rule, a referendum on constitutional amendments was announced, supervised by judges and assisted by the police to prevent intimidation and violence (Ibid.).

The referendum was approved by 77% of the people who casted votes (Birnbaum, 2011). Therefore, the SCAF initiated several measures in order to facilitate the legislative elections in September and a presidential election by November. They first announced that the emergency law would be lifted prior to the elections. Secondly, they made it easier to form new political parties by requiring only 5000 members (Michael, 2011a) and nominate candidates to run for presidency, even if they were a party with only a single parliamentary seat; the independent candidates were instead required to obtain a certain number of endorsements by legislators or gather 30.000 signatures from voters (Brown, 2011). Third, they issued an interim constitution that separated the state from religion by prohibiting the formation of political parties based on religious grounds. The SCAF

also called on the new parliament to set up a committee to draft a new constitution that would be then submitted to referendum. It then purged the media of pro-Mubarak editors who had published misleading news during the protest and dismantled Mubarak's party, although its former members were not banned from political activity.

In October, a campaign began to elect Tantawi as the new president (Ottaway, 2011). His candidacy was presented as a continuation of having a military leader as head of state which had started in 1950 with Gamal Abdel Nasser (Droz-Vincent, 2011). These developments also suggested that the military planned to remain in power beyond the transition period. On November 1, the interim government issued a "Constitutional Declaration" in order to guide the drafting of a new constitution, designating the military as protector of constitutional legitimacy. It gave SCAF the veto power over the president's authority to declare war and made the military and its budget not subject to civilian oversight. Liberals and Islamists both opposed the "Constitutional Declaration" and demanded its withdrawal even organizing protests in which hundreds of people returned and occupied Tahrir Square, calling for the end of the military rule. The continuous fight benefited the SCAF and put it in a position of even more power of dictating the pace of change and determine the terms and the time for a transfer of power. It acted only when it had to, and when challenged it enforced the emergency law.

On November 28, the first democratic elections began amidst uncertainty. The voters had to choose between gradual or radical change of the political system. The voting in the first stage, conducted in nine provinces, was orderly. No major irregularities were reported and there was a big turnout. There was a general satisfaction with how the first stage of elections were held; Islamists' big win in this first stage shocked the SCAF, which quickly played down the importance of this election. Tantawi pointed out that Egypt was "*a presidential state, not a parliamentary one*" and added that "*even if the Muslim Brotherhood had won the elections, it did not mean that they had been chosen by the whole people*" (Droz-Vincent, 2011). The elections ended in January 2012, with Islamists winning 70% of the seats. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party emerged as the dominant force in the new parliament with 48% of the seats, followed by the Salafi's Al Nour, with 19% of the seats (www.aljazeera.com, 2012e).

On January 23, the People's Assembly met and elected Freedom and Justice Party's Saad El-Katatni as the speaker of parliament and Al Nour's Ashraf Thabet as deputy parliamentary speaker. The SCAF quickly transferred legislative power to oversee to this new lower house of parliament. On the eve of the first anniversary of the revolution, Tantawi announced that the state of emergency would be lifted with only one exception, that is that it would still apply for law-breakers, hooligans and thugs, who would be tried in military courts.

The presidential election was scheduled for May 23 and 24 with a second round in June if none of the candidates had received over 50% of the votes. El-Assar declared that the military was to be neutral in the election. Eleven men were competing for the presidency, among which five were truly against each other: two former Mubarak officials, one Islamist and two independent candidates. All of them pledged to make security a top priority because of widespread crime across the country, mainly due to the state of lawlessness Egypt was facing, with thugs and armed gangs overpowering the police and governorates having people take law in their own hands and fight back. When the results were announced, the nation resulted as highly divided, as none of the candidates received an absolute majority of votes, making a runoff between the two with the largest number of votes necessary. The two candidates in question were Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood and Mubarak's Shafik.

Two major obstacles came to light, distancing Egypt from the new democratic life. Firstly, the Supreme Court dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated People's Assembly as the laws governing the election were illegal; secondly, the SCAF moved to limit the powers of the incoming president, fearing a Morsi win. On June 17, the Constitutional Declaration was amended, which gave the SCAF control over the country's budget, sweeping legislative and executive powers and maintaining the military autonomous (Davis, 2013). In addition, the military started quietly promoting Shafik's candidacy and the state media praised his qualifications and demonized Morsi. Unsurprisingly, more than half the voters did not show up to vote, and, when the runoff ended, the press started projecting Shafik as the winner. Many Muslim Brotherhood members feared a conspiracy to tamper with the results, which led tens of thousands of people to rally in Tahrir Square to support Morsi's election, who came to the square and read tallies of all election results district-by-district showing that he had won most of the votes. The SCAF accused him of being a divider of the population and a creator of tensions. Though, when the High Election Commission announced the results, Morsi was the winner with 51.7% of votes, making him the new Egyptian president (Ibid.).

Morsi had limited power as the SCAF had claimed control over the budget, foreign policy, defence and national security, which allowed them to continue to play as the behind the scenes director of the country (Davis, 2013). Morsi's first major action was convening on the dissolution of parliament, a decision considered illegal and that brought criticism from judges, generals and liberals; then, he fulfilled some of his earlier promises to the opposition and youth organization, resigning from the Muslim Brotherhood to be "*the President of all Egyptians*" (Davis, 2013). He also sought out 50 leading figures from various parties to join his administration, with the majority turning him down as they did not want any affiliation with a Muslim Brotherhood regime, nor did they want the blame for any government failure to implement revolutionary goals (Ibid.).

He then issued a decree that granted himself sweeping powers, making all his decisions immune to legal challenges, going from June when he assumed power until the constitution and parliament were in place; his action aimed at stopping the court from dissolving the currently-operating constituent assembly or the upper chamber of parliament. He appointed a new trial for Mubarak and his top officials and pointed out that judges and prosecutors had failed to deal with corruption and abuses under Mubarak's office (Ibid.). The nation's top judges were shocked by Morsi's decree, seeing it as an assault to the judiciary system.

This decree signed the worst political crisis since Morsi's arrival to office in June. Defeated presidential candidates joined the Tahrir Square protests together with El Baradei, co-coordinator of the National Salvation Front, and other opposition figures demanding a rescission of the decree. On November 28, tens of thousands of Egyptians rallied in Tahrir Square to express their distrust in the Muslim Brotherhood, chanting for the regime's downfall. A new revolution had started. Across the country, protesters set 13 offices of the ruling party on fire and clashed with the police. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis called off demonstrations on the same day to avoid confrontation and bloodshed.

The opposition was surprised when the constituent assembly scheduled a final vote on the draft constitution on November 29, as Morsi had given until February 2013 to complete its work. Fifteen liberals and Christians out of 100 members boycotted the meeting, eighty-five were present and voted on each of the 234 articles in an all-night session (www.aljazeera.com, 2012b) through a transparent process, with the entire session being broadcasted live on national television. On the 1st of December, the document was delivered to Morsi, who approved it and scheduled a nationwide referendum vote for December 15, as stipulated by the mandate, which stated that a referendum must be held within two weeks of the assembly's approval. The protestors continued their demonstration in Tahrir Square as they argued that the draft did not represent the views of their constituencies and was not approved by all political groups (www.aljazeera.com, 2012d).

His spokesman, Selim Al-Awa, said that if the constitution was not approved, a new one would be written "*by officials elected by the people*" (www.aljazeera.com, 2012f). On December 15, the first stage of the vote was held. The turnout was low compared to the last democratic elections. Egypt's human rights groups have reported numerous violations, including civil society representatives access to polling stations, closing stations early, and having ineligible persons overseeing the voting. The NSF called on people to protest the election violations that had occurred. El Baradei took the same position, calling on Morsi to "*cancel the referendum altogether and enter talks with the opposition*" (www.aljazeera.com, 2012c). The second stage took place on December 22 as scheduled. Overall, the referendum had an approval rate of 64%, compared with a 36% rejection. This was a clear victory for Morsi who could proceed with the preparation for the parliamentary elections, required to be held in 60 days.

In two years, Egypt faced one of the most arduous revolutions: it had terminated Mubarak's 30 years of autocratic rule in order to elect a civilian president after 60 years. When it succeeded, it still faced difficulties in its democratization process, as the government and the people themselves were not used to it after so many years of autocracy. But the history of the revolution in this country is continuous, as from the generals seizure of power in 2013, the fights continue still even eleven years later. During this time, Jihadist extremists prospered, providing their own version of the truth to people fighting yet another dictatorship (Bowen, 2021).

1.3 Libya

2011 was not only a transformative year for Tunisia and Egypt, but also for Libya. The toppling of the two dictators in the aforementioned countries had inspired the Libyan youth, where peaceful protests were started in order to pressure Muammar Gaddafi to leave after years of dictatorship. Gaddafi had been ruling for 42 years and was forming his older son Saif Al-Islam to succeed him; he had rejected western democracy by shelving the constitution, abolishing the political parties, banning independent media outlets and undermining civil society organizations. His choice was to use his own ideology in order to restructure state institution.

When the protests began in Benghazi in mid-February 2011, it spread quickly to other cities and towns. It had caught the world and Gaddafi by surprise, as no one had expected the revolution happening in Tunisia and Egypt to spread also to Libya. He vowed to fight, and the prospects were actually in his favour: the rebels had no organization nor a unified leadership to guide the struggle against Gaddafi, who previously had already used all possible means to crush his enemies to stay in power. The protesters were easily outnumbered and outgunned. What no one thought was that the restiveness in Benghazi could transform into a civil war.

Benghazi leaders used Facebook and Twitter to call for a nationwide "day of revolt" on February 17, the fifth anniversary of the major protest led in 2006, when a demonstration was held in front of the Italian consulate in Benghazi to protest against Italy's minister Roberto Calderoli for wearing a T-shirt with the offensive cartoon of Prophet Muhammad published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten (Hooper, Harding and Walsh, 2006). The revolution led was not ideological, religious or sectarian and had no organization behind it, but simply was inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian success in removing authoritarian rulers (Davis, 2013). Huge demonstrations were led in Benghazi, Ajdabiya, Darnah and Zintan demanding Gaddafi's ouster and calling for major political and economic reforms. Security forces used live ammunition to fire at peaceful demonstrators. The Baida protesters were successful in capturing a military base and took control of the town. Gaddafi's forces retaliated and killed 35 protesters and wounded 500. In Benghazi, one thousand inmates overcame their guards and escaped (Michael, 2011b).

Gaddafi reacted by fighting back. He made it public that his regime “*would not succumb to revolutionary rap songs, Facebook pages and nonviolent demonstrations*” (Ghosh, 2011). He kept the foreign media out of the country and shut down the Internet connection and phone lines to prevent any contact with the outside world. He also blamed Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda for the protests, accusing them of giving “hallucinogenic” drugs to youths in their coffee in order to incite the unrest. In addition, he urged “*parents to control their children and keep them at home*” (VOA News, 2011). He then told Libyans that they had “*to choose between stability and chaos, between Gaddafi and the leader of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network.*” On the protesters, the leader chose the same techniques he had used on the earlier attacks he had received: the army fired assault rifles and heavy weapons on thousands of demonstrators, killing or wounding hundreds of people, while others were killed when Gaddafi’s loyalists attacked mourners with machine guns during the funeral processions held for the protestors killed.

The protesters armed themselves with rifles and homemade bombs and surrounded the military garrison in Benghazi for several days; a driver crashed his vehicle through the gate, giving the rebels access to its weapons depot and security buildings (Al-Jazeera, 2011). On February 20, the protesters took control of the city. The army disappeared from the streets and armed youth started maintaining the order by guarding homes and public buildings and even directing traffic. The prime minister Baghdadi Mahmoudi told the European ambassadors in Tripoli that plans to make Libya “*a base for terrorism*” had been circulating, stressing that the government “*had the right to take all measures to preserve its unity, stability and people.*” (News, 2011). Gaddafi unleashed government troops, going so far as to call for African mercenaries’ help and tribal militia in order to stop the protests in Tripoli. The eye witnesses reported that live ammunition and tear gas were employed, and that the militias fired “randomly” on the crowds as “*fighter jets and helicopter gunships rained ammunition from the skies.*” At night, armed pro-Gaddafi civilians roamed the “*neighbourhoods in search of protesters as the aerial assaults continued*” (Raghavan, 2011).

Gaddafi urged his supporters to hunt down and kill the rebels, stating through a speech that “*people who don’t love me don’t deserve to live*” (Fadel, 2011). Helicopters flew overhead, and Gaddafi’s gunmen rode SUVs and ambulances through the city, firing indiscriminately at people and homes. People were afraid to leave home as they might be shot by Gaddafi’s forces or supporters. Schools, government offices and stores were closed, and a complete blackout was started, communications with the outside world being cut off. The situation in Tripoli was getting worse. Gaddafi threatened to escalate the fighting and arm all Libyans. The army was continuing to sweep the neighbourhoods, shooting opponents, conducting house-by-house search to arrest opponents, raiding hospitals and killing wound protesters and snatching bodies from the morgue to conceal evidence (The CNN Wire Staff, 2011b). The riot police lined up in the streets prior to Friday’s midday prayer and started firing when worshipers left the mosques, killing people in Siyahiya, in western Tripoli and several others in Zawiat Al-Dahmani in the centre of the city (Kirkpatrick and Fahim, 2011).

The government's indiscriminate bombing of unarmed protesters led some military units to switch sides and join the rebels. A group of army officers urged the soldiers to "*join the people*" and help overthrow Gaddafi. Two Air Force pilots bailed out and crashed a fighter jet in the desert and two others defected to Malta rather than dropping bombs on the civilians (Luxner, 2011). Libyan diplomats resigned in protest over Gaddafi's killing his own people. On February 21, the Minister of Justice, Mustafa Abdel Jalil, quit because of the excessive use of force against unarmed civilians. Abdel Fatah Younis, Minister of Interior and army general, resigned after hearing that "*300 unarmed civilians had been killed in Benghazi alone during the prior two or three days.*" He then reported that "*many members of the security forces, including those in Tripoli, had defected*" and urged others to join the revolution (The CNN Wire Staff, 2011a).

Benghazi became the epicentre of the uprising and the seat of the newly formed National Transitional Council (NTC), staffed by Gaddafi officials who switched sides in the early days of the uprising. Abdel Jalil became the head of the council, while Mahmoud Jibril, once head of the National Economic Development Board, became the prime minister. The two became the face of the revolution and sought support and recognition from abroad. The NTC got a boost during March when France recognized it and sent an ambassador to Benghazi. France was followed by Qatar, which also agreed to market the oil from the territory under the rebel's control. The NTC, though, had no money as it was unable to export oil, the main source of revenue, due to the UN sanctions on Libya, therefore it sought the help from Europe and the US to get an exemption from UN sanctions. The outreach was though unsuccessful; on the home front, the NTC sought to involve the local population in liberating their own localities in order to give them a stake in the revolution. The strategy became to force each local government to face an internal uprising while defending the city against external attacks by the army. Once a city or town was liberated, a representative was chosen in consultation with its revolutionary commanders to serve on the NTC (The Economist, 2011c).

The rebels gained control of several cities in the east and of the oil facilities at Brega and Ras Lanuf after catching Ajdabiya. Gaddafi staged brutal counterattacks against the rebels to gain back the lost territories: his forces successfully recaptured two oil towns and seized a strategic road juncture at Ajdabiya (The Economist, 2011e). It was a setback for the rebels, showing that they were badly armed and disorganized. Younes, NTC's top commander, gave a positive twist by explaining that retreating was a tactical strategy aimed at luring Gaddafi's forces into an area where they could fight (Stier, 2011). The fight had spread to three cities near Tripoli in the west. The rebels took over Zuwara, Zawiya and Surman, raising concerns about the scale of the conflict. On February 25, Gaddafi's loyalists recaptured Surman and attacked the oil-refining town of Zawiya, killing 17 people and injuring 150 (The CNN Wire Staff, 2011b).

Gaddafi's violent crackdown led Libya's deputy ambassador to the UN Dabbashi to call on the international community to intervene to control Libya's skies to stop new weapons from reaching the government. Neither

the UN nor any major power were ready to get involved with the civil war in Libya. On February 22, the Security Council issued a statement to condemn the violence in the country, calling on the authorities “*to act with restraint, to respect human rights and international humanitarian law, and to allow immediate access to international human rights monitors and humanitarian agencies*” (The CNN Wire Staff, 2011a). On the same day, the Arab League suspended Libya, called for a cessation of violence and asked the Libyan government to ensure the delivery of emergency medical aid to the wounded (Ibid.).

On February 26, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1970, imposing sanctions on the regime, freezing Gaddafi’s family assets abroad and imposing a travel ban on them and on senior officials involved in the violent crackdown on civilians. The Security Council also referred Libya’s case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate on the “*widespread and systematic*” attacks on Libyan civilians (Wyatt, 2011).

