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Social Protection and the Politics of Anger in the Middle East and North Africa

by Alfio Cerami

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND THE POLITICS OF ANGER IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA • This article investigates the *confessional resource dependent welfare regimes* of the Middle East and North Africa. It emphasizes the elite-captured nature of resources as well as the dependence of these regimes on oil and gas revenues or the acquisition from state-assets. The article pays a special attention to religious and other non-state actors in the administration and delivery of social protection. By examining key institutional features in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Yemen and Tunisia, the article also highlights the ways in which differential sets of social protection institutions succeeded in ensuring social peace and loyalty to the regimes. In addition, by identifying shortcomings and strengths in the administration of public goods, the article highlights the prospects for future and more successful reforms. In the conclusions, the «politics of anger» that led to the *Arab Spring* of 2011 is briefly elucidated.

KEYWORDS *social protection, welfare regimes, corruption, resource curse, Middle East and North Africa, politics of anger.*

1. INTRODUCTION¹

In the Spring of 2011, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region faced a series of unprecedented revolts, which forced politicians, policy-makers, scholars and international observers to reflect more carefully on the existing institutional set-up of social protection, on the kind of public administration reforms that are urgently required and on what are the future prospects for the modernization and the democratization of these societies. During the so-called *Arab Spring*, riots suddenly exploded in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan,

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Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Kuwait, Yemen and Tunisia. However, while in some countries the transition has led to an apparently smooth regime change (Egypt and Tunisia) or to the maintenance of a fragile status-quo (Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait), in others (Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen) the ghost of civil wars has materialized.

This article does not aim to provide a full explanation for the Arab revolts, but rather it aims to investigate the politics of anger that characterized the MENA region over the decades as well as what has been the role of political and welfare institutions in reducing or enlarging the reasons for political quiescence and protest. In particular, this article aims to address these issues, by investigating (1) what kind of welfare model characterizes the countries of the MENA region; (2) what was the role of confessional organizations and of elite-sponsored programmes in reducing or increasing the reasons for tension; and (3) what are the specificities in welfare programmes of this region. In order to achieve these objectives, this article examines the *confessional resource dependent welfare regimes* in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Yemen and Tunisia. This quite extensive choice of case studies is dictated by the necessity of exploring variation and similarities among countries located in a highly diversified region. The MENA region includes countries characterized by substantially different levels of socio-economic development with different institutional structures and welfare performances. These range from the extremely oil rich nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) to the less affluent economies of the Mashreq (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and Gaza, Egypt) and of the Maghreb (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia). In exploring similarities and variance, the article emphasizes the systemic dependence that these regimes have developed on oil and gas revenues or the acquisition of state-assets. Whilst Algeria, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen are rich oil or gas exporters, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia remain dependent on the import of oil and food (IMF 2011). The elite captured nature in the collection and redistribution of resources as well as the important role played by religious and other non-state actors in the administration and delivery of social protection are also highlighted here.

In this account, it will be stressed that the diminution of vertical inequalities (inequalities among citizens) and horizontal inequalities (inequalities among social groups) (Stewart 2008) is crucial to improve the prospects for future and more successful reforms. As argued by Greskovits (1998), Vanhuyse (2006) for the cases of Eastern Europe and Latin America, it will be demonstrated that political and welfare institutions and, more in particular, the model of welfare present in a country are determinant elements to take into account when examining the prospects for social peace and stability.

They do so by increasing social resilience and, subsequently, societal success (Hall and Lamont 2013).

In order to clarify this argument, the article is divided into five main sections. In the first section, the article discusses the shortcomings and strengths related to the abundance or absence of natural resources. A particular attention here is given to the «resource curse» hypothesis and its critics. The article then proceeds with an analysis of welfare regime typologies. In this second section, an examination and classification of the dominant social protection models present in the MENA region is provided. The overarching goal of the third section is to discuss key institutional features, as well as their repercussion in social stratification and in the reproduction of the political, economic, cultural and social order. In the fourth section, the article continues with an investigation of mismanagement in public administration and confessional involvement, as this analysis is important to an understanding of the prospects for future reform. This is discussed in further detail in the fifth section, as is discussed the «politics of anger» that, ultimately, led to the *Arab Spring*.

