

## Analysis vs. Prediction: Before and After the Arap Spring

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*“When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minevra begins its flight with the onset of dusk.”<sup>1</sup>*

Immediately after Hamit Bozarslan published his “Political Sociology of the Middle East” in French in February 2011, the whole Arab world – that had traditionally been described as the least liable region to change – has been turned upside down by a series of revolutions that were launched not by external intervention, as it was expected due to the Iraq experience, but by its very internal dynamics. As the seemingly most persistent authoritarian regimes are torn apart one by one by the “ordinary” Arab men and women, a worldwide controversy over the causes and possible consequences of the Arab revolutions has begun. The well-known conspiracy theory – which degrades the revolutions to the overt or hidden intentions of the international actors – is immediately falsified, as the Western forces were more than sorry for the ongoing collapse of their authoritarian allies and hesitant to support the revolutions for the security of their interests in the region might be threatened by a possible rise of Islamic/Islamist actors from the democratic elections. The hypocrisy over the discourse of democracy and human rights could not be more blatant. By underlining the preceding economic crises in the region, the theorists of homo-economicus, on the other hand, saw in the Arab revolution nothing but the usual “rebellion of the stomach”, since the behavior of those “ignorant masses”, as if they could not have any transcendent ideas (freedom, democracy, justice etc.) or emotions (solidarity, community, fraternity etc.), are only determined by economic interests. The rioters, however, displayed *the moral economy*<sup>2</sup> of the “ordinary” people in an extraordinary act – which proves, without any doubt, that human is (not only *also*, but *primarily*) a political and emotional (*thumos*) social being.

In order to understand the Arab riots, therefore, we should turn our attention from these crude perspectives to the political sociology literature on the Middle East that analyzes it, as a cultural, instead of a geo-strategic, space by taking into account its historical and sociological context within both a regional and global comparative framework. Regarding the line between analysis and prediction in social sciences, however, the difficulty is not only about contingency, but the very nature of thinking, as the thought of this world “*appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its completed state.*”<sup>3</sup> When Bozarslan’s study was published, the question, which was required to be addressed, was on the reasons of the persistence of the authoritarian regimes and the absence of a social rebellion in the

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<sup>1</sup> G.W. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, H. B. Nibset (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> For the concept of “moral economy”, see: E.P. Thompson’s analysis of urban unrest in the 18<sup>th</sup> century England: E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”, *Past & Present*, 50, 1971, p. 76-136.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel, p. 23.

Middle East. Bozarslan responded: “A complex balance between defiance and obedience is observed that explains why the “Arab streets” do not lead to any “social explosion. Except a revolution scenario or large-scale urban riots, which are unpredictable by definition, this balance has the chance to “constantly” reproduce itself without forbidding opposing movements.”<sup>4</sup> Bozarslan studied, in other words, the coexistence of the weakness of collective action in the macro level and the innumerable ways of resistances in the micro level. By presenting an analysis of the historical turning points and a critique of the reductionist paradigms, Bozarslan read the Middle East as an authoritarian world that was governed by *cartel states* – which are dominated by security paradigms, framed by metaphysical or supra-historical concepts, and required obedience (not full-fledged embracement of the regime as it is the case for the totalitarian world); thus an authoritarian state could tolerate opposition and dissent unless they threaten the existence of the regimes.<sup>5</sup> Still, the reader, in retrospective, finds the very pillars on which the upcoming Arab riots would built themselves and clues for their possible futures in Bozarslan’s analysis: (i) the stable rising of Islamic/Islamist actors, (ii) the loss of the legitimacy of the Arab governments, (iii) the relative advantages of the Syrian and Persian regimes to persist, and (iv) the increasing rebellious spirit of the Arab cities.<sup>6</sup> By the rise of counter-spaces in the cities that produce counter-histories and counter-heroes, Bozarslan, already, framed the upcoming events: “*Street, first of all, seizes the right to decide who is friend and who is foe; then, monopolizes it, and eventually forces the power to disappear by withdrawing itself in its palaces.*”<sup>7</sup>

It is now clear that the process of demobilization and apathy in the Arab world that lasted for twenty years has come to an end in 2012, but the revolutions are still farther from completion. Regarding the ongoing change in the Middle East, Bozarslan’s study gives crucial insight not only by including Turkey into the comparative analysis of the region with reference to AKP’s political power, the ongoing process of de-militarization, and the Kurdish question or by predicting the use of raw coercion in times of crisis by those regimes for their reproduction<sup>8</sup>, but also for his additional paper in its Turkish edition, i.e. an analysis of the causes and possible consequences of the Arab riots from the point of view of political sociology. In this additional article, the reader will find the typology of the Arab revolutions, the reasons of the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions due to the hegemonic role of their capitals, an explanation of the positions of the social classes and the army towards the revolutions by reminding the concept *cartel*, the subtleties of *the domino effect* by clarifying the similarities and differences between the countries of the region, an analysis of the rising Islamic/Islamist actors, the use of new social media, and the need for the Arab left.

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<sup>4</sup> All translations belong to me. Hamit Bozarslan, *Ortadoğu’nun Siyasal Sosyolojisi (Sociologie Politique du Moyen-Orient)*, Melike Işık Durmaz (trans.), İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2011, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 98 – 100. It is crucial to note that Bozarslan interpreted these authoritarian regimes as the products not of Islam or classical Middle Eastern political culture, but of modernization processes in the region. Ibid, p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> Respectively, ibid, p. 45, 101, 102, 110.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Every crisis, by its very nature, is an opportunity, especially for the one that is in crisis.