Gaddafi remained defiant. He began a major offensive to recapture rebel-held cities in the west. When he attacked Bin Jawad and Zawiya, UN Secretary-General Ban called for “*an immediate halt of the government’s disproportionate use of force and indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets*” (Meikle, 2011). Gaddafi ignored him, and his forces retook the two towns. In Misrata, they subjected the city to heavy bombardment and airstrikes, intentionally gunning and exploding drug stores, hospitals and mosques. On the eastern front, Ajdabiya was subjected to bombardment and air strikes after the rebels had taken control on the city the previous night. Gaddafi’s aim was recapturing the city in order to push toward Benghazi, which he wanted to annihilate as it was the city from which everything had started. NCT leaders feared it was only a matter of time before a bloodbath started in Benghazi (CNN, 2011).

Gaddafi’s foreign pilots were attacking the city, and the rebels had no fighter planes, nor radar systems or missiles to neutralize Gaddafi’s airpower. On March 12, the Arab League came out in favour of putting an end to the genocide by imposing a no-fly zone over Libya, which was also approved by some members of the UN Security Council who at first had opposed it. On March 17, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1973, establishing a “no-fly zone” over Libya and authorizing the use of “*all necessary measures [...] to protect Libyan civilians and civilian-populated areas under threat of attack*” (Elliott, 2011)

On March 19, the NATO began “*Operation Unified Protector*”, with France being the first to conduct air strikes against government targets, then followed by the US and Britain. In three days, the organization claimed a significant success in destroying all government radar installations used to guide surface-to-air missiles. Their air strikes were fundamental to save Benghazi from a “*government armoured-column that bulldozed his way to the outskirts of town*” (The Economist, 2011c). In this way, they saved the revolution and notified Gaddafi that his time in power was about to come to an end. The US limited themselves to using intelligence and Predator drones, while France and Britain enforced the no-fly zone, halting the air traffic. In addition, they

conducted selective air strikes to target Libya's air defence and helped the rebel forces gain land. They believed that controlling Libya's airspace would bring Gaddafi down in no time, but they were wrong. In fact, by June 1, the NATO had extended its mission for another 90 days.

The African Union (AU) tried to put an end to the Libyan conflict by finding a political solution. South Africa's president Jacob Zuma, close to Gaddafi, was the face of the involvement of the AU with Libya. In April, a delegation of African heads of state met separately with Gaddafi's and NTC's representatives to present a peace plan, calling for an immediate cease fire, the formation of an inclusive transitional government, the establishment of a framework for democratic transformation and a national reconciliation (MRZINE, 2011). While Gaddafi accepted the plan, the NTC rejected it as it did not specify that Gaddafi would step down from government: the rebels wanted him out due to his brutal campaign and the increase in civilian deaths.

In late April, NATO came to Misrata's rescue and bombed Gaddafi's tanks and artillery, giving the rebels access to the port area and advance slowly in the city. By May 11, the rebels had regained control over the airport. On the 15th, Gaddafi's forces withdrew from Misrata (Al-Jazeera, 2011). Zawiya came under heavy government bombardments, which led the NTC to complain of NATO air strikes, which were defined "*too slow, halting some of the regime's offences but failing to tip the balance*" (Hauslohner and Baker, 2011).

In June the NTC had to deal with a financial crisis, as they had no oil to sell because the energy infrastructure had been damaged. The NTC needed immediate access to Libya's overseas funds in order to pay wages and cover other costs, counting on receiving \$2.5 billion from Qatar (The Economist, 2011d). By late June the fighting was stalled, which divided the country into the government-controlled western region and the rebel-controlled east.

Meanwhile, the AU was growing more and more impatient with the NATO-led air campaign against Gaddafi's forces. Its delegation once again proposed to put an end to the conflict, but the plan was once again rejected by the NTC as they were set on having Gaddafi leave the country. When summer ended, it was clear to the AU that Gaddafi's departure was necessary as "*he could no longer lead Libya*" (All Africa, 2011). However, South African president Zuma disagreed with his colleagues, still believing that a negotiated solution could be reached, and instead blamed the NATO powers for undermining the AU initiatives and efforts to find a possible solution.

By August, the UN special envoy to Libya, Abdelilah Al-Khatib, had made no progress whatsoever to resolve the conflict. The UN Secretary-General urged both sides to cooperate with Al-Khatib to reach "*a cease fire tied to transitional arrangements which address the aspirations of the Libyan people*" (United Nations, 2011). This effort failed because Gaddafi refused to relinquish his power. At this point, the rebels were starting to

gain round, advancing in the Nafusa Mountains. On August 15, the rebels captured Garyan, a strategic juncture that gained them the control of all roads leading to the capital. Four days later, the nearby city of Zintan was captured. On August 21, NATO bombardment forced Gaddafi's forces to flee its base in Zawiya, which allowed the rebels to restock for the battle of Tripoli (The Economist, 2011d).

On August 20, there were clashes between Gaddafi's forces and rebel groups in Tajura and Souk al-Juma neighbourhoods in Tripoli (Erdbrink and Fadel, 2011). The rebels then captured the state telecom company and restored the country's Internet connection (The Economist, 2011c). The following day, the battle of Tripoli officially began. Thousands of rebel fighters entered the city and found little resistance. Gaddafi called on his supporters and promised them weapons to fight off the rebels; he assured them that he was in the capital and would stay with them "*until the end*" (MSNBC, 2011). The rebels reached the Green Square and raised the monarchy flag. They met a resistance near Gaddafi's fortified compound, but it was eventually captured. A few days later, the rebels had managed to eliminate the other resistance in the city.

Gaddafi had managed to escape Tripoli with his family. The NTC had offered a \$2 million award for any information that could lead them to Gaddafi, who had been charged by the ICC of committing crimes against humanity. Guessing Gaddafi would be hiding in his hometown, the NTC gave Sirte's authorities until the beginning of September to surrender (Fadel, 2011). Sirte was put under siege and the hunt for Gaddafi intensified. The Libyans did not feel safe as long as Gaddafi was still in the country, while his loyalists were still controlling some areas in the hinterland and could cause havoc.

In fact, on September 12, Gaddafi's loyalists raided the oil facilities at Ras Lanuf and killed 15 people (The Economist, 2011c). But Gaddafi did not plan for a quiet step down. He announced the beginning of a long struggle to defeat NATO and the traitors, defining that "*Libya will burn.*" (Bahrapour, 2011) The NTC fighters were sent out to fight Gaddafi's clansmen in Sirte as well as the loyalist in Bani Walid, which was a gateway to the desert interior. By late September, the fighting led NATO to extend its Libya's mission again for up to 90 days.

On August 25, the UN Security Council released \$1.5 billion from Gaddafi's frozen assets, which helped ease the financial crisis the NTC was facing, since it needed funds to pay back wages for government employees, fix the damaged infrastructures, restore basic services and cover the cost of transition and consolidation. However, the US or international agencies were put in charge of dispersing the funds so to ensure its use for humanitarian needs; among them noticeable was the attempt by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi who promised to unfreeze \$500 million (Lee Myers and Bilefsky, 2011). The South African president Zuma refused to release \$1.5 billion of Libya's frozen assets, stating that the NTC had not been officially recognized by the UN. After facing pressure by the other agencies, though, he released \$500 million for humanitarian needs (Smith, 2011).

Meanwhile, the NTC executive committee tried to assure the people that they were planning the transition. Their plan was to appoint a new interim government which represented all people and tribes, within 30 days of a “Declaration of Liberation”, hold multiparty elections in eight months and write a new constitution in 20 months (The Economist, 2011a). While they wanted to wait until all land was free from Gaddafi’s control, the complaints were many, which led them to pledge that it would begin rebuilding Libya as a democratic state after the fall of Sirte (Markey, 2016). On the 1st of September, the NTC’s head Abdel Jalil announced that they were “*not a political party and won’t exist beyond the first elections*” (Hussain, 2011).

On the 10th of September Abdel Jalil went to Tripoli and delivered a speech at Martyr’s Square, where he shared his vision of a new Libya to 10.000 people, a Libya that “*would be a country of tolerance and mercy, free from extremism and open for all to take part in shaping a common future*” (The Economist, 2011d). He then urged the Libyans to unite and warned against reprisal killings or taking law into their own hands. In addition, Jalil decided to retain Gaddafi’s army, police and civil service.

By the end of September, over 80 countries had recognized the NTC as the legitimate authority in the country (Al-Turk, 2011). On October 17, Bani Walid was captured and, three days later, even Sirte was about to fall. On October 20, Gaddafi tried to flee the city but was captured alive and shot dead. His death marked the end of the regime and the country’s liberation. People rushed into the street of the three main cities – Tripoli, Misrata and Benghazi – to celebrate the end of the autocratic rule. This departure meant that Libyans were entering a new period of uncertainty for the future, but also of the end of old institutions in favour of a democratic transition.

After his demise, the NTC continued to govern through the transition even if its members were not elected. The stabilization of the country became their fundamental mission together with bringing the local militias under government control. When Gaddafi’s army fled their bases in Tripoli, an important number of weapons depots had been left unguarded, allowing rebels and civilians to haul out weapons and explosives. Security thus became another fundamental issue in the country, as the NTC was too weak to force the militias that had been created to come under its control.

Another challenge became the political transition. The NTC leadership was divided over the scheduling of elections and the draft of the new constitution. Prime Minister Jabril did not support the initial plan to hold elections in summer and to allow a new congress to choose a panel to write the constitution; he instead proposed to double the NTC membership to 120, including women, youth and military commanders from around the country in order to permit an expanded council that could draft a constitution and prepare for elections. In the announcement of his resignation, he highlighted the importance of holding the elections

sooner, warning that a political vacuum could develop in a country emerging from an eight-month civil war (Sheridan, 2011).

On the day of the end of the NATO mission in Libya in November, the NTC elected a new interim prime minister, Abdel Rahim El-Keeb. El-Keeb chose only secularists to serve in the cabinet, a proper move to address western concerns of the role the Islamists had in the post-Gaddafi regime.

The last problem was a communication one. The NTC was accused of operating in secrecy and ruling by decree, which did not give people confidence in its deliberations, eventually leading to a new series of peaceful demonstrations. In Benghazi, about 2000 youths demonstrated in front of the NTC offices, ransacking the offices – while Abdel Jalil was in the building -, demanding more transparency and calling for the removal of Gaddafi's officials from government (Stack, 2012). To calm the protest, the NTC deputy chief Abdel Hafiz Ghoga and Saleh El-Ghazal, head of the Benghazi's local council, resigned their posts. Other appointed local council members were then removed, and their replacements were put up to election. Furthermore, the NTC announced the set-up of a religious leaders council in order to investigate charges of corruption in its ranks and in the government to identify improper ties to Gaddafi's regime (Ibid.).

The NTC tried drafting an electoral law without consulting interest groups or civil society organizations. Women activists were the one to put more pressure on the NTC's committee to increase women's allocation, as only 10% of the parliamentary seats were reserved to women. Libyans forced to live in exile during Gaddafi's regime were outraged because of the rule denying them to run for office because of their dual citizenship. In addition, there was opposition to the winner-take-all elections made on the ground that it would encourage people *“to vote along tribal lines or for rich prominent citizens in their region and undercut those that seek to form new parties”* (Ibid.).

The NTC therefore decided to delay the release of the electoral law until January 2012 and worked on changes. The council doubled the number of seats for women, required women's inclusion in each party's candidate lists with an alternation between male and female on the lists. In addition, the Libyans with dual citizenship could now compete in the election and changed the winner-take-all approach to proportional representation.

The allocation of the 200-seat national congress revived instead the old east-west rivalry. Based on population, the NTC had allotted 100 seats to Tripolitania, the west, 60 to the east, the region of the Cyrenaica, and 40 to the South, Fezzan. The Benghazi leaders objected to the number of seats for the east, accusing the NTC of perpetuating Gaddafi's marginalization of their region as they were the ones who constantly opposed his regime and were therefore the most punished. At the beginning of March, 3000 tribal and political leaders met in Benghazi and refused the seat allocation, then established an autonomous provincial government in the east,

that is Cyrenaica, for administrative purposes, but still supported a united Libya. The head of the provincial governing council became Ahmed Al-Zubair, an NTC member (Al Jazeera, 2012b).

The action was strongly opposed by the NTC, which feared a break-up of the country. Jalil called for a dialogue and vowed to use force if necessary. Waheed Burshan, senior NTC member, warned that “*the Libyan people will not stand for autonomous provinces*” (Al Jazeera, 2012a). After clashes in Sebha and Kufra in April, also the southern leaders tried calling for autonomy, with similar calls emerging also from cities in the west (Pack, 2012). The calls for autonomy were actually premature as a constitutional committee was going to be formed only after the elections.

The NTC established a High National Election Commission to oversee the national elections and scheduled them for June 19. Voter registration began in May, but the NTC faced a major challenge in educating people who had no electoral experience in such a short time period; therefore, the NTC decided to delay the elections only slightly, from June 19 to July 7, to allow non-qualified candidates more time to appeal to the citizens. Gaddafi’s officials were banned from running for elections and the NTC members were also not allowed to run. By the deadline of July 7, over 85% of eligible voters had successfully registered to vote (Bahrapour, 2012).

There were 1206 candidates divided into 142 parties and associations and 2501 independent candidates running up for the new national congress. All of them were given a guideline by the election commission in order “*to avoid conducts that foster the outbreak of conflicts between voters, hurt national unity and sow discrimination or hatred*” (www.aljazeera.com, 2012a). Some candidates complained they were given only 18 days of campaigning. Ian Martin, head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), acknowledged that it was a tight schedule, but it was “doable”. He stated: “*It doesn’t have to be a perfect election, but it is a much needed election*” (Ibid.).

Jibril’s National Forces Coalition was the highest ranked party in 11 of the 13 electoral districts, gaining 41 out of the 80 seats in congress. In Misrata, the majority of the votes went to the Union for the Homeland Party. The Muslim Brotherhood’s Justice and Construction Party ranked second in 9 out of 13 electoral districts, winning 17 seats overall. Libyans appeared to be socially conservatives and tended to reject extremists independently from whether they were on the right or the left of the spectrum; in addition, even if religious and practiced Islam, they objected to using religion as a vehicle of gaining power.

Jibril’s coalition was successful partly because he could count on a huge bloc of votes from his Warfalla tribe, which amounted to a sixth of Libya’s population; in addition, he had been on television more than any other candidate talking about his party’s platform and urging voters to support him and his coalition. His plan to

form a unity government was decisive to bring a change in the issue of the national reconciliation. He reached out to Benghazi to try to find a compromise to bring the eastern region back into the fold.

Libya made progress in building democratic institutions as of August 2012. On the 8th of this month, the NTC handed power to the national congress and went out of business, creating a new era where power was now in the hands of the people. On the 9th, the congress elected Mohammed El-Megarif, the National Front's leader – the oldest opposition group – to be the country's first democratic president with 113 votes, who remained in office until the new constitution was written in 2013, being followed firstly by Giuma Ahmed Atigha and then by Nuri Busahmein.

As of December 2021, a new president of the Presidential Council has been elected - Mohamed Younis Ahmed Al-Manfi, politician and diplomat who on the 5th of February was elected as president of the Presidential Council of Libya organized by the UNSMIL. Al-Menfi ran together with Abdul Hamid al-Dabaib as prime minister and Musa Al-Koni as members of the Presidential Council. The list obtained 39 votes out of the 73 participants who voted, five more than the Aguila Saleh Issa's and Fathi Bashagha's list (Zaptia, 2021a), which was perceived to be favoured by the United States of America, whose ambassadors denied any attempt to influence the electoral process (Zaptia, 2021b).

1.4 Syria

Just a few weeks after the ouster of the Tunisian dictator bin Ali, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad insisted that Syria would have not been next. According to the president the Syrian policy was *“very closely linked to the beliefs of the people and Syria was free of the “pollution” built up over decades of rule of “stagnant water” regimes in the other Middle East states* (Wall Street Journal, 2011). And while initially it appeared to be true, with an Egypt-inspired “Day of Rage” protest planned for early February 2011 soon ceasing down despite the buzz on social media (The New York Times, 2011), it is also true that the authorities had taken the possibility of any uprising seriously, with the security forces aggressively ending any popular gathering in any major city, even if innocuous.

Following the arrest of 15 school children in Dara'a, a small city close to the Jordanian border, Syria changed forever. The youths, which were seized by the local authorities while aping the revolutionaries in Tunisia and Egypt and spray painting *“The people demand the fall of the regime”* on the walls of the local school, were beaten and tortured. When their parents begged for their release, one of the local officials was reported saying: *“Forget your children. If you really want your children, you should make more children. If you don't know how to make more children, we will show you how to do it”* (Sterling, 2012).