2. Economic Growth, Natural Resources and Political Corruption

Since the 1960s the countries in the MENA region have witnessed large fluctuations of their GDP, with significant repercussions for their prospects of economic and social progress. During their history, the main economic and social indicators of these countries have been linked to the growth of the international markets of oil and gas (especially in Algeria, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen) and to the fluctuations in the level of fuel and food prices (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia) (IMF 2011; UNECA 2011; Malik and Awadallah 2013). This uncertainty and economic vulnerability to oil and gas revenues or from fuel and food prices has resulted in the creation of highly unstable economies (World Bank 2010a; 2010b), which are still characterized by relatively high unemployment rates (Gatti *et al.* 2013).

Over the years, several authors have demonstrated that we need to understand the structure of economies which are heavily dependent on natural resources if we are to make judgements about patterns of economic and social progress their country's prospects for democracy (see Huntington 1991; Haber and Menaldo 2011). According to the supporters of the «resource curse hypothesis», the presence of natural resources, such as oil and gas, can hinder the economic growth and democracy of a country through a variety of different means (Diamond 2008). For Ross (2012), these include (i) a *rentier mechanism* which concerns the tendency of governments to adopt low tax rates and high spending in order to ensure their political survival; (ii) a *repression mechanism* which involves the possibility of governments of finding additional resources

to finance internal security forces which are then used to silence dissenting voices; and (iii) a *modernization mechanism* which implies the possibility of governments limiting the chances of the population to undergo necessary societal changes by silencing the voices of alternative civic associations. In a similar vein, other eminent scholars have emphasized the importance of (iv) a *state assets mechanism* (Boix 2003) which concerns the influence that non mobile state assets have in hindering the democratization process by limiting the chances of political elites to transfer their accumulated wealth abroad; (v) a *corruption mechanism* (Fish 2005) which involves the negative effect of oil in encouraging dishonest behaviour by tempting officials to avoid legal restrictions and public scrutiny; and (vi) a *foreign involvement mechanism* which concerns the strategic interests and influences of foreign powers (including multinationals) in keeping authoritarian regimes alive.

As demonstrated by several studies (for an extensive review, see Cerami 2013), the presence of significant natural resources and emergence of political and administrative corruption are elements that, inevitably, go hand in hand. However, the perception of political and administrative corruption can also affect non oil rich countries. In the MENA region, this is often the case and it produces clear negative consequences for the quality of their government, creating a set of vested-interests and well-entrenched supporting institutions that can prove to be extremely difficult to dismantle (Rothstein 2011). Emblematic examples of state-captured in oil and on-oil rich countries have been represented by the ruling families in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Kuwait, Yemen and Tunisia.

3. *Confessional Resource Dependent Welfare Regimes in the MENA Region*

Despite the vital importance of these elements for the process of modernization and democratization, the MENA region remains an extremely poor researched area in the field of comparative social policy and public administration studies in general. Up to the present time, very little attention has been paid to the administration of social policy, to its system of governance, to the key institutional features of social welfare regimes as well as to the performance that welfare institutions have in reducing poverty and income inequality. The systems of social protection in the MENA region are not homogenous entities, but they are constituted by a variety of welfare arrangements that correspond to country-specific institutional set-ups with associated path-dependencies and institutional legacies. These systems of social protection do not also fit in any of the classifications currently available. Esping-Andersen's (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* was primarily concerned with the establishment

of welfare institutions in advanced Western capitalist societies and almost no attention has been devoted to religious factors and actors (van Kersbergen and Manow 2009) or to the captured nature of resources by political elites. These are, however, extremely important elements to take into consideration when analyzing the peculiar welfare architecture of the MENA region (Karshenas and Moghadam 2006; Jawad 2009). They represent the common features that unite instead of dividing seemingly different welfare organizations and models of administering and redistributing public goods.

