

ABSTRACT

The work intends to provide a description of social institutions, their birth and their development in real scenarios. Starting from the work of John Searle "The construction of social reality", I will focus on the concept of institutional change, then I will point out the reasons why institutional crisis happen and at the end I will apply these analyses to two real cases-studies: Egypt and Tunisia during the Arab Spring.

The work is divided in three parts: the first part will analyze the birth and the development of social institutions. To better understand this it is necessary to specify the existence of two kinds of facts: brute facts (which are independent from human institutions) and institutional facts (which suppose the existence of social institutions). Institutional facts are a subset of social facts, and they need three elements to exist: imposition of a symbolic function, collective intentionality, and constitutive rules (which create the possibility of new activities). On the base of these elements it is possible to analyze institutional facts. First of all the main characteristic of social fact is self-referentiality. To understand this concept we may use an example: in order to make sense of the concept of money, people need to believe that some pieces of paper are money. If everybody stops believing that it is money, it would cease to function as money, and eventually it would cease to be money. Moreover a social fact can be created through the use of performative utterances, which are speech acts that produce immediately a real fact ("The meeting is updated"). Social facts in general, and institutional facts in particular are hierarchically structured. An institutional fact cannot exist in isolation but only in a set of systematic relations with other facts. The transition from collective intentionality to institutional facts is not very simple because, in theory it is necessary to impose a certain status to a certain object. To clarify this point an example is necessary: the evolution of money. The use of commodity money, such as gold and silver, is, in effect, a form of barter, this is because money is not just a piece of paper, but everything valuable can become what we call money. The object in question performs the function of money solely because of its physical nature, even though it already has a different function. When somebody figured out that it was possible to increase the supply of money simply by issuing certificates, it was clear that it would have been easier to create these instead of

finding gold. As long as these certificates continue to function, as long as they have a collectively imposed function that is still collectively accepted, the banknote are, as they say, as good as gold. The next innovation came when somebody figured out – and it took a long time for people to figure this out – we can forget about gold and we could just have banknotes. With this change we have arrived at fiat money, and that is nowadays situation. The locution "counts as" names a feature of a status' imposition to which a function is attached by collective intentionality, where the status and its accompanying function go beyond the sheer brute physical functions that can be assigned to physical objects. There are generalizable features of social facts: collective intentionality can impose a certain status to a object, which could not have it, just by physical properties, the creation process of institutional facts may proceed without participants being conscious that it is happening according to this form, a social fact can be named this way if people are able to create rules to regulate it. Social facts are different from institutional facts because of this last thing. The simplest cases of creation of institutional facts are those where the institutional structures already guarantee that certain lower-level actions count as higher-level institutional phenomena. It is easy to understand the reason why institutions continue to exist: some individuals directly involved and a community continue to recognize the existence of such facts. Social facts exist just in virtue of human agreement and they require, sometimes, official representations, which are called status indicators. There is a hierarchy between facts, and brute facts are at the bottom, while social facts are at the top.

After the explanation of the birth, the development and the continued existence of institutions, it's necessary to analyze what happens when there is not anymore collective intentionality. Social changes in society are the result of unfulfilled expectations, and their most visible symbol is the subjective surprise. There will be a regressive or a progressive balance, considering the result of change. There is a real tension between the expectations and the ability to realize them: people always want more, but they often cannot have it because institutions are not able to respond to demands for change, the consequence is a social action. A good example of this is the appearance of trade unions: they channeled the social action of the peasantry, which was becoming workers, and avoided the revolution due to the ever

increasing expectations and the impossibility to realize them. The regime, when the change is going to be realized, will have to choose what decisions to take, and only the right choice among many will guarantee life to the regime; the sovereign will have to be able to interpret the future in order to choose which way to follow. Today, institutions should be different from the past: stable and effective, and generally creators and achievers of change. This point of view can be easily rejected: it is unlikely that the institutions act in order to create a long and lasting social change, especially for the complexity of social causality. Going on with the explanation of institutional change it is also necessary to analyze the agreement, which institutions have to obtain to continue existing. Agreements may be of two types: one political and one procedural. The first case refers to the consensus that people give to the institutions, and this case it's about individual consensus or consensus that is achieved through political participation, both with the election and the aggregation in political groups, such as parties, in the latter case we it is meant collective consensus. Political consensus, in short, is the consensus on the values of the State. In this case consensus means adherence to rules and allows the coexistence (and even reaching decisions) in a pluralistic situations. In the end when there is no procedural consensus, there is the collapse of the democratic institutions.

Having, now, a clear image of what institutions are, how they were born, how they develop, and the situations which lead to institutional change and loss of support of the institutions, we can move to the third part, which deals with the application of these theories to a particular case: the Arab Spring, in the specific case of two States where revolts first began: Tunisia and Egypt. First of all it is necessary to analyze the rise of institutions in these States. They, until the First World War, were under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which didn't represent their cultural identity. So the United Kingdom didn't have problems involving Arabs unsatisfied *élite* against the Empire, in order to reach freedom. Obviously it was not real, and Britain, in accordance with France, signed the Sykes-Picot agreements, through which the territory in North Africa was divided between the two Powers. Only in 1925, Britain released part of its territory and gave support to the family Sa'ud to govern. The institutions that emerged and which were born during the process of decolonization, were built in the image and likeness of those in the West, but of course they did not fit to the Arab

countries, because of the two continents' different cultures. Moreover, in many states were settled military dictatorships. The events in Arab countries after the Second World War were influenced by the Cold War. Many states have adapted socialism to their needs, this, however, did not lead to anything good especially for the economy. The dissatisfaction reaches very high levels, but it is not openly expressed because regimes oppose strong punishments to opponents. Only in 2010, thanks to the networks, new generations could see what was happening in the Western countries, and they began exchanging information. This was the beginning of Arab Spring.

Egypt and Tunisia lived in a different way the Arab Spring because, although in both cases what people wanted was an institutional replacement, in Egypt there is an institution created by the regime, and very favored by it the army. Its aim is to take over the reins of the protests and to give input to the renewal. In Tunisia, however, change will be much more difficult, because institutions even after the start of the demonstrations remain, and there are still present regime loyalists, despite the abandonment of the country by Ben Ali. Only 23 October 2011 there will be new elections, will be activated again by the constitution, in fact, they were suspended by Ali, and will finally implement the change hoped.