On March 18, thousands of protesters gathered at the al-Omari Mosque and marched at security forces, demanding the release of the children, greater political freedom, and an end to government corruption. When riot police failed to stop the protesters' advance with batons and other cannons, members of the security services opened fire on the crowd with live ammunition, which resulted in four deaths and a dozen wounded (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

Protests spread to the nearby towns of Jassem, Da'el, Sanamein, and Inkhil as the Ba'ath party headquarters in Dara'a was burned to the ground. A delegation led by General Rustum Ghazala, the head of Syrian military intelligence in Lebanon and a Dara'a native, promised to bring those who fired on the protesters to justice. State security also released the arrested children of the tribal leaders, and the government issued a decree cutting taxes and raising state salaries (Macleod, 2011). Though, action proved to be insufficient as the boys, who had spent several weeks in jail, returned bloody and battered, some even missing fingernails, which enraged the citizens of Dara'a. On the 26th of March the protests spread to the coastal city of Latakia. During the clashes with the security forces, 12 people were killed.

On the 30th of March, the President Bashar al-Assad spoke in a televised address to the nation from the Syrian parliament. The speech was expected to have a conciliatory tone, as many believed the president would try to significantly change the government policy, among which putting an end to the emergency law that banned public gatherings which had been going on for four decades (Chulov, 2011). Instead of trying to approach the reactionaries, Assad doubled down and insisted that reform would occur, but at a deliberate pace. Assad distanced himself from his fellow Arab authoritarians who made vocal commitments to reform. However, Assad did not differ from his peers on addressing the origins of the unrest: like Mubarak and Ben Ali had done in their respective countries, the Syrian president described the uprising as a conspiracy, an outside plot to destabilize the country. Assad thought that those that were initially protesting had "good intentions" but were "misled" by "foreign conspirators" who were only interested in spreading "chaos in the country under the pretext of reform" (Landis, 2011).

Syrians were enraged with how their legitimate grievances were treated so poorly. On that same week, after Friday prayers, Syrians took to the street by the thousands in towns and cities across the country. Syrians weren't fearful anymore, signing the start of the Arab Spring in Syria. But the Syrian government had already faced popular revolts before, as Hafez al-Assad, Bashar al-Assad's father, subjected the population to a systematic of political arrests.

By the end of April, that is only a month after Syria's protests had begun, Bashar al-Assad had enough of the demonstrations. Even if initially he only responded with a combination of violent repression and a series of

reactionary promises of reform, when the protesters started gaining greater mobilization, militant voices within the regime won out. Assad decided to deploy the Syrian Armed Forces with orders to shoot to kill, first in Dara'a, but soon also to the rest of the country. Violence perpetrated in the country against what was described by the regime as a group of "armed terrorists" but in reality were peaceful demonstrators, something that increased the number of anti-government protests. Hundreds of thousands of people started demonstrations across Damascus, Aleppo and Hama (BBC News, 2011b).

Syrian tanks laid a complete siege to population centres which included Dara'a, Baniyas, Homs, Talkalakh, Latakia and Hama. The security forces deployed snipers on various buildings close to the demonstrations and used the Shabiha Alawite paramilitary units in order to intimidate, torture and kill the protesters. Not all the soldiers wanted to kill unarmed civilians, however, despite government orders to execute those soldiers who refused to fire on the demonstrators (Al Jazeera, 2011), news of defecting from the army spread.

On the 29th of July 2011, the Air Force Colonel Riad al-As'ad announced his defection together with several other officers and formed the Free Syrian Army (Asharq al-Awsat, 2011). On YouTube, a video was posted in which al-As'ad asked the members of the government forces to "abandon their military units" and join him in the creation of a national army to protect the revolutionaries and all Syrian people with all their sects.

Not all the Syrian Opposition was armed; in fact, already from the beginning, various groups, councils and committees had been formed to plan protests to support the revolution, both inside and outside the country. The first one was the Syrian National Council, formed in Turkey on the 23rd of August 2011, and is the "*biggest and most significant opposition grouping in exile, and the main point of reference for outside countries that support the opposition*" (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2013). It was made of famous intellectuals and human rights activists from the days of the "Damascus Spring" and the "Damascus Declaration", but also those from other opposition groups and demographic minorities such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Although it was formed to act similarly to the Libya's National Transitional Council, the SNC had way less success than its inspiration.

Then, there was the Local Coordinating Committees and Revolutionary Councils, which made up Syria's internal grassroots opposition. The local committees were created for the sake of planning, documenting and publicizing demonstrations against the regime and did not have a connection to the pre-revolt opposition (Spyer, 2011). There were more than 400 different local committees in every Syrian town and suburb which made up the "*backbone of the Syrian revolution*" (O'Bagy, 2012b), but they operated mostly on local levels, so, some 50 Revolutionary Councils formed organically across the country in order to facilitate the communication and the planning over larger geographic areas and urban centres. Even if it played a secondary role in the escalation of the armed conflicts, the local councils were instrumental in the coordination of the

activity of the civilians, both in anti-regime efforts, the distribution of humanitarian aid or the provision of medical and legal services (Ibid.).

The last one was the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which was not an “army” per se, but a rebranding under which the majority of the opposition operated, consisting of a large number of loosely coordinated local militias. In some areas, the forces consisted entirely of defectors from the army, in others local residents that wanted to defend their families, therefore deciding to take up arms (Spyer, 2012). Riad al-As’ad, commander of the FSA, moved the headquarters into northern Syria in order to obtain more support, solidify the command and control structure and unite the various forces.

Initially, the Free Syrian Army played an almost exclusively defensive role in Syria’s revolution, as small groups of local fighters, armed with weapons obtained through the black market or via defection, attended the demonstrations to protect the civilians: the offences mainly consisted in small-scale raids on local checkpoints or security offices. Insurrections in the isolated town had crackdowns by the regime forces. The rebels were outmatched in training, the quality of the weapons and the numbers of fighters. For almost a year, local militias would swoop in on the regime in towns and rural suburbs, holding territory before being forced to flee by the Syrian army which brought reinforcements. Especially in January 2012 in Zabadani, a town 30 kilometres from Damascus, where the rebels managed to destroy a number of tanks and hold town for a few weeks before being driven out by the Syrian forces.

As FSA brigades grew in size and capabilities, Assad’s forces started to change their tactics. The Syrian army started using artillery to surround and bombard the restive areas. In Homs, the government artillery laid siege to the Baba Amr neighbourhood for weeks, which caused a humanitarian crisis which killed thousands were killed and wounded before the Syrian soldiers retook the area at the beginning of March (Holliday, 2012). The extremist jihadi groups also played a role in the conflict, which although remained marginal to the revolution, as less than 5% of those who fought in the FSA belonged to jihadi groups. The number was much lower at the start of the conflict, but the more the Syrian state receded, the more space was available for the extremists to operate.

The first group is the Jabhat al-Nusra, formed in late 2011 and the most well-known Islamist group operating in Syria. Al-Nusra was responsible for a series of high profile bombings in Syria’s urban centres which also conducted military operations across much of the country. It was never announced as an al-Qaeda affiliate, but Jabhat al-Nusra remained closely linked to the transnational jihadi networks and is believed to have been formed by Syrians with experience fighting for al-Qaeda’s Islamic State in Iraq, the ISI (Lund, 2012). Jabhat al-Nusra is thought to have 6000 fighters under its command across all the country (Ignatius, 2012).

Another one was the Ahrar al-Sham Brigade, a collection of Salafi and conservative Islamist militia which operates in northern Syria. This one worked closely both with the FSA and with Jabhat al-Nusra and has a media department. Even if the leadership is kept secret, Ahrar al-Sham is popular across the jihadi forums and the battlefield. The majority of the foreign fighters stationed in Syria fight under the Ahrar al-Sham, and most of them are Salafi-jihadists (O'Bagy, 2012a).

On the 23rd of February 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon announced that he had appointed former Secretary-General Kofi Annan as UN-Arab League envoy to Syria (Reuters, 2012). The following months, the international community was focused on Annan's six point peace plan, which aimed at negotiating a ceasefire between the Syrian army and the rebel forces. The plan was, though, doomed to be a failure, as Russia and China started blocking any measure that would bring to consequences should the Assad regime fail to implement the plan, since in reality the fighting never stopped (Gladstone, 2012).

What was certain was that the various international forces were implementing fundamentally incompatible foreign policies in Syria. The NATO-led mission in Libya had left Russia feeling unwilling to cooperate with any other Western initiatives in the Middle East. Syria was the home of Russia's only naval base in the Middle East, so it would not allow it to collapse. In addition, Syria was the only last country highly influenced by Russia in the Middle East, which showed the obstinacy of the country at the UN, which had become more of a necessity for them. Russia's aim was to support Bashar al-Assad's government at all costs; the involvement of the country is still unknown, but the reports suggest that the Russian government continues to supply the Assad regime with cash and military hardware, in addition to diplomatic support (Linzer, Larson and Grabell, 2012).

China also provided Syria with diplomatic support, but for different reasons. The Arab Spring was frightful for China, as it was for all those countries with large impoverished and disenfranchised populations. Its vetoes against the resolutions at the Security Council are to be attributed to a non-interference ideology: in fact, China's leaders had always regarded the Syrian conflict as an internal affair to be dealt with by the sovereign government. Giving any kind of intervention their support would be a violation for the UN Charter, according to the People's Republic, but it would also set a dangerous standard according to which the countries or the UN itself would use the international bodies to satisfy their geopolitical agendas (Swaine, n.d.).

For what regards instead the Western powers, the Syrian revolution seemed more of an international inconvenience rather than a priority. Even if the US, the UK and other various states continued to pledge and deliver humanitarian aid to support more than 400.000 registered Syrian refugees living in camps in Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon, no Western country committed to a decisive solution to end the conflict (Gladstone and MacFarquhar, 2012).

Former president Barack Obama declared already in August 2011 that “*the time had come for President Assad to step aside*”, yet, after one year, the regime was battered but still in place (Wilson and Warrick, 2011). However, for much of the conflict, Republicans called for the implementation of a no-fly zone across Syria in order to protect the civilians from bombardment and to catalyse the rebel advances. The Obama administration, though, remained opposed to any measure of this kind. Syria was a foreign policy disaster, particularly in light of the US past experiences with Iraq and Afghanistan. Rumours had even circulated of the French intelligence agents wandering through Syria with suitcases containing cash and CIA operatives which coordinated the rebels from offices in Turkey. But this action, had hardly a tangible effect on the fight for Syria.

Since the start of the Arab Spring, the regional powers such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, all struggled to decide what their role would be in the uprisings. In the Syrian case, however, they were all committed to supporting the revolutionary forces. Turkey had for much of the conflict served as a base for the operations of the FSA command and welcomed the presence of the Syrian National Council members in Istanbul, as well as shouldering the humanitarian burden by providing safety and aid to the refugees. Furthermore, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar used the Turkish territory to coordinate the funding and arming of the rebel militias, apparently with the tacit approval of the US government (Doherty and Bakr, 2012).

Such support, though, was not as extensive as it was documented. The majority of the arms wielded by the rebel fighters were either captured from the regime depots or were purchased on the black market. The more the conflict went on, more weapons and ammunition procured by the Gulf States started being deployed in the areas of conflict (Davis, 2013).

On the other side, also the regime had its support among the regional states. Iran, an aged ally of Syria, along with the Lebanese political party and paramilitary group Hezbollah, aided Assad in his fight. Iran provided military equipment – which was all ferried through Iraqi airspace – hundreds of elite Revolutionary Guard “military advisors” (Coughlin, 2012), and extensive technical assistance to the Syrian government in its effort to track the opposition on the internet (Nakashima, 2012). At the same time, Hezbollah sent fighters directly into Syria to aid the regime (Wood, 2012).

As of now, the conflict has still not ended, with Assad still being in the regime (Lister, 2020). At present, the collapse is still seen as a remote possibility for three reasons: the Syrian government’s power is consolidated, the opposition still appears fragmented and the international actors who are strongly committed to the survival of the regime have a strong resolve. In fact, the 2019 Worldwide Threat Assessment authorized by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has noted that the Assad regime held momentum and, as aforementioned, was and still is supported by Iran and Russia in its consolidation of territorial gains (Jafri and Goncharova, 2020). Iran and Russia are still strongly invested in the Syrian regime, therefore any sign of a

collapse would likely cause a decisive response from the states, especially if we consider the economic ties between Russia and Syria.

It is clear that there are forces at work in Syria that work in order to shield the Assad regime from collapsing and, if they should fail, it could precipitate to a collapse.

Chapter II: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

All countries have been shown to be similar in many aspects but the outcome of the uprising; it is necessary therefore to assess the similarities and how they contributed to the uprisings in the different countries. There are various approaches that have been used to study the origins of a revolution and why it starts; these different approaches have conceptualized the revolutions in different ways. In this chapter we will synthesize a number of different approaches highlighting the aspects that have resulted to be the most relevant in the context of the Arab Spring, that is the role the military played in the revolution and the role played by social media.

2.2 Structural Approaches: Skocpol and The Social Revolutions

In order to do so, we analyse the concept of revolution, taking advantage of the key contribution by Theda Skocpol, American sociologist and political scientist, who proposed the definition of “social revolutions” (Skocpol, 1979a, pp.175–210).

Skocpol designated a model of revolutions according to which they begin with the “Crisis of State” that is generated by various internal factors, like security and economic competition from the world. This first condition is then augmented by a second factor, that is “Class Dominance”, the identification of the group that will exploit the situation of revolution (Ibid.). These two are the main basic factors from which a social revolution is born. There is also a differentiation to be made between the Social Revolution and what Skocpol defines the Political Revolution: the Social Revolution is comprehensive both of the political revolution and of the changes in the social structure, while the Political Revolution refers only to changes in government.

In Skocpol’s view, social revolutions are uniquely crucial (Skocpol, 1979b, p.278). They need to look at all groups that compete for power in the state; for Skocpol to be social, a revolution needs a deliberate and substantial change in state and class structures. Therefore, the state and class organizations are central to the revolutions, and something that does not bring any kind of tangible change in the realms does not qualify as a social revolution (Skocpol, 1979a, pp.175–210). In addition, according to the scholar, there needs to be an understanding of international and world-historical contexts to understand social revolutions (Ibid.).

In fact, an event in one part of the world can have drastic impacts on events in another, such as what happened in the 2011 Arab Spring which not only influenced the other states of the Middle East-North African region but was also influenced by international factors. The push for democracy in Tunisia spread like a wildfire around the rest of the Arab world, leading to a mass pro-democracy protest – which reflects many of the

Skocpol's ideas on the international impacts (Anderson, 2011). According to Skocpol, the most relevant transnational relations are shaped by the structure of world capitalism and the international state system (Skocpol, 1979a, pp.175–210). For example, the placement of sanctions on a country by another can result in changes in policy by the government of the sanctioned state, which can worsen the life of the people, which in turn creates the necessary preconditions for a revolution.

Furthermore, Skocpol attributes the influence of the international sphere to global capitalism: capitalism is in fact spread in an uneven manner around the world, with some countries profiting from capitalism more than others, and the transnational economic relations that have developed will always influence the national economic developments of such countries. Capitalism has created an international system of competing states which have in turn shaped the uneven state development course that left some states behind (Ibid.). It is safe to say that the economically disadvantaged states will more likely be the ones to experience a revolutionary situation because of the disparity created by global capitalism.

There is a difference to be made between Skocpol and other theorists, that is that she does not consider a state's government to be under complete control of the dominant class. Skocpol sees that the government's goal is the preservation of the existing class structure and modes of production as a whole (Ibid.). To achieve this, the government may be free from specific control of dominant class groups, but it has to implement policies that serve the dominant class's fundamental interests (Ibid.). The class struggle reductionism theory affirms that the state structures are all shaped by the class struggle between the dominant and the subordinate classes and that many of the social revolutions started because of direct contradictions based on the structure of the old regime (Ibid.). This is the ability of the state to withstand the revolution depends mainly on the structure the state has. Even if a loss of legitimacy happens, a state can still remain stable and unmoved by the mass revolts if the coercive organizations remain coherent and effective (Ibid.).

The model proposed by Skocpol is the framework that best helped predict which countries in the region did or did not experience the Arab Spring uprisings. According to the scholar, the countries involved in the Arab Spring showed signs of international economic and security competition since decades, which had contributed to create the conditions for a revolution (Ibid.); in fact, the Arab region was and still is characterised by high levels of income disparity: for example, in Egypt one half of the Egyptians lived on \$2 per day, immensely low from the other half, such as the businesses or those connected to President Mubarak, who enjoyed a great benefit from his official position. In addition, the annual per capita Gross National Product of Egypt was only \$2,791.8 (The World Bank and OECD, 2022). Moreover, the Arab countries in which the revolutions begun showed higher food prices than the world average population of the world, a data that highlights the theory expressed by Skocpol.