Here, it is argued that five main features characterize the *confessional resource dependent welfare regimes* of the MENA region: 1) the dependence of these regimes on oil and gas revenues (or on the acquisition of state-assets); 2) a confessional involvement in social protection; 3) strong role for nuclear and extended family or of tribal, sectarian and religious communities; 4) basic state provision in health and education; and 5) market-based social welfare for the wealthy (Gal and Jawad 2013, p. 247).

The first common characteristic of these highly differentiated systems of social protection can be attributed to the *captured nature of resources* by the political elites with its market and social protection distortive mechanisms. As in the case of other oil and gas rich countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (see Cerami and Stubbs 2013), the revenues from natural resources have been captured by the political elites, who have, subsequently, and in a highly discretionary way, redistributed the benefits according to their short-term political and economic objectives. These have involved subsidizing goods, services and fuels, non productive jobs in the public and private sector, ultimately, offering cash benefits to individuals when the latter were not sufficient to ensure social peace (Fattouh 2011). Over the years, the elite-captured nature in the collection of oil and gas revenues and consequent politically motivated redistribution of wealth to specifically targeted groups of the population has reinforced and enlarged the persistence of political clientelism and administrative corruption (Cook 2010). Interestingly, while *divide and pacify strategies* (Vanhuysse 2006; see also Hirschmann 1978) have constantly been put in place through universal price subsidies of primary goods and the other means elucidated below, sectarian welfare policies have been more specifically targeted to specific ethnic and religious groups, such as the Shiite Muslims in Lebanon, the Sunni Muslims in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Yemen, the members of the Gaddafi's closest tribes (especially the Ghadala and Meargha) in Libya – but the list of Shiite-Sunni, Muslim-Christian or inter-tribes divides could include other countries in the region as well. In order to reduce the tensions that resulted from these differential social inclusion strategies in political positions and in divided labor markets, a strong repressive and military apparatus became a necessity. Interestingly, however, where abundance of natural resources was not existent (such as in

Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Tunisia), political elites have turned to the private wealth acquired through the capture of state-assets into vital means to calm the masses and to ensure their survival.

The second and third characteristics of these welfare regimes in transition lie, in this case, in the *confessional* orientation of the system of social protection and in its particularistic way of redistributing welfare benefits and social services. In the MENA region, due to poor public administration capacity (OECD 2010), the governance architecture of the welfare regimes is highly decentralized. Access to social services and distribution of welfare benefits depend, for the most part, on non-state religious actors (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Heyneman 2004; Karshenas and Moghadam 2006; Jawad 2009; Jawad and Yakut-Cakar 2010; Cammett and Issar 2010; Cammett and McLean 2011). By devolving the tasks to decentralized religious and other non-state actors (or clans and tribes as in the case of Libya), the pressures caused by the state inefficiencies in public administration have been reduced. In this way, the religious attachment of the population has been increased and with it the loyalty to the dominant political elites (Cammett and McLean 2014). The confessional orientation to social protection, which aimed at creating both a «good citizen» as well as a «good Muslim» (Gellner 1981; Leca 1994), has involved also the development of a peculiar understanding of solidarity, with religious precepts that have slowly replaced Weberian rational bureaucratic aspirations (Weber [1922] 1968).

The fourth and fifth and final characteristics lie, in contrast, in the severe economic vulnerabilities and *dependence* that these countries have to exogenous economic shocks and the involvement of the state in providing basic services for the poor and market-based social welfare for the wealthy. In the case of the oil and gas rich economies of Algeria, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen, the source of stability and legitimacy of the political, bureaucratic and moral order has been, for the most part, attached to the collection of oil and gas revenues. Fluctuations in the level of prices have, as a consequence, fostered economic growth when high but have also been extremely destabilizing when low. Similar to the case of the Russian Federation (see Cook 2007; Cerami 2009), most of the countries in the MENA region are characterized by an «oil-led social policy» whose positive performance in terms of economic modernization and poverty reduction greatly depend on their capacity to manage, in an efficient way, the revenues from natural resources. The case of Kuwait is among the most emblematic examples, with social peace ensured (or bought) by granting to the citizens free health care, education and other extensive social security arrangements (El-Katiri *et al.* 2011). The same can also be affirmed for the less resource rich economies of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia. In these cases, however, forms of dependence and of capture of resources have been more directly linked to how the ruling

families have succeeded in securing key economic and political positions and economic assets of the country. These have, subsequently, been used to redistribute benefits in order to maintain their privileged position, which has resulted in a differential set of social protection institutions consisting, besides food and fuel price subsidies used to obtain political quiescence, in very basic state provision in health and education for the poor and market-based social welfare for the wealthy (Gal and Jawad 2013).

These strategies to buy social peace, as extensively used in the case of Latina America and Eastern Europe (see Greskovits 1998; Vanhuysse 2006), have also largely been employed during the *Arab Spring*. At the height of the mass protests of 2011, the following concessions were, not by chance, made:

- in Algeria, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and its government implemented several different measures aimed at lowering food prices, such as a temporary exemption in the tax burden on sugar and edible oil, coupled with a declaration of intention to remove the state of emergency in force since 19 years;

- in Bahrain, the Interior Ministry Shaikh Rashid bin Abdula Al Khalifa (member of the reigning family Al Khalifa) announced he was hiring 20,000 people and was providing cash transfers of \$ US 2,660 to each family. Despite these generous benefits, violent riots, nonetheless, rapidly emerged;

- in Egypt, ex-President Mubarak (and his successors) promised a 15 percent increase in government wages and pensions, the creation of a fund for small enterprises, and higher subsidies for wheat imports. Interestingly, when these measures were not sufficient to calm the protests, regime change immediately occurred;

- in Jordan, King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein (and his government) raised allocations for social protection and announced cuts to taxes on fuel and foodstuffs, additional subsidies, and improved civil service salaries and pensions. Despite increasing tensions, bloody repression has, to a large extent, been avoided;

- in Libya, Muammar al-Gaddafi offered tax exemptions and 500 dinars (approximately \$ 400) to each family and innumerable other gifts in the hope of avoiding the collapse of his regime. However, beside these generous benefits, the country soon entered a civil war followed by NATO intervention;

- in Morocco, King Mohammed VI, son of Hassan II, and the head of government Abbas El Fassi, close to promulgation of implementing measures aimed at lowering the increase in food prices, promulgated a set of constitutional reforms with the overarching goal of limiting the disruptive consequences of protest by democratizing the political domain;

- in Syria, the President al-Assad announced the establishment of a National Fund for Social Aid and the future recruitment of 67,000 civil servants, increased allowances for public sector employees, improved cash transfers to

poor households, reduced taxes on some food products, a reduction in income tax rates, an increase in the minimum wage, and the extension of full health coverage to civil service pensioners. Despite all these attempts, civil war was not avoided and riots have continued;

- in Yemen, the President Ali Abdullah Saleh promised to increase public wages, expand coverage of the social welfare fund by 500,000 additional families, pay interim monthly stipend to new school graduates, to reintroduce bonuses and allowances to civil servants and so on. When these concessions proved insufficient, violent police repression followed;

- in Tunisia, the Ben Ali regime and the interim government promised to drastically raise the food subsidies for sugar, rice and wheat, to increase transfers to the unemployed and the poorest segments of the population, to suspend adjustments in regulated prices, to extend subsidies, and to scale up public investments. When these incentives proved insufficient, smooth regime change unexpectedly followed (IMF 2011, 22-31).

It becomes immediately evident that all reigning families and governments have seen in the absence of social protection as a key social transmission mechanism of protest. When the first concessions became insufficient to pacify the masses, police and military repression followed. In the following section it will be shown that not only *timing* and *sequencing* of reforms (Pierson 2004) have played a crucial role in ensuring peace (those countries like Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia that immediately accepted the demands of protesters also ensured a more peaceful regime change or maintenance), but also the key institutional set-up of social protection with associated effects in reducing vertical and horizontal inequalities proved to be an extremely important element of stability or change. In those welfare regimes that limited the set of inequalities between different groups of the society, sectarian tensions have, in fact, been reduced and this hastened the process of further modernization and democratization.