Another important issue is the levels of unemployment in the countries, which highly contributed to the participation of the youths in the revolutionary situation. On average, 24% of the Arab youth were unable to find jobs (Haerens and Zott, 2013). The issue worsened after the world financial crisis. Around two-thirds of the Arab population consisted of youth at the time, which was under 30.24% unemployed people (Clark, 2011); the high population rate together with the rising unemployment rate contributed to the creation of a ripple effect for the demand to change the basic structures of society.

In his book “Neopatriarchy”, Hisham Sharabi affirms that even when the majority of the Western countries of the world enjoy political rights and democracy, the Arab region suffered from an intense corrupt political system, state of emergency laws, a lack of freedom of speech and election as well as the lack of fundamental rights to practice religious practices, thus highlighting the difference of human and political rights between the different regions of the world (Sharabi and Berque, 1996). These conditions add up to the reasons to make a revolutionary situation as identified by Skocpol. The prime example is the lack of political freedom and intensified corruption in Egypt, starting from the emergency laws number 162 of 1958 which had been enacted by the Egypt government in 1967 after the “Six Day War” and that abolished a series of constitutional rights while enhancing the level of power given to police (Mccaffrey, 2012), a situation that presented itself even during the uprisings when the SCAF entered the revolutionary scene.

Another fact highlighted by Skocpol is that the dominant group exploited the revolutionary situation to carryout mass mobilization. In fact, in the majority of the countries, numerous Islamist groups rose to power, such as the Ennahda Party in Tunisia, which provided a platform for the revolt against the Constitutional Democratic Rally (CDR) and Ben Ali, or the National Transition Council (NTC) in Libya that became the political weapon of the revolution under which the protestors started the demonstration and almost controlled Benghazi.

2.3: Agency-based Approaches: Davies and Gurr and the Modernization Processes

It is possible to affirm, then, that Skocpol goes against the line of the second-generation theorists from the post-WWII period, such as James Davies and Ted Gurr, who pointed to the modernization processes as the root of the revolutions in developing countries. The more modernization advances and economies grow, the more a down-turn in growth is able to cause a sense of “relative deprivation”, that is a divide between what people expect to be and to have and what they have and are in reality (Bayat, 2021b). In fact, we can categorize Skocpol among the third-generation theorists, who put capitalism, class relations and international wars as the root cause for the generalized discontent and the revolutionary situations. The third generation of thinkers offers a more structuralist paradigm, but it does not explain why some revolutions started in places that had

none of these conditions and did not occur in societies that had instead the conditions for a revolution (Bayat, 2021b).

It needs to be said that the wave of protest in the Arab region did not have structural preconditions. Although there was no hard prerequisite, the uprisings were highly likely to appear under nonhereditary authoritarian regimes; still, Libya and Syria are already an exception to the pattern. It is therefore the agent, not the structure, that drove the uprisings. A reversal of Skocpol's theory can therefore be made: the Arab Spring was not a revolution that came after a set of various conditions, they were made by the people (Skocpol, 1979a, pp.175–210).

2.4 An Alternative Approach: Asef Bayat and the Refolutions

Asef Bayat tries to find a new nuance to the Arab Spring starting from the assessment that the Arab revolutions were mainly “leaderless” in the sense that, while there were many local leaders or coordinators, there was no charismatic leader that guided them (Bayat, 2021c). The second affirmation is that the revolutions barely developed a solid organization in any country that had a successful command structure and distribution of responsibilities to articulate a strategy in order to speak with one voice. According to Bayat, the choice of the protesters was that of “horizontalism”, which involves different and multiple ideas and voices which spread easily and quickly also thanks to the new technologies and social media and mobile phones. Thirdly, the absence of a leader and of a trusted organization made the possibility of representation in the negotiations with the regimes unlikely. In addition, the Arab Spring had no ideology behind the uprisings, whether it was nationalism, Marxism, Islamism or liberalism (Bayat, 2021c). The absence of an intellectual vision to articulate a revolutionary transformation in the countries analysed made it difficult for it to truly happen. The fifth reason is that the Arab Spring did not cause a serious breach in the old order of things: the key institutions of the state and the old ruling classes remained more or less unaltered and intact.

As affirmed by Hannah Arendt, the collapse of authority and power can be defined as a revolution “*only when there are people willing and capable of picking up the power, of moving into and penetrating, so to speak, the power vacuum*” (Arendt, 2017). This notion cannot be applied to Tunisia and Egypt, where there was not a power vacuum since the state power did not see a real collapse, nor the insurgents were willing and capable of becoming the ones in power. The protestors always remained marginal to the government since they did not plan to ascend to power, but only to have better lives and opportunities. When they realized – only some and later – that the insurgents should have taken over the government, they did not have the resources to do so, such as the leadership, the strategies or the organization.

According to Bayat, the Arab Spring represents a new generation of revolutions, rich as movement but poor in terms of change (Bayat, 2017). These four revolutions did not bring societal changes, as Skocpol affirms in her theory, or a radical transformation of the states; Bayat uses the term “*refolutions*” – first coined by Timothy Garton-Ash to describe the anti-communist upheavals in 1989 in Eastern Europe – revolutionary movements that emerged only to push the incumbents into reforming themselves (Bayat, 2017) – writing new constitutions, holding new elections and create a better and new mode of governance. They did not want to take on the power, but merely to see it made better. The *refolutions*, therefore, sometimes may not bring to a fundamental transformation since the regimes were left to themselves to change and thus may not do so unless if put under pressure. It is not a case that in Tunisia and Egypt, that were touched by the uprisings, there was a large resistance in reforming the government personnel and regimes. For Syria and Libya, due to the intervention of foreign forces, it is difficult to make the same argument, as the extraordinary intervention significantly altered the nonviolent aspect of the revolutions and turned them into armed conflicts (Achi, 2020).

Furthermore, the *refolutions* have naturally given rise to non-hegemonic and fairly pluralistic regimes: in fact, the existence and persistence of multiple powers – as well as those from the past regimes – prevent the resurgent from monopolizing power. It is possible to notice this in post-revolution Tunisia until the coup d’état in the summer of 2021.

The new generation of *refolutions*, for the theorist, emerged worldwide from the post-Cold War condition in which the ideas of individualism, human rights, NGOs, market and neoliberal reform spread. The Arab Spring was born in a background of a post-socialist, post-Islamist and neoliberal world, where the idea of revolution became interconnected with ideas of civil society, NGOs, individual rights, identity politics, democracy and liberal reform (Bayat, 2017). The historical background is though supported by the rise of the new social media. Social networks played a fundamental role in the *refolutions* as they enabled the activists to call on other people to join them in protesting against the regimes and spread news – where made possible by the governments – about the protests. The new technologies made available through the internet rendered political mobilization easier for the protesters. But at the same time, even if the crowd was of spectacular sizes, it developed without a real strategic vision about the transformation of the status quo in order to achieve a new social order.

Even if *refolutions* may not cause any radical break in the structure, they can generate radical thoughts and practices at the grassroots level (Bayat, 2017), a theory that, according to Bayat, has been overlooked by the dominant literature. The main revolutionary theories are, in the theorist’s view, are all centred on the macro-structural, institutional, political and state-centric viewpoints. Bayat instead focuses on a micro-perspective to understand what revolting means in the eyes of the people in everyday lives, but also in the ideas, the norms and the popular subjectivities (Bayat, 2021a). The situations of the Arab Spring show a long popular struggle

over issues such as property norms, self-rule and redistribution, which have revealed an even more important and radical series of practices which are mainly pursued by the poor, the marginalized youths and women. These practices are far from the preoccupations of the political class which focuses on human rights and democracy (Bayat, 2021a).

2.5 Military Behaviour in Endgame Scenarios

What many theorists agree with, though, is the theory according to which the factor that influenced the different outcomes of the four revolutions is the Military-Government relations. Analysing the theories on military defections and loyalty, many theorists such as Barany affirm that an increase in economical support and political power is more likely to keep the military loyal to the regime (Barany, 2011), while others suggest that the military that are the same in ethnicity to their regime are more likely to stay loyal to the regime (Lutterbeck, 2012).

Considering the cases of Tunisia and Syria, one being the most successful revolution and the other still being signed by a civil war, the main difference between the paths taken by the two countries was the role that the military assumed in the authoritarian regimes and the role that the leaders had against the militaries. Kohn stated that the role the military assumes in the autocracy is focused on internal order and security – that is, defending the country from war and most of all avoiding it. In his words, the military is “*preying on society rather than protecting it*” (Kohn, 1997). Svobik, instead, argues that the authoritarian leaders use a strategy to integrate military forces into internal security and everyday repression in order to ensure and sustain the longevity of authoritarian rule and to stop the dissidents (Svobik, 2012b).

In the two countries it was possible to see how different the reaction of the military to the uprisings was: in Tunisia, the military defected and sided with the people against the government; in Syria, instead, the military stood alongside the government and violently repressed the insurgents. The strongest theory is that the militaries that are granted greater economic support and political power by the government are more likely to stand by it against threat of mass protests (Barany, 2011). Instead, those militaries that are denied political power and are underpaid are more likely to side with the people (Brooks, 2013).

According to Barany, if the regime provides the army with the political and socioeconomic demands and the soldiers are paid a generous amount, then it is likely that the army will take the side of the regime to protect it (Barany, 2011). Svobik instead argues that the militaries should be given the political power and the resources in order to suppress the protestors (Svobik, 2012a). In addition, Albrecht states that the regimes’ way of obtaining the military’s loyalty is by “*buying off the officer corps by granting them economic privileges and opportunities for self-enrichment*” (Albrecht, 2014). In fact, the majority of the authoritarian regimes have a

tendency to “purchase” the loyalty of the military with various economic incentives that are rendered unavailable to the rest of the population, as they grant the military increases in spending and various other benefits such as good housing and health services (Makara, 2013). In particular, Brooks analyses the Tunisian case, where she argues that the reason they armed forces started defecting was the marginalization of the military, that is the lack of funding and political power (Brooks, 2013). This is stated even more clearly in the “Praetorian State” by Amos Perlmutter, in which he defines the states in question as the militarized societies or states where there is a large military in power (Perlmutter, 1974). The military had in fact become part of the bureaucracy and the main force of the middle class during and after the Arab Spring; Egypt, Syria and Libya all saw an administrative structure based on the military as well as oppressive powers founded on it or, as Khaled Abou el-Fadl defines it, an “*octopus that has its tentacles in various aspects*” (el-Fadl, 2013).

Furthermore, fundamental is the theory on military ethnic composition. Many scholars have argued that the composition of the military is one of the main factors if not the most important one in studying whether the army will be loyal or will defect during uprisings, and the studies have suggested that the militaries that share commonalities with the protestors are more likely to defect than those that are ethnically similar to the regime, who in turn suppress the protestors and stay loyal to the regime (Barany, 2011).

Bellin, instead, affirmed that if the military leaders “*are linked to regime elites through bonds of blood or sect or ethnicity [...] then the fate and interests of the military’s leadership become intrinsically linked to the longevity of the regime*” (Bellin, 2012). Especially in the middle eastern countries, the authoritarian regimes exploit the communal identities in the creation of their armed forces and in the promotion of officers, they grant favour to those that Makara defines “*communities of trust*”, that is those that have close ties to the regime, which can vary “*based on context, with family, tribe and sect*” (Makara, 2013). In Barany’s study on the role of the militaries in the Arab Spring, it is of notable evidence the focus on the ethnoreligious differences within the armed forces which, in his opinion, may mean more in a country and little or nothing in another (Barany, 2011). This notion applies to the four countries, as the ethnoreligious differences especially in Syria meant a significant amount in the behaviour of the military against the insurgents as it was affected by the ethnic gaps that usually exist in society; in countries like Tunisia and Egypt, instead, the lack of ethnoreligious differences in the country did not influence the actions of the military (Makara, 2013).

Bellin also argues that where there is a relationship of patrimonialism, then the fate and the interests of the military’s leadership become “*intrinsically linked to the longevity of the regime*” (Bellin, 2012). It is less clear though if in the case of the Arab Spring it was indeed patrimonialism that led to military loyalty: a clear example was the defection of Major General Abd al-Fattah Yunis in Libya, who co-conspired in 1969 with Gaddafi in the coup that brought him to power (Gaub, 2013), but also the defection in Syria of Manaf Tlass, son of the long-term defence minister Mustafa Tlass and personal friend of Assad (Zisser, 2013), which shows

that patrimonialism sometimes has not prevented high-level defections and has actually, in some cases, even contributed to the fracturing of the armed forces, like in the case of Libya.

Furthermore, Hicham Bou Nassif gave evidence that the cases in which favouritism in career advancement is a proof of patrimonialism sometimes influence the loyalty of the corps, giving evidence of what happened in Egypt where the officer corps remained loyal to Mubarak when they were promised rewards with high-tiered positions upon retirement. The military in Egypt did in fact profit from the connections with the political power (Nassif, 2013). In the case of Tunisia, instead, the armed forces suffered from the dominance of the Sahelian officers which were in high-ranking positions, a sign that the officers that worked in less privileged areas were actually disadvantaged and that the military and political elites shared a regional identity (Jebnoun, 2014). Even so, both the armies turned themselves against the main political power and helped in making Mubarak and Ben Ali fall.

Even Skocpol attributes importance to the military, referring to it as a component of the “Crisis of State” factor in her theory on social revolutions (Skocpol, 1979b, p.278). From this point, a reflection can be started on the political role of the military, especially in cases of insubordination during regime crises. Samuel Finer distinguishes between disposition and opportunity to intervene (Finer, 2003); if other things are equal, there is an expectance that the political militaries assert themselves with the political elites more frequently and therefore reproduce the military-dominant pattern typical of the political-military relations.

The reason of the political activism of the militaries can be found in the combination between the corporate interests – such as safeguarding the political prerogatives – and the ability to overcome problems in coordination. But, according to Finer, if the relations between politics and military are dominated by the civilian elites, the military elites will be more prone to be more modest regarding their mission and to be subjected to an oversight by non-military elites. This means that the countries that face civilian-dominant political-military relations generally face less military insubordination (Finer, 2003).

But the fact that there are actually anti-regime uprisings has changed the dynamics of military behaviour. As a matter of fact, the likelihood of military insubordination decreases in the cases of increasing politicizations during anti-regime mass uprisings, as the presence of a concrete threat to the stability of the regime in power will increase the costs of the loyalty by the military. In addition, according to Kevin Koehler, the scenarios see the presence of externalities that pose as a challenge to the stability of the regime (Koehler, 2016). The officers are in fact forced to take a position in the revolutionary situation: the closer they are to the old regime, the more likely the whole military influence will be reduced by the new regime that might rise to power. As even O’Donnell and Schmitter have affirmed, the politically influential military will be more likely to favour the “status quo”, especially if there is not a pact that gives them any kind of prerogative (Khachaturian, 2015).

There are of course different consequences according to the military analysed when talking about uprisings. First of all, the probability of an insubordination should normally increase when talking about militaries which are put at the margin of the political context. These types of militaries do not have prerogatives that have to be protected at all costs, therefore if the costs of loyalty increase, it will push them to insubordinate. Those militaries that are, instead, put at the centre of the political sphere, will find an advantage in the increased costs of loyalty: this is because while on one side they can expect that the regime will uphold their prerogatives if they support it, then the position of the corps under the new regime led by the opposition or the protesters will not be clear, particularly if there is a strong association between the military and the old order (Koehler, 2016). It is expected, therefore, that the militaries remain loyal to the regime.

At the same time, military insubordination is more likely if the officers that are in what Koehler defines as “formerly dominant militaries” believe that their prerogatives are threatened by the old regime; thus, if the elites among the military are faced with a challenge, it will be less likely that they will repress the uprising and might actually exploit the situation in their favour in order to improve the position of the armed forces (Koehler, 2016).

It can be said that there are factors that produce the behaviour of military insubordination in endgame scenarios. First of all, even if the presence of a dominant military may increase the chances of a coup during normal times, during an endgame scenario insubordination this is less likely to happen if the military is a political institution through and through (Ibid.). The dominant militaries insubordinate only if the officers had the chance and the reasons to find criticism in the regime before the uprisings start.

According to Koehler, this differs significantly from the idea of patrimonialism, nor does it confirm if loyalty can be expressed by closeness between the regime leaders and the armed forces. This is proven by those situations in which those who were considered to be close to the incumbents actually were involved in plans to overthrow them. A striking example is that of Syria, where the commander of the praetorian Defence Companies, Hafiz al-Assad’s brother Rifat, moved against his brother in 1983, or in Tunisia when President Bourguiba was overthrown by his own prime minister in 1987 (Ibid.).

In addition, always according to Koehler, it is the long-term development of military politicization that form the behaviour of the militaries (Ibid.). In the cases in which the military institutions acted as a launching organization for the authoritarian rulers, they then developed and transformed into politically powerful actors. These militaries are the ones who stay loyal during an uprising. It is therefore the variation in military politicization that acts as crucial in the understanding of the military behaviour during a situation of crisis.