4. Welfare Institutions and the Reproduction of Existing Power Relations

Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Yemen and Tunisia have established a social insurance system of social protection, which provides access to welfare benefits and social services after the payment of social insurance contributions. In these countries, the contemporary system of social protection dates back to the aftermath of the post-war period, although important modifications have occurred during the intervening years. The most important changes have involved an increased power for the political elites and reigning families in setting the rules of the game. Coverage tends to include all

citizens employed under labour contracts, with some sporadic extensions for household workers, the self-employed and farmers. Special provisions exist for particular professional categories. These special categories particularly apply to the cases of oil industry workers, police and military personnel and to civil servants in strategic sectors of the state. The hidden aim of these special schemes is easy to imagine. As happened in communist Eastern Europe and in the Russian Federation (Cook 2007; Cerami 2006, 2009), loyalty to the system has been ensured by targeting strategic professional categories. These, in turn, have helped to maintain the status quo by refraining from making demands for institutional and political innovation.

As far as the pension system is concerned, since the MENA region has a young population, pension schemes continue to be based on a «pay-as-you-go» system. This has occurred in spite of the increasing demands by international financial institutions to enlarge the scope and coverage of private pension funds. Retirement age is low and usually set at 60 years for men and 50 or 55 for women. Substantial reductions exist for some privileged categories of workers. Social insurance contributions are not equally divided between the employers and employees as in typical Bismarckian-oriented social insurance systems. A rate of two-thirds for employers and one-third for employees usually applies. This system of asymmetrical contribution rates helps to ensure loyalty to the regimes, by shifting responsibilities for financing social insurance from individuals to employers, firms (usually state-owned) and public authorities. Despite the establishment of social insurance, old age benefits are granted under relatively favorable calculation rules, but this applies only to workers with official labour contracts. Significant state subsidies also exist in all countries under scrutiny here (Robalino 2005; IMF 2011; ISSA 2011; UNECA 2011). They cover the pension funds deficit or employers' contribution quotas. Old-age benefits are calculated on the basis of the last earning record (instead of being based on the life-course), and thus favor more recent, usually higher, contribution years and rates. In the MENA region, an average replacement rate provides between 70 and 80 per cent of the previous wage, which is substantially higher than the replacement rates in force in Eastern and Western Europe. However, the devil often lies in the detail, due to the low wages of workers (see Angel-Urdinola and Kuddo 2010), the more favorable calculations rules are not sufficient to avoid a gentrification of poverty. In fact, as a World Bank study has shown (Robalino 2005), pension funds in the MENA region tend to favor middle- and high-income workers at the expense of low-income workers, with pension systems that are able to cover only a relatively modest share of the labour force (33 per cent).

With regard to health care, the countries in the MENA region are in the process of restructuring the universal health care systems established during the 1970s. They are doing so by strengthening the health insurance

principle, by introducing health insurance funds and by improving the efficiency in public management. While impressive efforts and progress have been made in the last four decades to protect citizens from several health hazards (see contributions in Karshenas and Moghadam 2006), improving the often obsolete health care infrastructures and extending coverage to a large section of the poor population are now the most urgent priorities. In Egypt, for example, a World Bank sponsored project has aimed at fostering the adoption of a business model of social health insurance operations and management by one single national provider. Similarly, in the other countries, a primary focus of World Bank's interventions has been given to improve the administration, delivery, financial sustainability, and targeting of social and health care services. However, this has implied a decrease in health care expenditures, and a consequent increase in out-of-pocket payments. In presence of a clientelistic system in the access and distribution of benefits, for people living in the MENA region, this has been translated in a reduction in the universality of health care systems that has occurred despite the reassuring promises of the reigning families and governments.

Unemployment benefits also follow the social insurance principle, even though they are extremely poorly developed. A clear system of unemployment insurance exists in Bahrain, Egypt and Tunisia, while in the other countries no well developed system of protection against unemployment is, to date, available (Angel-Urdinola and Kuddo 2010). Benefits are earnings-related and usually do not exceed 50 per cent of the previous wage for a maximum duration of six months. Qualifying periods for accessing benefits are also strict. In the countries where detailed information is available, an employee must have worked over the last six months before having access to unemployment insurance or assistance benefits (ISSA 2011). The strict eligibility criteria and the lack of a clear system of protection against unemployment and of basic safety nets leaves a large section of the population unprotected and extremely vulnerable to poverty and income inequality. Attachment to the labour market becomes, in this context, crucial. It ensures, on the one hand, the survival for one's own family. On the other, it simultaneously provides unconditional loyalty to the employer and to the regime. When attachment to the official labour market is not possible, price subsidies generously granted by the political elites to the citizens, welfare benefits and services administered and redistributed by religious and other non-state actors (Jawad 2009) are the only means to escape from extreme poverty. As shown by two World Bank reports (Angel-Urdinola and Kuddo 2010; Gatti *et al.* 2013), in several countries of the MENA region labour legislation is still based on the social contract introduced in the post independence era, as it reproduces the set of vested interests that had been established between the ruling elites and the upper-classes. As a consequence of this residual system of protection against

unemployment, most workers in the MENA region continue to remain highly vulnerable to unemployment risks (especially to youth unemployment), to informality in the labour market, and to extreme poverty and to increasing religious fundamentalism (Kindt *et al.* 2009).

As these *confessional resource dependent welfare regimes* are based on a traditional vision of women as mothers and household workers rather than as full-time employees (Karshenas and Moghadam 2006), the system of maternal leave and family benefits in the MENA region remains poorly developed. A rational system of family policies exist, in Egypt, Iran, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, but even in these cases public administration is poor and benefits are granted only for a short period of time do not aim at promoting gender equality in the labour market. Maternity leave is paid for only 30 days in Tunisia, 90 days in Egypt, Iran and Libya and for 98 days in Morocco. In these countries, child benefits, when available, also cease, in the best case, at 15 or 18 years of age, thus precluding to the poorest social strata from full access to university education (ISSA 2011). As noted by Karshenas and Moghadam (2006), women's participation in the labour market has often and unjustifiably been seen by the ruling elites as anti-Islamic. Even when integration in the labour market has occurred, it has served primarily to reconfigure state functions and to provide legitimacy to the regime (Krause 2009). Feminization of poverty has, hence, been the most obvious result.

5. Mismanagement in Public Administration and Confessional Involvement

Once that the key institutional features of the welfare architecture have been highlighted, it remains to clarify how resources have been raised during the years so as to finance social programmes, who has been in charge of distributing these resources, under what conditions, for what aims, and who has benefited the most. The history of the systems of social protection in Western Europe is extremely variegated, as their development has been associated with country-specific political, economic and social prerogatives/cleavages. The most famous work by Korpi (1983), Baldwin (1990), and Esping-Andersen (1990) has, for example, emphasized the important role played by welfare institutions in the production and reproduction of the existing political, economic and social order. The systems of social protection in Western Europe have also been vital in maintaining social stability and political legitimacy in times of recession and deep crisis (Iversen and Soskice 2009). More recent studies on comparative social policy and international political economy have also emphasized the important role that religious and other non-state actors have played in influencing the introduction of politically-dominated social

welfare systems (van Kersbergen and Manow 2009). The lesson to be learnt by van Kersbergen and Manow's (2009) edited collection is that it is not simply party politics and power politics dynamics that matter in the creation of specific welfare regime typologies, but also religion and the key actors of decentralized public administration.