2.6 The Role of the Arab Media in the Arab Spring

Another fundamental element of possible success is the role the media played during the Arab Spring.

The sociological discussion on how powerful the new media can be in shaping society actually began with Manuel Castells' work, and as of nowadays, scholars are divided between those who emphasize how controlling the new media can be, becoming a new form of repression in the hands of the dictators, and those who instead see it as a tool for even bigger democratic openness (Castells, 2009). But even in the case of democratic countries, some scholars have pointed out how the new technology can be a threat to the freedom and the privacy of the citizens.

Since the 1990s, the Arab countries faced an increase of satellite channels, which many analysts of the Arab world defined as a strong potential tool for political change in them (Harb, 2011). The most prominent station was Al-Jazeera, which soon became controversial as it managed to break a number of taboos in the Arab media by tackling issues of human rights and by hosting Arab dissidents. In addition, it had a coverage of international conflicts which soon gave it the epithet of a "counter-hegemonic news outlet" (Ibid.). According to Lynch, the Arab media and Al-Jazeera in particular have created a new public sphere (Lynch, 2009).

In the revolutions of the Arab Spring, the satellite channels had to be on par with what social media were reporting. For example in Tunisia, when Bouazizi sacrificed himself in protest, it instantly became both a national and an international event due to the combined role of Al Jazeera and Facebook, which joined forces in disseminating information and mobilizing a mass of protestors in all of Tunisia (Khondker, 2011). The president of the Internet Society in Tunisia Khaled Koubaa reported that out of 2000 registered tweeters in the country, barely 200 were active users, but before the revolutions there were 2 million users on Facebook. According to Koubaa, *"three months before Bouazizi burned himself in Sidi Bouzid, we had a similar case in Monastir. But no one knew about it because it was not filmed. What made a difference this time is that the images of Bouaziz were put on Facebook, and everyone saw it"* (Beaumont, 2011). It also needs to be considered that, due to the presence of only 28.000 Facebook users in Tunisia, the protest movements of 2008 were crushed without a significant backlash (Khondker, 2011).

This means that in the years the level of penetration of the media increased, to the point where the self-immolation of a young fruit vendor in a small town became an international event.

The media played a major role even in the Egypt revolution. Thanks to the dominant role that media had played in the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, they soon started being called the Facebook or Twitter revolutions. In fact, thanks to the social networks taken into account, not only the protestors managed to organized mass social protests, but they also were able to publicize them to the rest of the world in the ways

they could. As Global Voices Advocacy testifies, during the anti-Mubarak protests, the Egyptian activists expressly tweeted what they had planned to use the social media for: “*we use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate and YouTube to tell the world*” (Global Voices Advocacy, 2010).

A highlight has to be done on the underlying factors, the most important of which was the revolutionary conditions and the inability by the state apparatuses to contain the revolutionary situations. Social media thus was a crucial part of a scheme, not a sufficient condition. Manuel Castells states that Al-Jazeera simply collected the information disseminated on the Internet by people who used it as sources and that organized groups on Facebook and that retransmitted free news on mobile phones. What started was a new system of mass communication that was built like a mix between an interactive television, internet, radio and mobile communication systems (Castells, 2011). The new communication technologies did not give birth to the insurgency, but the rebellions were born from the poverty and the social exclusion of the population (Ibid.).

This new role of the media can also be linked to the historic one of print media that fostered through nationalism in what Benedict Anderson defined “print capitalism” (Anderson B., 1991) or to the role that literacy had in raising consciousness in the pre-revolutionary eighteenth-century France (Dannon, 2006). John Markoff showed that in those regions that had high literacy, the revolutions were more organized as compared to those with low literacy levels. However, the revolution spread even without the aid of literacy (Markoff, 1986).

In turn, independently from the spread of social networks, the countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria all were ready for revolutionary movements thanks to the numerous political-economic conditions that made the people deem it necessary for the Arab Spring to start. In the same way, the extent of which the revolutions were successful or not depended on various factors in which social media played a supportive role, working as a tool of spreading of information.

2.7 Conclusion

The different theories can aid us in understanding the dynamics in which the Arab Spring revolutions developed. In addition, almost in a unanimous manner, the literature shows that two are the elements that prove to be fundamental in understanding the uprisings, which are the relations between the military and the civilian authorities, and the role played by the media in the revolution.

Still, a more in depth analysis has to be done especially regarding the role both the military and the media had in the revolution in the four countries analysed. In order to do so, in the next chapter an analysis will be carried

out of the two factors in the singular countries and explain the reasons for the success or failure in the short and in the long-term.

Chapter III: Military and Media During the Arab Spring

As previously stated in the second chapter, the countries showed similarities in their mode of operation during the events of the Arab Spring. There are, though, some distinctions which need to be analysed to better understand the results obtained in the different uprisings.

These results are evident especially in the behaviour adopted by the military during the revolutions and by the role that the media played as a tool of spread of information regarding the events at play. In this chapter, an analysis will be conducted firstly on the militaries at play, then on how the media have been used in the four states.

3.1 The Role of the Military During the Arab Spring

3.1.1 Introduction

The relations between politics and the military in the Arab Spring differed during the regime crises. Table 1 (Koehler, 2016) provides an overview of the patterns of relations in the four Arab countries analysed in this thesis.

This model proves to be helpful in understanding the role of the military as it gives us evidence first of all on the presence, or lack of thereof, of a dominant military in the countries, which proves to be fundamental in understanding why the countries faced corporate insubordination or not. The dominant military label informs us on whether the militaries of the various countries had a dominant role, often regarded as a politicized institution, or if they had a marginal role. Then, it informs us on the presence or absence of institutional balancing, a strategy that employs pressures or threats to initiate, utilize and dominate the institutions first proposed by the realists as a way for the states to pursue security (He, 2008). Lastly, the table shows us if the countries faced a situation of corporate insubordination, that is whether the armed forces in the different countries defected and joined the protesters in the revolutions, which is the case, as the table shows, for both Egypt and Tunisia.

All the case studies show that Koehler's theory holds: for example, Egypt's politicized military saw the clear competition on the civilian political realm side and contributed by doing insubordination and deposing Mubarak; Libya's politicized army, instead, did not contribute in the uprisings, nor did they found unity in siding with Gaddafi, actually dividing and assuming different positions. In Syria, the military chose to retain the politically pivotal position and remained loyal on the corporate level, but they still faced defections.

Finally, Tunisia had a politically marginal military that contributed in making Ben Ali fall by deciding not to act during the mass protests.

	Dominant military	Institutional balancing	Corporate insubordination
Egypt	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bahrain	No	–	No
Libya	Yes	No	No
Syria	Yes	No	No
Tunisia	No	–	Yes
Yemen	Yes	Yes	No

Table 1. Military politicization and insubordination in the Arab Spring, 2011

3.1.2 Tunisia’s Military Marginalization

The Tunisian’s military is probably the only exception that never rose up to a political position: the Tunisian armed forces, in fact, did not have a relationship with the national movement. Due to its marginalization, it did not play an active political role, nor did it act as a channel for elite recruitment. The only exception in Tunisian’s history was the Interior Ministry during Ben Ali’s regime as well as Ben Ali himself, who was an intelligence officer (Jebnoun, 2014).

During the 2011 uprisings, the military acted in response to its marginal situation. Ben Ali, in fact, did not rely on the military even in this situation, instead opting for the police and using it as a “praetorian guard”. The police forces became the main agents of repression in Tunisia, while the military leadership, in the hands of Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Rachid Ammar, was misinformed about the situation going on in the country. Even when the military was deployed in Tunis, there were attempts that were made in order to place the army under the control of the National Guard in order to “prevent the army from staging a coup” (Ibid.). In addition, what led to Ben Ali’s flee from the country was not the military, but the police special forces, in particular the Brigades Anti-Terrorisme (BAT) which were under the command of Colonel Samir Tarhouni. He himself decided to arrest the members of the Trabelsi’s family of Ben Ali’s wife at the airport in Carthage and even contributed to Ben Ali’s decision to join his wife on a plane to Saudi Arabia. It was always the police, not the military, that took the first steps to overthrow the regime (Belkhodja and Cheikhrouhou, 2013).

The events, though, increased even more the levels of marginalization faced by the military. When the police special forces mutinied and he was explicitly ordered to deal with the situation by the Minister of Defence,

Ammar refused to deploy the army against Tarhouni at the airport (Pachon, 2014). The marginalization of the military elites thus did not support Ben Ali as it saw no advantage in it, seeing it more profitable to side with the rival forces and the protesters.

3.1.3 Egypt's Institutional Balancing

The regime in Egypt formed after a military coup under Gamal Abd al-Nasser in 1952, which brought the armed forces to develop into a politicized military. Nasser's successor, Anwar al-Sadat, instead, changed the situation completely, creating a divided pattern in the relations between politics and military. From his rise to power in the 1970s onward, there were three processes which combined and restructured this relationship completely: first of all, al-Sadat demilitarized the Egyptian cabinets, then he led the country towards the growth of non-military security services, and, in conclusion, he brought to the emergence of the project of hereditary succession, which happened only in the 2000s (Cooper, 1982). The hereditary political succession was a project that aimed at formally preparing Gamal Mubarak in succeeding his father, Hosni Mubarak, in becoming the new president of Egypt; to do so, Hosni Mubarak first reformed the constitution in order to oust the Muslim Brotherhood from legal political life, then, at the National Democratic Party Congress, he made sure that his son's "presidential posture" was once again marked, in turn eclipsing all other senior party members who aspired to the role (Ben Néfissa, 2007).

Of major importance is the demilitarization of the Egyptian cabinet. According to the research, the military officers who hold government offices had declined steadily: under Nasser, in fact, 35.6% out of 131 of the ministers was part of the military, a proportion which declined to 19.6% out of 163 ministers under Sadat (Hilal, 2006) and then to less than 10% out of 120 ministers under Mubarak (Stacher, 2012).

Another trend was the growth of the non-military security apparatus. Between the 1990s and the 2000s, the Egyptian interior ministry's budget had grown at a pace that was much faster than how much they spent on defence. Egypt, in fact, spent on average 3.5 billion EGP annually on the ministry of interior in 1990s, but the expenditure began to grow reaching more than 20 billion in late 2000s. In 2011, the security services amounted to 1.4 million personnel, that is 1.5 times the strength of military reserves included (Sayigh, 2012), which led security forces under the ministry of interior to become the pole of the repression and their influence was instead resented by the military (Mietzner, 2014).

Military officers, though, continued to profit from the various existing networks of active and former military personnel present in the state (Nassif, 2013). The position of the Egyptian military was not one of marginalization and its economic interests managed to expand even under Mubarak's regime. On the other

hand, though, the role as a kingmaker was put under pressure by the rise of the civilian elites as a result of the political liberalization and the plans to put Mubarak's son, Gamal, in charge of the presidency.

The hereditary succession, instead, was made by allowing Gamal Mubarak to rise within the National Democratic Party rather than in the military ranks. Part of the project consisted in putting a group led by Gamal Mubarak that had the job of reforming the party from within and enhance its institutional capacities; in addition, the group was behind the organization of Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential elections in 2005, which even more led to the speculation that all of this was just a plot made to prepare the regime to Gamal Mubarak's succession. According to Albrecht, what Gamal Mubarak did was “*virtually ignore the military apparatus and took over the politicized institutions of the state*” (Albrecht, 2014).

His rise and the formation of what became known as the “new guard” of the NDP was not agreed on by the high-ranking military leaders. In fact, according to a US embassy cable published on WikiLeaks, the once Minister of Defence Tantawi complained about Gamal Mubarak and there was speculation on whether the military would accept the succession of the president's son (Koehler, 2016). The president and the advisors were aware of the dissatisfaction of the officer corps. To secure himself the loyalty of the military, on the 28th of January 2011, Mubarak first offered the position of Prime Minister to Tantawi, but when he refused, he offered him the vice presidency (Bakry, 2011).

But after Tantawi rejected even this offer, the new government that was formed on the day after saw the leadership of a military figure, that is General Ahmad Shafiq, who became the prime minister.

The concession, though, was too far too late, and on the 31st of January 2011 the military issued its first public statement in which it highlighted the demands of the protesters and affirmed the ruling out of the use of force against them. Moreover, with the creation of the SCAF and the forced resignation of Mubarak, the Egyptian officers took the opportunity given by the 2011 uprisings to rise to power and become the kingmakers.

3.1.4 Libya's Divided Loyalty

Due to the low levels of institutional development and the high levels of corruption, it is easy to comprehend why there was talks of a “divided loyalty” in Libya. Libya had not had a constitution since 1951 and had no formal head of state: in fact, Ghaddafi bore the name “supreme guide” of a large clan, not a state. The parliament was symbolic and Ghaddafi, during the decades, weakened the governmental institutions in many ways, including the military, so that he could strengthen his highly personalized rule (Wolfram Lacher, 2020).

In addition, Ghaddafi gave the majority of the position of trust, that is also high-tier positions in the military and security commands, to his own tribesmen or his close relatives and named sons and nephews to be in charge of various security agencies and choice military units. The military and the security were divided into numerous organizations that did not or rarely had contact with each other (Plattner et al., 2011). The military had the mission of being the external defence of the country, while the security forces had to protect the regime, even if in practice they both had to ensure the survival of the regime.

Ghaddafi's response to the uprisings in Libya was far different from that of Tunisia, which saw a complete marginalization of the military: in fact, he unleashed half-dozen of paramilitary organizations against the protesters (Mattes, 2004). The security units, though, instead of the regular military, still became the first line of defence. This is because, after the 1969 coup led by Lieutenant-Colonel Ghaddafi, his fellow army officers had tried to make him fall four times, the most recent in 1993. Therefore, it seems clear why Ghaddafi chose to neglect the military and gave priority to the security units which were commanded by his relatives.

When the uprisings started, the regime tried to have the military guarantee their loyalty and obedience to it by giving out cash and by making threats; they also purged the commanders that hesitated firing against the protesters and even held the families of the unit commanders as hostages. He even suspected that the people in his family, the same ones he had appointed in the top positions, would be disloyal towards him: he dismissed his brother-in-law Abdallah Senoussi from his position as head of the secret services and put the top army general Abu Bakr Yunis Jabr under house arrest since the beginning of the revolt (Wolfram Lacher, 2020).

Even if he took such preventions, the army and the air force units near and in Benghazi and Tobruk defected more or less entirely, while units in Kufra, Misrata, the Western Mountains and Zawiyah all deserted as well (Plattner et al., 2011). To reinforce and compensate for the shortages in the army, Ghaddafi allegedly resulted to bringing in mercenary troops from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Latin America (Sen, 2011). Those soldiers who instead continued fighting against the protesters reported that the officers lied and told them they were being sent to put down foreign-inspired terrorists instead of civilian rebels (Chivers, 2011).

The divisions in the Libyan armed forces are just a reflection of the divisions in the Libyan society; while it is proven that the bonds between the leader of the regime and the military do not prove every discord, they still are the main mean to determine the attitudes assumed by the military.

The threats and the bribes were therefore necessary as well as coercion and bribery in the society. But the threats and the bribes were even more necessary since, as proven by the various defections and desertions, even in the armed corps there were doubts regarding the legitimacy of the regime.

3.1.5 Syria's Military Politicization

As the regime in Syria originated through a military coup led by the Minister of Defence Hafiz al-Assad in 1970, there was a closely-knit group of elites that formally established their hold over the military and security sector. During the passage from Hafiz al-Assad to Bashar al-Assad, some of the central figures were replaced, but the general politicization of the military was maintained (Chivers, 2011).

What is more striking and particular about Syria's model is the process of hereditary succession. Jason Brownlee explains that Syria's military leaders had an enormous influence over the state and the elites, which are supported by a transition based on father-son relations (Brownlee, 2008). Thus, Bashar al-Assad was formed as an heir from within the military itself, which was a process that highlighted how important such institution was (Albrecht, 2014). Furthermore, the political transition led to the old-guard being replaced with a younger generation of officers, such as Bashar al-Assad's brother-in-law General Asif Shawkat to the head of military intelligence. The presence of people closely connected to the leader of the regime shows even more how important the military was in the regulation of the access to power in Syria. Moreover, those units that were charged with protecting the regime enjoyed a special position in Syria (Holliday, 2013).

Noticing how pivotal the army position was, an insubordination was a seriously unlikely outcome when the uprisings started; in fact, as previously described, the military special forces intervened by attacking a mosque where the protestors found refuge in Dara'a. In the cases of insubordination, it always regarded individuals; a large-scale defection did not happen in Syria despite the widespread dissatisfaction within the ranks and only occurred relatively late during the conflict (Koehler, Ohl and Albrecht, 2016).

This concludes that a politicized military finds an unlikeliness in outcome of the corporate insubordination.