Surprisingly, the MENA region has, often, been omitted from such historical, culturally and administrative oriented analysis. This has occurred in spite of the fact that under highly volatile economic conditions, ensuring redistribution through non-state religious actors has been the only viable strategy to maintain social peace and to institutionalize the often highly polarized political preferences of citizens. Focusing on the case of Lebanon, Cammett and Issar (2010) have highlighted how religious and other non state-actors (Sunni Muslim *Future Movement* and the Shiite Muslim Hezbollah in Lebanon) have influenced the policy preferences of specific groups of the population, ultimately, altering the formal architecture of the welfare regime. Loyalty of the local population has, in this case, been obtained by granting access to social welfare services (i.e. health care facilities, access to education, housing, etc.) (see also Cammett 2014). Similarly, Rothstein and Broms (2010) have accounted for the expansion of religious support in the MENA region in terms of the redistributive poverty relief successes that state and non-state actors have obtained thanks to the revenues of special religious endowments (the *waqf*). *Waqf* refers to the religious endowments and assets that are in the hands of religious establishments and that are, in principle, used for public benefits. All Muslim countries have ministries of *waqf* (Jawad and Yakut-Cakar 2010, 665). Revenues and donations from the *waqf* have, subsequently, been used to develop a peculiar system of social protection (*waqf-fare local state*), that succeeded in ensuring loyalty to the dominant religious, political and moral order. On a similar vein, for Jawad (2009) and Jawad and Yakut-Cakar (2010), religious and other non-state actors have played a far from irrelevant role in welfare production through the collection and redistribution of two religious financial resources (the *waqf* and the *zakat*). The *zakat* is a 2.5 per cent tax on assets paid by the members of the community (often the richest members). According to Jawad and Yakut-Cakar (2010, 665), it has historically played important role in income redistribution and socio-economic development objectives, and it is based on the notion of community solidarity. This has also included the administration and redistribution of welfare benefits as well as a decentralized public administration and delivery of social services. According to the authors, and in absence of clear state interventions, this confessional approach to social policy administration helped to resolve the major economic and social problems that the countries of the MENA region have faced during their history.

To go into more details, non-state actors involved in «tax farming» in the MENA region involve politically closed organizations such as *Dar Al*

Aytam (Muslim Sunni) and *Emdad* (Muslim Shi'a – affiliated to Hezbollah) in Lebanon, *Da'wa Islamiya* (close to the National Islamic Front) in Sudan and the *Jami'yyat Da'wa Islamiya* (close to Muammar Al-Gaddafi) in Libya. Several hundred NGOs or charity associations associated with the Muslim Brotherhood exist in Egypt and in Jordan and with Hamas in Palestine, the Behzisti organization in Iran or Caritas (closed to the Catholic Church) in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine where there are significant Christian minorities. Religious and other non-state actors also include international human relief organizations, such as the *International Islamic Relief Organization* in Saudi Arabia, the *Islamic African Relief Agency* in Sudan, the *Human Relief Agency in Egypt* (close to the Muslim Brothers) and national *Red Crescent Societies* (part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society) in Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Yemen. These have usually developed strong ties with national governments. The list could, however, also include para-state or para-military organizations (such as *Emdad* in Iran or the *Scouts Musulmans Algériens* and the *Oulémas* in post-war Algeria, the *Organization for the Renewal of Islamic Tradition in Kuwait*, or the *Office for Services to the Mujahidin* of Afghanistan) (Gellner 1981; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Karshenas and Moghadam 2006; Jawad 2009).

Even though the religious linkage is not so straightforward, as in the case of other non-state actors, clans and tribes should also be included in the list of important informal welfare providers in the MENA region. As an extension of basic social units (e.g., the family), clans and tribes, as in the cases of the Ghadala, Megarha Zuwayya and Warfalla tribes in Libya² guarantee not simply the personal security of their members, but also the access to a variety of different social services. These social services include employment, income support to families, education, housing, and so on. In addition, it should be kept in mind that the members of the clans and tribes, often sharing the same branch of Islam (e.g. Sunni or Shia Islam), tend, by means of their hierarchical structure, to favour specific religious leaders, and, hence, to privilege similar group-specific religious precepts, orientations and redistributive priorities. The importance of these religious and other non-state actors in collecting taxes, redistributing benefits to specific groups of the population and in alleviating extreme poverty should not be underestimated. Recent evaluations undertaken by the World Bank have shown unambiguously that, despite the presence or absence of natural resources, about one in every five persons in the region should still be considered poor (\$ 2 PPPs). This proportion has also remained tragically constant over the last decades, fluctuating between 20 and 25 percent of the population (Iqbal 2006). Similar considerations ap-

² See report of GlobalSecurity.org available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/libya/tribes.htm>

ply in the case of income inequality, with a Gini coefficient that has, over the decades, corresponded to 0.35 and 0.40 (World Bank 2012). What this has meant in terms of politics of anger and in the differential inclusion of citizens and of groups of the society is the object of the following section.