3.1.6 Military-Civilian vs. Military-Government Relations

In conclusion, there are different and various factors that influence military insubordination. In particular, while the presence of a dominant military force increases the likelihood of a coup during normal times, it is less likely that military insubordination can happen during an endgame situation if the military is deemed a political institution (Koehler, 2016). In fact, as already proven, dominant militaries are loyal to the regime unless the officers had low incentives and their prerogatives were not respected. This is the case of Tunisia, where the militaries had always been marginal and never deemed as an institution.

In addition, it has been proven that it was the long-term development of the military through the history of such countries that shaped the military behaviour during the Arab Spring, like in the case of Libya, a country in which the military was the organization that first started the authoritarian ruling coalitions, developed into a powerful actor and thus remained close to Ghaddafi during the uprisings (Koehler, 2016).

What is certain, is that the Arab Spring contributed to highlight how fundamental the military relations with civilians are and how the different societal factors and the foreign influences have contributed to the military response to the phenomenon (Brooks, 2017).

3.2 Social Media During the Arab Spring

What the Arab Spring has contributed to highlight is that in the period of the digital revolution the modes of expression with which people can share information, express criticism and organize protests have increased significantly. Thanks to the new forms of media, activists and social movements have access to a new form of communication which grants them a political landscape in which they can discuss and create a collectivity that makes demands. In particular, Facebook and Twitter have proved to be crucial for the Arab Spring, both for the protesters and for the government's response (Comninos, 2011).

It seems therefore necessary to analyse how influential social networks were in each country.

3.2.1 Tunisia: the Twitter Revolution

As already confirmed, the Tunisian revolution was a combination of political corruption and nepotism exercised by Ben Ali, a situation of food inflation and high unemployment and generally poor living conditions (Pollock, 2013). There was also an issue of lack of political expression for the citizens and a situation of censored press. When Ali rose to power in 1987 all forms of media had been forbidden until a small conservative television station was allowed in 2003 (Ibid.). In 2009, Ben Ali's son-in-law, instead, purchased a publishing house that began printing four newspapers. It is clear that when the revolution began in the country, the majority of the news media sources were under the influence and control of Ben Ali and his family.

At the same time, new forms of media were spreading among the population, first of all Facebook and Twitter. The presence of these new media helped shape the public opinion when the images of Bouazizi's sacrifice became known through the cyber world. In fact, citizens recorded the tragic event on their mobile phones and posted the videos on the Internet and on Facebook, and from there they were downloaded by the mainstream broadcasters who shared it on their websites, the most important of them being Al Jazeera (Laghmari and

Mahmoud, 2011). The following day, Tunisians joined forces under a Twitter hashtag that called for the march that happened the day after. The tweets mentioning Tunisia amounted to 329 million and reached an amount of 26 million users. The most retweeted account, @VoiceofTunisia had a low amount of followers – only 496 – yet it was retweeted over 400 times (Laghmari and Mahmoud, 2011).

This spread of information and the way the mobilization was planned in the cyberspace resonates with the theory proposed by McAdam and Paulsen on how important weak social ties that then develop in the virtual world and help the spreading of messages across the networks are (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993). It also supports the argument made by Jenkin on the conceptualization of “civic media” and the ones made by Bennet and Segerberg on how digitally networked individuals, even if different among themselves, can all use social media to express common criticism and grievances that can lead to a revolutionary situation or to contentious politics at a more local level (Bennett and Segerberg, 2014).

The images of the harsh repression done by the police gave out more visual weapons for the various bloggers and the online activists around the globe to inform on what was happening and calling for action, and the support given by the international sphere gave the demonstrators the strength to continue their fight. The activists soon recognized how crucial the role of social media as a tool was in ousting the regime not only during the uprising in itself, when for example blogger Majdi Calboussi uploaded videos of police violence on YouTube and Twitter, gaining a million views only on the first day and even fuelling the outrage of the people even more (LeVine, 2011), but also in the aftermath, when they celebrated by posting banners and drawing graffiti all over the capital that read “We Love Facebook” or “We Love Twitter” (Solnit, 2012).

Even the attempt at censorship done by the government did not stop the activists who found ways to avoid the blackout, using landlines to phone in tweeted messages through the Google’s alliance with Twitter called “Speak to Tweet” (Buhler-Miller and van der Merwe, 2011), which highlights the importance for social movements to have control over the narrative or, as better defined by Nie, how the physical power of the authorities can be mediated by the soft power that the new information technologies have (Nie, 2001).

What needs to be considered is, as previously stated, that even if technology played a major role during the protests, there are other variables which enabled a mass mobilization, which can be explained by the social movement theory. The theory on political process, in fact, cannot explain the outbreak of protest activity since the formal political system was a relatively closed one during Ben Ali’s regime (Carty, 2014). The theory on political mediation, instead, focuses on the role that public opinion and the perception political openings had, and the belief in a probability of victory even in the presence of a closed political system at an institutional level (Ibid.).

One, if not the most, successful aspects of the revolution in Tunisia was the removal of Ben Ali from the role of president. The major help was given by the change in public opinion which granted the activists the upper hand, increasing and quickly helping them gain a sense of what Tilly defined as WUNC – worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment (Tilly, 2004), which also brought a sense of legitimacy as a valid constituency which promoted and could bring social change. What the Tunisian citizens were able to do, at least in the short-term, was undermine the structure of the political system and gain leverage over the authorities of the time, which supports McAdam’s definition of the consequences that protest activity has (McAdam, 1982).

A more updated version of the resource mobilization theory also can be of aid in understanding the events of the uprising: this is because the most optimal resources were the digital tools, not those which were provided by formal Social Media Optimizations (SMO) or the presence of a professional leader among the protesters. In addition, money, labour-intensive organizations or expertise were not much of relevance as the access to new media was (Carty, 2014).

The cultural theories are also a source of information since the activists were not utility-maximisers, but they all shared grievances regarding an unjust system and that were embedded in their moral principles, the most important of them being the sense of indignity that they felt when subjected to the authority (Ibid.). Furthermore, the protesters were careful in framing their issues so that they were not just concerns of the youths, but of the whole Tunisian society. Doing so, they recruited new members both online and offline, which gave them the power to challenge the stability of the government.

It is thus possible to conclude that in Tunisia social media were helpful tools of spread of information as well as a recruitment tool for the activists to gain new members among their rank but also changed public opinion on the events by sharing posts and photos on what was happening in the Tunisian cities.

3.2.2 Egypt: the Facebook Revolution

The story of Tunisia spread through the whole region thanks to Internet, which led the other regimes to soon face similar challenges. This was the case of Egypt, in which the population shared the same grievances over President Mubarak and his regime. Before the events of the Arab Spring, a group of young people under the name “April 6 movement” began organizing a mass mobilization, an event that acted as a forerunner of the Egyptian Arab Spring (Souaiaia, 2011). In fact, the activists took inspiration from this movement when they started advertising the mass protests to demand Mubarak’s departure from office on Facebook (Ibid.).

The theory on resource mobilization underlines how important the networking among the SMOs and the coalitions was to help the social movements organize, which was fundamental during the early stages of the Arab Spring in the country. What differs from Tunisia, however, is that during the first phase of the uprisings the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) granted the reach of a critical mass in quick times thanks to a peer-to-peer network which created virtual public spheres (Kahn and Kellner, 2003). This created an establishment of civic engagement at the grassroots level, which is defined by Bennett and Iyengar to be essential for the social movements in their efforts (Bennett and Segerberg, 2014), and is what Castells emphasizes is the grassrootsing of democracy through the birth and usage of new media platforms (Castells, 2001).

If in Tunisia the sharing of information was done mainly through social media, in Egypt the job was handled by amateur journalists who recorded videos via mobile phones and shared online to the rest of the world cases of police abuse and the disregard they had for citizens' rights. Citizen journalism was the way of the people to avoid state authorities and the mainstream media that were in the hands of the regime to make their voices be heard. This created a new wave of transparency that was fully developed through connective action made via digitally-rooted politics, which once again proves Bennet and Segerberg's theory on the impact media have in political complaints transmission and transformation into common demands (Bennett and Segerberg, 2014).

In addition, always compared to the previous analysis of Tunisia, it needs to be highlighted that the population in Egypt saw a strong percentage of disaffected youth: the average age in the country was 24 and 60% of the population was under the age of 25 (Kuebler, 2011). Furthermore, also Egypt had its own martyr when an Egyptian citizen, Khalid Said, was beaten to death by the police in one of the largest protests in the country on June 6th 2011 (Preston, 2011). After this incident, Google executive and activist Wael Ghonim created a Facebook Page titled "We are All Khalid Said" which commemorated the immolation of the 28 year old Egyptian with photos from the morgue and YouTube videos that showed pictures of him smiling together with those of him beaten and bloodied (Ghonim, 2011). It soon became the most important dissident Facebook page in the country because it helped spread the word about police brutality and the lack of accountability in the Egyptian society (Preston, 2011). Always through Facebook, activists started to raise a sense of collective identity among people which led them to bring contentious politics on the streets. This proves another theory, that is Bennett and Iyengar's one on the role of the spillover effect: organizing efforts beginning from the Internet or through social networks can result in demonstrations on the streets (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008). In fact, in the days previous to the first protest, 85.000 people had committed their participation in the protests online, and as it was also stated in the first chapter, on the 25th of January there were over 10.000 only in Cairo, adding up to the 100.000 who marched throughout the whole country.

To further help their cause, activists and citizens took to Twitter where they planned discussions under the hashtag #25. The Twitter page @TahrirSupplies was used to coordinate donations for medical supplies and assistance to those in Tahrir Square, an event that in the past would have not occurred in the same large scale it did in 2011 due to the absence of new media (Carty, 2014). Thanks to their activity of peer-to-peer sharing, the Facebook page through which they organized the events gained about 400.000 members, and through that they even were able to elude the authorities (Haulsohner, 2011) by, for example, throwing off the police by stating the protestors would gather at a place that was previously announced in public instead of the actual one, which was announced online.

The new citizens journalists instead provided footage of the protests by circulating them on the various social networks, which helped increase social awareness at a global level, also aided by the fact that the images were then taken by broadcasters and shared on mainstream media to influence the international public opinion in their favour; Al Jazeera led livestreams and podcasts online that viewers could watch both on their website and on Facebook and Twitter. Only on the first two days of protests, the channel viewership increased by 2.500% (Carty, 2014).

This new form of framing the revolution highlighted how important social media and Internet have become in expanding the uprisings. Ghonim demonstrated that Facebook was effective in motivating the Egyptian population in participating in the activities even if they were highly risky; as reported by reporter Terrence McNally in an interview with the Egyptian activist, Ghonim stated: *“This was not a page that tells people what to do; it was a page that asked people, ‘What should we do?’ and created surveys. Then, based on the most liked choices, actions took place. [...] Contrary to what many people would think, the anonymity added a lot of legitimacy to the page. And why? Because people could connect directly to the cause. [...] All of this played a critical role in building the DNA, the credibility between the page members and the page, despite the fact they did not know who was running it”* (Ghonim, 2012a).

Therefore, similarly to Tunisia, thanks to the access that citizens had to new media, communication was not constrained by political or economic forces anymore like in the case of mainstream or state-controlled media. With social media, all citizens were able to take part in the discussion equally. Ghonim’s work on Facebook and the impression that it left on the revolution can thus be seen as a re-elaboration of Castells’ “electronic grassroots of democracy” (Castells, 2001), since all the activists could exchange ideas and create a horizontal information through the geographically diffuse networks. This also comes to show that the new media lend themselves to alternative organizational dynamics and structures that are often leaderless, like in the case of the Facebook pages, and are completely based on peer-to-peer communication that helps recruiting new members to the cause and accelerates the activity.

3.2.3 Libya: a Country that Stayed Behind

Compared to the two previous countries, Internet usage for political purposes was limited in Libya, especially after the start of the revolution on the 17th of February 2011. Libyans users on Facebook were low, and those present had no interest in politics. Still, despite the blockage led by former President Ghaddafi on the Internet, there still were Libyan online activists who managed to raise public awareness of the political events in the period prior to the Libyan Revolution. An example is Faraj Saad Faraj, a male activist who used social media and Facebook for political purposes and who called for change even before the revolution. Faraj affirmed that many were the online activists that got arrested by the regime during the revolution. Internet thugs had been employed to monitor the activists' work online and to launch Facebook pages and campaigns online that publicized the regime; online activists were arrested in Benghazi before the revolution started, which instilled fear among others (Khamis and El-Nanawy, 2012).

The effort in raising political awareness in the public could lead to an increase in the general public morale, which in turn can create a shared feeling of self-assurance in the possibility of change. Hofheinz affirmed that cyberactivists in the whole Arab world developed an increase in self-confidence and belief in their own potential. The Internet users in the Arab countries have become aware of their individuality in a way that could bring a real change (Hofheinz, 2005).

So, even in the case of Libya, the increase in political awareness through online media platforms became public motivation, and through citizen journalism and cyber-activism, the uprisings in the country had their kickstart.

Another example of male activist that played a fundamental role in the mobilization of the Libyan public before the protests started was Omar Boshah, who used social media to cover both the social and political life, especially regarding the city of Al Baida, 1.200 kilometres east of Tripoli; he posted pictures and comments highlighting the negative aspects of life in his hometown, like for example people tortured by the regime, using fake names in order to avoid being arrested (Khamis and El-Nanawy, 2012). During that period, the regime had its own Facebook groups where they promoted the regime and its policies and targeted all the people opposed to it. When Libyan online activists were arrested, several Facebook groups and pages were created to ask for freedom, and even those who were afraid to voice their concerns joined. All of this contributed to the mass protest that took place on the 17th of February 2011, which was in fact called through a Facebook group which attracted many people (Ibid.).

Fear among the citizens was therefore broken on the online platforms, which encouraged people to move to the streets in order to oust Ghaddafi. Activists stayed online until the Internet was cut off on the second day of

the revolution, which Boshah saw as a positive sign since it encouraged and even forced every online activist to move to the streets to protest (Ibid.).

Still, Libya had one of the lowest internet and social media penetration rates compared to the rest of the Arab countries, close to 5.5%; one of the reason for this low percentage at the time was the temporary block of internet by the regime when the revolutions started in Tunisia and Egypt, so that the citizens would not be influenced in doing the same thing (BBC News, 2011a). In 2011, in fact, there was a small number of social networking sites users, which amounted to be only 0.8% for Facebook (Chorev, 2012).

In addition, its civil society was suffering due to Ghaddafi's regime, which led to an absence of activists at the grassroots level which could mobilize the Libyan citizens. This is another reason why the revolution needed the help of NATO to put an end to the regime, which was one of the most important determinants of the course of the revolution.

3.2.4 Syria: a Revolution on Youtube

In Syria, the usage of social media played a crucial yet different role as compared to the other countries.

Already starting from August 2010, the number of social media users was significantly lower as compared to Egypt and Tunisia, where the catchment area surpassed the millions, reaching merely 30.000; the Facebook page titled "The Syrian Revolution" had less than 50.000 likes, despite the fact that it was born with purpose of encouraging the people to fight for political change. The majority of the feedback actually came after the protests had already begun, which was a response to the events, rather than an incentive. The contribution of Facebook was therefore not as significant as it was in the other countries (Chorev, 2012).

What was actually influential was YouTube. The website played a major role in the Syrian uprisings since it provided the protesters with a cyber space in which they could upload videos of the events happening in their country. Thus, the website soon became the principal tool in which they transmitted images of the fights between protesters and the security forces, which were a sharp contrast with the reports that were broadcasted by the official Syrian outlets (Huffington Post, 2011).

It can be said that social media were good tools during the protests in Syria. The usage of social media was in fact useful for the participants to inspire others to join the revolution by sending revolutionary messages through social media both to local and international spheres, which helped drawing people's attention to the Syrian uprising in order to achieve global support during the revolution. What was also helpful was the fact

that, differently from the other leaders but still with few exceptions, Assad did not prevent access to the Internet, which led the activists to share even more information in various ways. As Gohdes affirmed, the regimes usually can obstruct access to the internet and thus hinder to the growth of online and in person social protests, which leads to an increase in military repression and a decrease in government information about the citizens (Gohdes, 2015).

3.2.5 Social Media as Tools of Cohesion

Social media tools, specifically Facebook and Twitter, had a significant impact on the revolution as tools for the protesters to spread and exchange information and inform the rest of the world on the uprisings. At the same time, as said in the previous chapter, the Arab Spring does not depend solely on social media, like in the case of Libya, where its role was minimal also due to the intervention of international forces; in fact, in the absence of factors such as the human power or even the intervention of the military in some cases, the revolution would have been impossible.

At the same time, if no people had been willing to contribute to improve their condition in a situation of absence of government transparency and unemployment and free themselves from the political, economic and social oppression, and if no one had been physically present on the street ready to protest, then the role of the media would have been null (Khoury, 2011).

Still, the growth of usage of social media in the Arab region played a role in the mobilization of change that should not be ignored, as it formally activated the public and allowed the activists with a platform to mobilize the protesters and communicate the events to a greater public.

3.3 Conclusion

It is thus clear that the militaries were fundamental in the in-person aspect of the uprising: in fact, the conflicts not only depended on the people and their willingness to fight for their needs, but also on the will of the armies to side with the people or the dictator. Social media, instead, have opened the doors to a new form of activism for the Arab world, by letting them rouse new members in their ranks and by informing on the events at place; in addition, they proved the power social media has in spreading information throughout the whole world, by letting activists on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube share posts, videos and photos in real time, which in turn were broadcasted by the mainstream media all over the world. In doing so, both social media and militaries have proved to be a probable answer to the reason of the success or failure of the four countries analysed.

Conclusion

Throughout this work it has been argued that the reason of the success or failure of the four countries analysed was not only due to the struggle of the people, but also to two fundamental factors such as the role of the military and the usage of social media as a tool of social cohesion. In particular, it has been demonstrated that even the influence of foreign forces has played a role in the various uprisings and in their development.

Starting from the work of Theda Skocpol on social revolutions, it has been proven that the Arab Spring was a particular case of revolution, a leaderless one that saw no definite and radical change in the social and political structure, leading Bayat to deem it a “refolution”, that is a revolutionary movement that emerged only to push the incumbents of the states to reform themselves (Bayat, 2017). Then, an analysis has been led on the power that the Military-Government relations and social media had on the revolutions, finding that the militaries had a more important role in the uprisings itself, as the fate of the conflicts was also in their hands in deciding whether to rally around the flag or side with the people according to their degree of influence as a political institution; social media, instead, have revealed to be fundamental on a rather communicational aspect, since they participated both in the rallying up of the protesters by working as tools of organizing for the protests, as well as in the informational aspect, as they helped spread information over the phenomena at place to the whole world through posts, videos and photos.

By going through all the points in this thesis, it is possible in fact to conclude that the differences in the employment of social media and the behaviour of the various militaries in the four countries are strictly related to the various short-term outcomes obtained during and right after the Arab Spring uprisings.

This project tried to give an answer to the many questions that are left opened over the Arab Spring, especially on the outcomes that the revolution faced, as it was possible to see that there were countries which had an instant success but a failure in the long term, while others saw a constant and lasting failure that does not seem to change even eleven years after the events.

In fact, in Tunisia, where everything started, the political crisis has intensified after President Kais Saied dissolved the parliament on July 25, 2021 (Bajec, 2022). A final decree came in April 2022 just hours after the members of the last house held a plenary session voting to end his exceptional measures, such as suspending the chamber and firing the prime minister, together with the seizure of legislative and judicial powers. Furthermore, the president promised that the legislators who opposed the presidential rulings would be prosecuted on charges of “conspiring against state security” (Ibid.). Many Tunisians welcome the decision taken by Saied, deeming it necessary to save the country from a corrupt elite which the president held

responsible for years of political paralysis and economic stagnation. According to analysts, due to the climate of intimidation and persecution against the opposition and in the absence of a functioning parliament, any future national voting will happen without a rule of law, thus meaning that fair elections are not a prospect that can be considered in Tunisia (Ibid.).

Egypt, too, has been showing signs of cracking down on dissent. According to the human rights organization Amnesty International, as of 2021, authorities continued to severely repress the right to freedom of expression and shut down critiques both online and offline and arbitrarily detained and unfairly prosecuted tens of human rights activists and members of the opposition on charges of “terrorism” and “spreading false news”, as well as enforcing disappearance on hundreds of detained (Amnesty International, 2021). The gap between rich and poor continues to be cause of major problems for the country; the majority agrees that the middle class is being undermined with an unequal distribution of wealth in favour of the small elite (Holleis, 2021). Still, it seems that progress has been made on the social front, with social security pensions being issued, as well as several new projects focusing on solidarity and dignity. But it seems that the majority of the population does not appreciate such developments: according to activists, the Egyptian president El-Sissi focused on so-called “white elephant projects” that the businessmen and generals can profit from but do not generate an impacts on citizens’ lives (Ibid.).

In Libya, the mandate of the UNSMIL has been extended at the end of July 2022 to last until 31 October 2022. The main reason is the competition between the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) and the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU), which has caused a deterioration of political, security, economic and human rights (International Peace Institute, 2022). The country was in fact scheduled to hold elections in December 2018 but was delayed by the HoR’s representative Libyan National Army’s campaign to capture the western region of Libya and the capital of Tripoli, which was held by the UN Security Council-recognised GNU (al-Sahili, 2020). The elections were once postponed to December 2021 but were postponed once again after the head of the High National Election Commission (HNEC) ordered the dissolution of the electoral committees online and is now supposed to be held at the end of 2022 (Daily Sabah, 2022). The UN continues to prove being an important partner to Libya; nonetheless, the situation of political stalemate and the concerns over human rights and humanitarian concerns have highlighted the necessity to reevaluate the support given to the country. According to the International Peace Institute (IPI), it is necessary to prioritize Libya and ensure that the UNSMIL provides more funding and staffing in order to engage on economic issues and human rights (Ibid.).

This proves that, even if these three countries had apparent success at first in deposing their presidents in order to form more democratic government, in the long term their plans failed, with Tunisia going back to a sort of

one-man rule, Egypt facing a situation of lack of human rights and Libya lacking a democratic government even with the help of foreign forces.

In Syria, instead, as of April 2022, Assad has remained isolated internationally and has attempted to escape its condition by meeting with any foreign army official, regardless of their rank. Internally, instead, President Assad has issued a decree which tightens the regime's hold on security and justice by amending some articles of the Penal Code and imposing a penalty of temporary detention on anyone who seeks to "*undermine the prestige of the state or its status*", "*affects national and ethnic identity*" or works to "*awaken racist or sectarian strife*" (Harmon Observatory, 2022). Popular protests continue, with people taking to the streets in the main cities to commemorate the eleven years from the start of the Syrian revolution. The most prominent of these commemorations has been the one in the Saba' Bahrat square in Idlib, but they were also led by Syrian activists and opposition in those countries hosting Syrian refugees (Ibid.). On the other hand, the Kurdish militias dominating the Autonomous Administration called for the celebration of the anniversary of the revolution for the first time, an event which was perceived as an attempt to pressure the Syrian regime and Russia, one of the two main allies of the Syrian regime together with Iran, into rekindling negotiations to establish the Autonomous Administration as an entity that controls its own areas (Ibid.). It seems clear that the situation in Syria is stationary, with on one side Assad's regime tightening the power in his own hands, while on the other hand the Kurdish's Autonomous Administration is reiterating the need to become a unique entity with its own areas. It is no doubt that the situation is bound not to change in the near future.

The Arab Spring has proved to be a complex event, especially noting the most recent evolutions in the four countries, which proved that even if successful in the short term, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt were not successful in fulfilling the democratization process, while in Syria the revolution is still ongoing without any tangible success, as Assad is still in government as of 2022. Yet, it is one of the most important historical and political phenomenon of the contemporary era. The aim of the protesters was moving from being the marginalized to being active part of the community they live in, gain fundamental civil and social rights, improve their economic and social conditions and save their country from corrupt and unjust governments, those who had created the situations the citizens lived in prior to the revolution.

Italian Summary

Questa tesi nasce dall'intenzione di comprendere gli eventi che si sono susseguiti nel 2011 durante la Primavera Araba. Come evidenziato dalla ricerca, le varie primavere arabe succedutesi dal 2011 in avanti offrono molteplici spunti di indagine teorica, la cui complessità le ha rese un caso di studio singolare. La ricerca ha come scopo comprendere il motivo del successo o del fallimento delle rivoluzioni negli Stati della Tunisia, dell'Egitto, della Libia e della Siria, analizzandone le cause.

Si è partiti con l'illustrare le rivoluzioni avvenute nei quattro Stati partendo dalla Tunisia, Paese che per primo ha iniziato le proteste che hanno dato vita alla Primavera Araba. Descrivere gli eventi, per quanto complesso, si è rivelato indispensabile per comprendere le dinamiche e i motivi di successo o fallimento. Ciò che è stato possibile evincere dalla panoramica è che, nonostante i diversi risultati, l'obiettivo comune di rimuovere i dittatori corrotti e la volontà di ottenere maggiori diritti politici abbia portato popoli con storie differenti a unirsi simbolicamente in nome della rivoluzione. La Tunisia è stata, infatti, la prima a portare avanti una protesta tesa a spodestare il presidente Ben Ali e, nonostante sia stata la più breve, il suo successo ha non solo influenzato prima l'Egitto e poi anche la Libia e la Siria, ma è stato anche duraturo, fino al colpo di stato avvenuto nel 2021 per mano del presidente della Repubblica Kais Saied (Guesmi, 2021). Si è trattato però, come già affermato, di una rivoluzione breve in confronto alle altre tre analizzate; in Egitto, infatti, gli eventi si sono svolti in due anni – dal 2011 al 2013 – in un susseguirsi di proteste, processi elettorali e riforme costitutive; in Libia, la rivoluzione è durata fino al 20 ottobre 2011, giorno della cattura e uccisione di Gheddafi, evento che ha cambiato la storia della Libia (Al-Turk, 2011). In Siria, invece, dove si continua a combattere da undici anni, non si è mai posto fine alle rivolte (Lister, 2020).

Dopo aver ripercorso i passaggi fondamentali delle varie primavere arabe, si è entrati nel merito della ricerca, facendo ricorso a teorie utili al processo di analisi delle cause del successo o del fallimento delle rivolte. Come punto di partenza sono stati considerati tre diversi approcci: quello strutturale, focalizzato in particolare sul pensiero di Skocpol; un approccio focalizzato sul ruolo delle agency, analizzato da Davies and Gurr, e un ultimo approccio alternativo, quello dello studioso iraniano-americano Asef Bayat.

L'approccio Skocpoliano è stato studiato partendo dalla definizione di “rivoluzione sociale”, con la quale Theda Skocpol ha disegnato un modello di rivoluzione diviso in due momenti: il primo, la “Crisi di Stato”, generato da una serie di fattori interni quali la sicurezza dello Stato e la competizione economica con il resto del mondo; il secondo, la “Dominazione di Classe”, consistente nell'identificazione del gruppo che sfrutterà la situazione rivoluzionaria (Skocpol, 1979a, pp.175–210). La rivoluzione sociale, secondo Skocpol, è un evento cruciale, in quanto necessita della presenza di un cambiamento deliberato e sostanziale dello Stato e delle organizzazioni di classe, elementi cruciali alla rivoluzione; la studiosa ritiene, inoltre, che per capire una

rivoluzione sociale bisogna comprendere i contesti internazionali in cui si inserisce. La Primavera Araba ne è un esempio: la spinta verso la democrazia ricercata in Tunisia si è presto estesa al resto del mondo arabo, portando a una protesta di massa. Va però fatta una differenza tra la teoria di Skocpol e quelle degli altri teorici strutturali, in quanto la prima non considera il governo di uno Stato sotto il completo controllo della classe dominante. Skocpol afferma che lo scopo del governo è, infatti, preservare la struttura sociale esistente e, per fare ciò, deve implementare politiche che soddisfino gli interessi della classe dominante. La teoria riduzionista della lotta di classe afferma che le strutture dello Stato sono tutte formate dalla lotta tra la classe dominante e quella subordinante e che molte delle rivoluzioni sociali sono iniziate a causa delle contraddizioni basate sulla struttura del vecchio regime (Ibid.).

Il modello proposto dalla sociologa è quello che meglio ha aiutato a prevedere quali nazioni nella regione hanno vissuto le rivolte della Primavera Araba. Secondo Skocpol, le nazioni coinvolte nelle varie primavere arabe avevano mostrato segni di competizione per la sicurezza nazionale e l'economia con gli altri stati da decenni, il che ha contribuito a creare le condizioni per una rivoluzione; non a caso la regione araba era e ancora è caratterizzata da alti livelli di disparità salariale: un esempio è l'Egitto, in cui metà degli egiziani viveva con \$2 all'anno, un valore immensamente minore rispetto all'altra metà composta dai business o da coloro che erano in rapporti con il Presidente Mubarak. In aggiunta, il Prodotto Interno Lordo pro capite annuale dello Stato era, al tempo della rivoluzione, di soli \$2,791.8 (The World Bank and OECD, 2022).

In questo lavoro si vuole mettere in evidenza come l'idea di Skocpol contrasti con la linea teorica fondata sul ruolo dell'agency, rappresentata da James Davies e Ted Gurr, i quali hanno indicato i processi di modernizzazione come la causa delle rivoluzioni nelle nazioni in via di sviluppo. Secondo i due studiosi, più la modernizzazione avanza e l'economia cresce, più una crisi nella crescita di uno Stato può causare un senso di "relativa deprivazione", ovvero può determinare una divisione tra ciò che le persone si aspettano di essere e avere e ciò che effettivamente possiedono e sono (Bayat, 2021b). Nasce da qui una controparte alla teoria di Skocpol, secondo cui sono stati gli agenti, non la struttura sociale, a guidare le proteste: la Primavera Araba non è stata una rivoluzione nata dopo una serie di condizioni esterne, ma è stata fatta dalle persone.

Con il suo approccio alternativo, Asef Bayat cerca di dare una nuova sfumatura agli eventi partendo dalla definizione delle rivoluzioni arabe come rivolte senza un "leader", poiché, nonostante la presenza di coordinatori locali, in nessuno Stato era presente un leader carismatico capace di fare da guida. La seconda affermazione di Bayat è che le rivoluzioni non si sono davvero sviluppate secondo un'organizzazione solida in nessuna delle nazioni che hanno avuto delle strutture di comando di successo, né hanno distribuito le responsabilità in maniera tale da articolare una strategia che permettesse loro di parlare con una sola voce (Bayat, 2017). Bayat presenta, quindi, una nuova generazione rivoluzionaria, ricca in quanto a proteste, ma povera in termini di cambiamento: usa il termine "rifoluzione", coniato per la prima volta da Timothy Garten-Ash per descrivere le proteste anti-comuniste nate nell'Europa dell'Est nel 1989. Le "rifoluzioni" sono

movimenti rivoluzionari che nascono unicamente con lo scopo di spingere i governi a riformarsi; non vogliono prendere il potere, ma semplicemente vederlo migliorare. Anche se non creano una rottura all'interno della struttura, le "rifoluzioni" possono generare pensieri e pratiche radicali, teoria che, secondo Bayat, è stata ignorata dalla letteratura dominante (Ibid.). Le principali teorie rivoluzionarie sono, secondo lo studioso, focalizzate unicamente su temi strutturali, istituzionali, politici e centrati sulla figura dello stato. Bayat invece si concentra su una micro-prospettiva che punta a comprendere cosa significhi fare una rivolta per le persone nella loro vita di tutti i giorni, ma anche nelle idee, nelle norme e nelle soggettività popolari (Bayat, 2021a).

Ciò su cui concordano vari teorici, i cui studi sono stati esaminati in questo lavoro, è che la relazione tra l'esercito e il governo nei quattro Paesi interessati sia stata determinante per gli esiti delle rivoluzioni. Analizzando le teorie sulla defezione militare e la lealtà al proprio leader, vari studiosi come Barany affermano che un incremento nel supporto economico e nel potere politico permette di mantenere un esercito leale al regime, mentre altri suggeriscono che gli eserciti le cui etnie sono le stesse di quelle del regime sono più propensi a mostrare lealtà al regime. Secondo Barany (2011), se il regime garantisce all'esercito le sue esigenze politiche e socioeconomiche e i soldati sono pagati generosamente, allora l'esercito si alleerà con il regime e lo proteggerà. Svulik (2012a), invece, afferma che gli eserciti dovrebbero avere potere politico e risorse tali da poter sopprimere i manifestanti. In aggiunta, Albrecht (2014) afferma che il regime può ottenere la lealtà delle forze armate comprando gli ufficiali e garantendo loro privilegi economici e opportunità di crescita. Non è un caso se la maggior parte dei regimi autoritari tende a comprare la lealtà del proprio esercito con incentivi economici non disponibili al resto della popolazione.

Un'altra teoria fondamentale riguardo le relazioni esercito-governo è quella sulla composizione etnica. Vari studiosi hanno affermato che la composizione dell'esercito è uno dei fattori principali se non il più importante per definire se l'esercito sarà leale o se defezionerà durante le rivolte, e gli studi hanno suggerito che gli eserciti che condividono determinate caratteristiche con i manifestanti saranno più propensi a prendere le loro parti rispetto a quelli che sono etnicamente più simili al regime, che invece tenderanno a sopprimere le proteste. Secondo Bellin (2012), se i leader dell'esercito sono legati all'élite governativa da legami di sangue o etnia, allora i loro interessi saranno intrinseci a quelli del regime.

Anche Skocpol attribuisce importanza all'esercito, categorizzandolo come una componente del fattore "Crisi di Stato" nella sua teoria sulle rivoluzioni sociali. Da qui è nata una riflessione sul ruolo politico dell'esercito, in particolare nei casi di insubordinazione durante le crisi dei regimi. Samuel Finer (2003), in particolare, ha teorizzato una distinzione tra la disposizione a intervenire e l'opportunità di intervenire: nel caso in cui tutto il resto è invariato, ci si aspetta che gli agenti politico-militari si affermino tra le élite politiche più frequentemente e che riproducano il modello militare-dominante tipico delle relazioni politica-esercito. La presenza di rivolte anti-regime, tuttavia, ha cambiato le dinamiche del comportamento militare; infatti, la probabilità di insubordinazione militare diminuisce nei casi di crescente politicizzazione durante proteste anti-

regime di massa, poiché la presenza di una minaccia concreta alla stabilità del regime aumenterà il costo della lealtà da parte dell'esercito.

Vi sono certamente conseguenze diverse a seconda degli eserciti analizzati. Innanzitutto, la probabilità di insubordinazione dovrebbe incrementare nel caso di eserciti posti al margine del contesto politico. Questo tipo di esercito non ha delle prerogative che vanno protette a ogni costo; perciò, se il costo della lealtà aumenta, saranno spinti all'insubordinazione. Gli eserciti che, invece, sono al centro della sfera politica troveranno un vantaggio nella difesa del proprio regime: questo avviene perché, mentre da un lato possono aspettarsi che il regime adempia alle loro richieste se supportato, dall'altro la posizione delle forze armate sotto il nuovo governo portato avanti dall'opposizione o i manifestanti non sarà chiara, in particolare se si tratta di un forte legame tra l'esercito e il vecchio ordine (Koehler, 2016).

Dopo aver definito i vari ruoli che l'esercito può assumere durante una rivoluzione, la ricerca ha spostato l'attenzione su un altro elemento che si è rivelato fondamentale per definire il possibile successo o fallimento delle primavere arabe: i media. Partendo dalla teoria di Manuel Castells (2009) sul potere che i nuovi media hanno nell'influenzare la società, è stata svolta una riflessione sui media nelle nazioni arabe. Dagli anni '90, i Paesi arabi hanno visto un aumento dei canali satellitari, evento che ha portato gli analisti del mondo arabo a vedere in essi un potenziale mezzo per il cambiamento politico. La stazione di maggior importanza è Al-Jazeera, canale che ha eliminato numerosi tabù trattando problematiche legate ai diritti umani, ospitando dissidenti arabi, divulgando notizie di conflitti internazionali, motivi per cui le è stato attribuito l'epiteto di "notiziario contro-egemonico". Secondo Lynch, i media arabi e Al-Jazeera in particolare hanno creato una nuova sfera pubblica (Lynch, 2009). Durante le rivoluzioni della Primavera Araba, i canali satellitari hanno dovuto mantenere il passo con quanto mostrato sui social media. Un esempio è la Tunisia, dove, quando la protesta è iniziata con il sacrificio di Bouazizi, l'evento è diventato subito sia di portata nazionale che internazionale grazie al ruolo combinato di Al-Jazeera e Facebook, che hanno unito le loro forze per disseminare informazioni e mobilitare la protesta di massa. Il social media ha svolto un ruolo di grande importanza anche nella rivoluzione egiziana: non solo i manifestanti hanno avuto modo di organizzare proteste di massa, ma potevano anche divulgarle nel resto del mondo. La ricerca ha provato che i social media sono stati una parte cruciale di uno schema, non una condizione sufficiente: come afferma Castells, Al-Jazeera ha semplicemente condiviso le informazioni disseminate dalle persone su Internet; ciò che è nato è un nuovo sistema di comunicazione di massa creato come insieme di televisione, internet, radio e sistemi di comunicazione mobili (Castells, 2011).

Una volta illustrata la letteratura rilevante, è stata svolta un'analisi di come i vari eserciti e i social media abbiano influenzato gli eventi delle primavere arabe.

Partendo dalla Tunisia, si è notato come la posizione dell'esercito all'interno della sfera politica di uno Stato possa influenzare le sorti di una rivoluzione. Nel caso della Tunisia, infatti, le forze armate erano fortemente marginalizzate, non svolgevano un ruolo politico attivo né erano un canale di reclutamento dell'élite. Durante le rivolte del 2011, l'esercito si è comportato in base alla sua posizione marginale: Ben Ali anche in una

situazione di crisi non si affidò alle forze militari, cercando esclusivamente il sostegno della polizia che presto divenne il principale agente di repressione tunisino. Paradossalmente, non fu l'esercito a muovere i primi passi per far cadere il regime, ma la polizia, con la conseguenza di una marginalizzazione ancor maggiore dell'esercito: fu la Brigata Anti-Terrorismo, forza speciale di polizia guidata dal colonnello Tarhouni, ad arrestare la famiglia della moglie di Ben Ali, non l'esercito. Non vi era quindi alcuna necessità da parte delle forze armate di supportare Ben Ali, in quanto era più vantaggioso allearsi con le forze rivali e i manifestanti. In Egitto, invece, gli ufficiali militari avevano sempre trovato profitto dalle relazioni tra il personale militare attualmente in servizio all'interno dello stato e gli ex militari. La posizione dell'esercito egiziano non era marginalizzata e gli interessi economici erano solo aumentati durante il regime di Mubarak. Inoltre, fondamentale fu il processo di successione ereditaria che permetteva a Gamal Mubarak di crescere all'interno del Partito Nazionale Democratico (PND) più che nei ranghi militari. Parte del progetto consisteva nella formazione di un gruppo guidato da Gamal Mubarak che riformasse il partito dall'interno e ne rafforzasse le capacità istituzionali. La nascita e la formazione della "nuova guardia" del PND non furono però approvate dai leader militari d'alto rango; il presidente e i suoi consulenti erano a conoscenza del malumore degli ufficiali, perciò, per assicurarsi la lealtà dell'esercito, prima offrì la posizione di Primo Ministro al generale e ministro della Difesa Tantawi poi, in seguito al suo rifiuto, la vice-presidenza. Nonostante ciò, il nuovo governo vide come primo ministro una figura militare, il generale Ahmad Shafiq. Ma questa concessione era arrivata troppo tardi e l'esercito si era già alleato con il popolo; inoltre, con la creazione del Consiglio Supremo delle Forze Armate e la dimissione forzata di Mubarak, gli ufficiali egiziani colsero l'opportunità di salire al potere.

In Libia, a causa dei bassi livelli di sviluppo istituzionale e degli alti livelli di corruzione, si è parlato di una "lealtà divisa". La Libia non aveva un capo di stato formale, ma una "guida suprema" di un grande clan. Durante gli anni, Gheddafi aveva indebolito le istituzioni di governo e l'esercito in modo tale da rafforzare un potere altamente personalizzato. In più, aveva ceduto le posizioni di fiducia, ovvero le posizioni degli alti funzionari militari e dei comandi di sicurezza, a parenti stretti o a persone della sua stessa tribù. La risposta di Gheddafi alle rivolte fu diversa da quella della Tunisia: infatti, scatenò mezza dozzina di organizzazioni paramilitari contro i manifestanti, anche se comunque le unità di sicurezza divennero la prima linea di difesa. La lealtà dell'esercito fu ottenuta tramite minacce e concessioni monetarie; inoltre fu svolta una dura repressione di tutti i comandanti che esitavano a sparare contro i manifestanti e le famiglie dei comandanti furono tenute in ostaggio. Inoltre, Gheddafi licenziò il cognato Abdallah Senoussi, che aveva nominato lui stesso, dalla sua posizione di capo dei servizi segreti e mise il generale dell'esercito Abu Bakr Yunis Jabr ai domiciliari. Nonostante tali precauzioni, l'esercito e l'aeronautica militare vicini e dentro Benghazi e Tobruk defezionarono più o meno interamente, assieme ad altre unità a Kufra, Misrata, Zawiya e nelle montagne dell'ovest, mentre coloro che continuarono a combattere testimoniarono che gli ufficiali avevano mentito sostenendo che erano stati mandati a sopprimere terroristi ispirati da forze straniere, non civili in ribellione.

In Siria, infine, le forze armate erano fortemente legate al governo proprio perché quest'ultimo era nato, nel 1970, da un colpo di stato. Fatto ancor più particolare del modello siriano è il processo di successione ereditaria: Jason Brownlee (2008) spiega che i leader militari siriani ebbero un'influenza enorme sullo Stato e sull'élite, che erano supportate da una transizione basata sulle relazioni padre-figlio. Bashar al-Assad, infatti, fu formato, in quanto erede, dall'esercito stesso; tale processo mise in evidenza l'importanza dell'istituzione militare. In aggiunta, la transizione politica portò al rimpiazzamento della vecchia guardia con una nuova generazione di ufficiali, come il cognato di Bashar al-Assad, il generale Asif Shawkat. La presenza di persone così vicine al leader del regime è la dimostrazione di quanto fosse fondamentale l'esercito per l'accesso al potere in Siria. Data la crucialità dell'esercito, l'insubordinazione era un risultato altamente improbabile; infatti, le forze intervennero immediatamente attaccando le moschee dove i manifestanti avevano trovato rifugio a Dara'a una volta iniziate le proteste. Nei casi di insubordinazione militare, si trattava unicamente di individui; in Siria non si è mai potuto parlare di una defezione su larga scala nonostante l'insoddisfazione tra i ranghi e, quando è avvenuta, si è verificata relativamente tardi.

L'analisi degli eserciti va quindi a favore delle teorie secondo cui la presenza di un esercito dominante incrementa la probabilità che quest'ultimo rimanga leale al regime. La Primavera Araba non ha fatto altro che evidenziare quanto siano fondamentali le relazioni tra i civili e l'esercito e quanto diversi fattori sociali e le influenze esterne possano contribuire alla risposta militare a un fenomeno (Brooks, 2017).

Per quanto riguarda i media, le rivoluzioni hanno contribuito a evidenziare i nuovi modi di espressione tipici dell'era digitale, grazie ai quali attivisti e movimenti sociali hanno avuto accesso a nuove forme di comunicazione che hanno permesso loro di ampliare lo scenario politico in cui discutere e creare una collettività capace di sollevare questioni e richieste. In particolare, Facebook e Twitter sono stati cruciali sia per i manifestanti che per la risposta dei governi. In Tunisia ed Egitto, infatti, i due social media hanno assunto un ruolo cruciale nel formare l'opinione pubblica, condividendo immagini dei sacrifici avvenuti in Tunisia, come quello di Bouazizi, sulle piattaforme social che sono state scaricate dagli emittenti tradizionali e trasmessi sui propri canali, primo tra tutti Al-Jazeera. In Egitto furono create pagine e gruppi Facebook gestiti anonimamente in onore delle vittime delle proteste, come nel caso di Khalid Said, insieme a video caricati su YouTube che mostravano gli eventi dal punto di vista dei manifestanti stessi. La diffusione di informazioni e il modo in cui la mobilitazione fu pianificata nel cyberspazio concordano con la teoria, proposta da McAdam e Paulsen (1993), sull'importanza che i legami sociali deboli assumono una volta sviluppati nel mondo virtuale e sul contributo che offrono nel diffondere messaggi attraverso la rete. A supporto di ciò intervengono le teorie di Jenkin sulla concettualizzazione dei *media civic* e quelle proposte da Bennet e Segerberg (2014) su come gli individui connessi digitalmente, anche se diversi tra loro, possano tutti usare i social media per esprimere una critica comune che può portare a una situazione rivoluzionaria.

Lo stesso non si può dire per la Libia, dove l'utilizzo di internet per ragioni politiche era limitato, specialmente dopo l'inizio della rivoluzione. L'utenza su Facebook era bassa e gli utenti non si interessavano di politica. Eppure, nonostante il blocco all'utilizzo di Internet da parte di Gheddafi, vi erano comunque attivisti online

che riuscirono a creare una coscienza pubblica circa gli eventi precedenti alla rivoluzione libica. Lo sforzo di creare una coscienza politica nel pubblico avrebbe portato a una crescita del morale del pubblico generale, che in cambio avrebbe creato un sentimento condiviso di fiducia nella possibilità di un cambiamento. Hofheinz (2005) afferma che i cyberattivisti nel mondo arabo hanno sviluppato un aumento dell'autostima e una fiducia nel loro potenziale, venendo a conoscenza della loro individualità in un modo tale da portare a un vero cambiamento. Eppure, la Libia ha avuto il minor tasso di penetrazione dell'internet e dei social media in confronto al resto degli stati arabi, circa il 5.5%; uno dei motivi al tempo fu il blocco temporaneo di internet da parte del regime quando la rivoluzione ebbe inizio in Tunisia ed Egitto, cosicché i cittadini non venissero influenzati nel fare lo stesso. Nel 2011 vi fu un numero minimo di utenza social, per un totale di solo lo 0.8% per Facebook (Chorev, 2012).

In Siria, l'utilizzo dei social media ebbe un ruolo diverso rispetto alle altre nazioni. Nell'agosto 2010, il numero di utenti era significativamente più basso rispetto all'Egitto e alla Tunisia, raggiungendo a malapena la soglia dei 30.000; la pagina Facebook "La Rivoluzione Siriana" aveva meno di 50.000 like, nonostante fosse nata con lo scopo di incoraggiare le persone a combattere per il cambiamento politico. La maggior parte del feedback avvenne solo una volta scoppiata la rivoluzione come risposta agli eventi, più che incentivo. Ciò che fu effettivamente influente fu YouTube: il sito svolse un ruolo fondamentale nelle rivolte siriane poiché diede ai manifestanti un cyberspazio in cui caricare video degli eventi in corso, rendendolo il mezzo principale attraverso cui trasmettere immagini delle lotte tra le due parti e che venivano poi condivise dai notiziari siriani ufficiali. L'utilizzo dei social media fu comunque utile a ispirare gli altri a unirsi alla rivoluzione comunicando messaggi rivoluzionari sia alla sfera locale che a quella internazionale, fatto che aiutò ad accrescere l'attenzione sulle rivolte e a ottenere il supporto globale. Va inoltre sottolineato come, a differenza degli altri leader politici, Assad non vietò l'accesso a internet, inducendo gli attivisti a condividere ancora più informazioni in vari modi. Come affermato da Gohdes (2015), i regimi solitamente ostruiscono l'accesso a internet in modo tale da danneggiare la crescita delle proteste online e in persona, così da incrementare la repressione militare e diminuire le informazioni che il governo può raccogliere sui cittadini.

I social media, quindi, hanno avuto un impatto significativo sulla rivoluzione in quanto mezzi di diffusione e scambio di informazioni. Al tempo stesso, la Primavera Araba non è dipesa unicamente dai social media, come nel caso della Libia, in cui il ruolo è stato minimo. Se nessuna persona, tuttavia, avesse contribuito a migliorare la propria condizione, il ruolo dei media sarebbe stato nullo.

Come si può evincere dall'analisi riportata, è possibile concludere che le differenze nell'utilizzo dei social media e del comportamento dei vari eserciti nelle quattro nazioni sono strettamente legate ai vari risultati ottenuti durante e dopo gli eventi della Primavera Araba. Questa tesi ha cercato di dare una risposta alle varie domande rimaste aperte riguardo ai conflitti, specialmente sui risultati che la rivoluzione ha ottenuto, in quanto è stato possibile osservare nazioni che hanno avuto successo a breve termine ma hanno ottenuto un fallimento a lungo termine, mentre altre hanno vissuto un fallimento costante e duraturo che non sembra cambiare a undici anni dall'inizio degli eventi: infatti, se si tiene conto degli sviluppi più recenti, la Tunisia, l'Egitto e la

Libia non sono state capaci di portare a fine il processo di democratizzazione. La Tunisia sembra essere tornata a un governo autocratico (Bajec, A., 2022), il governo egiziano ha dimostrato di non osservare il rispetto dei diritti umani (Amnesty International, 2021; Holleis, J., 2021) e la Libia, nonostante l'aiuto apportato dalle Nazioni Unite e dalla Missione di Supporto delle Nazioni Unite in Libia, non è riuscita a formare un governo stabile a causa di competizioni interne (Daily Sabah, 2022). In Siria, invece, la rivoluzione continua tuttora senza successi tangibili, in quanto a oggi, nel 2022, Assad è ancora al governo (Harmoon Observatory, 2022). Eppure, la Primavera Araba rimane uno dei fenomeni storici e politici più importanti dell'era contemporanea. L'obiettivo dei manifestanti era quello di cambiare la propria condizione e passare da un ruolo marginale a uno più attivo nell'ambito della propria comunità, in modo tale da salvare i propri Paesi da governi corrotti e ingiusti e contribuire alla loro crescita.

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