6. Social Protection and The Politics of Anger in the Middle East and North Africa

In the previous sections the key features of the *confessional resource dependent welfare regimes* of the MENA region have been highlighted. Elite-capture of resources, confessional orientation to social protection and dependence from oil and gas revenues, in the case of rich oil exporters, or from the state-assets acquired by the reigning families in the case of the less rich oil importers have been identified as key drivers of reforms. The acquisition of revenues from natural resources or of strategic state-assets was subsequently used by political elites to ensure their personal enrichment, loyalty to their families and survival of their regime. These loyalty-enhancing mechanisms took place through a variety of different means, including subsidies to primary goods, to fuels, to particular unproductive jobs, and the establishment of special schemes in the welfare architecture (Silva *et al.* 2012).

The 2008 global financial crisis and the increase in food prices in 2008 and 2010 has done nothing more than crystallize the already existing systemic problems (Bellemare 2012; Silva *et al.* 2012). It comes then as no surprise that anger suddenly exploded quickly crossing national borders and territories. This was, on the one hand, the result of a new call for democracy and for the modernization of Islam (Adib-Moghaddam 2011), whilst, on the other, the consequence of the «politics of mobilization of anger» (Ost 2009) inadvertently created by the same authoritarian leaders and regimes in the antecedent decades.

Quite ironically, whilst excessively focusing on the education of the youths but not providing sufficient inclusion in the labour market, governments in this region increased the chances of mass protests, which, subsequently, ended in the Arab Spring of 2011 (Campante and Chor 2011). In fact, in a study on who participated in the Arab Spring revolution, Bessinger *et al.* (2012) have demonstrated that most participants in the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions were motivated primarily by economic concerns and only, secondarily, by desires for civil and political freedoms. The authors explain these differences by reference to the disparate strategies of autocratic control and welfare politics pursued in pre-revolutionary Tunisia and Egypt and the patterns of political opposition, coalitional configurations and cleavages that these produced in the regime strategies of control and maintenance (*ibidem*, 1).

Here, political, economic and welfare institutions and, more in particular, the model of welfare present in a country played a determinant role in ensuring social peace and stability, but also, when exclusive, creating new reasons for tension. As correctly highlighted by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) and Hall and Lamont (2009, 2013), establishing inclusive political, economic and welfare institutions is, in this context, crucial for nation-building and economic growth, as well as for societal success. When exclusive political, economic and welfare institutions were implemented, political conflicts inevitably emerged, subsequently determining the paths for societal unrests (see MacAdam *et al.* 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). In order to promote long-term peace, stability and growth, a drastic *recalibration* of the main functional, redistributive, normative and institutional priorities of the welfare architecture is, in this context, necessary (Hemerijck 2012) so as to increase social resilience (Hall and Lamont 2013).

As the Arab revolts have unambiguously shown, different negative institutional and social mechanisms have over the decades materialized, playing a key role in determining the different patterns of collective action and, subsequently, system stability and change. As discussed elsewhere (see Cerami 2013, esp. ch. 9 and ch. 10), poverty and the increase in vertical and horizontal inequalities can, in this context, be addressed as the primary causes of civil conflicts, but this tells us nothing about how these driving forces turn into practical results. Poverty and inequality (the cause), for example, influenced regime change through two interrelated mechanisms: an institutional mechanism and a social mechanism. On the side of the institutional mechanism, poverty and inequality produced lock-in and self-reinforcing mechanisms that constrained the resources available to the individual and, thus, limited the functioning and capabilities of the citizens, precluding their full integration into society (see Sen 1999). Yet this does not explain the actions. On the side of the social mechanism, poverty and inequality enacted a mechanism of mobilization of anger that altered the perceptions of social justice (Rawls 2003) of the affected individual. Feelings of resentment or simple revenge were, in this way, created and the trust in the existing social order reduced. This, in turn, motivated actions that led to civil conflict, war and, ultimately, to a more general system transformation, including the leading political and economic institutions of a country, as well as cultural and social ones (*ibidem*, 211-212).

To provide some more clearer examples, a first set of institutional and social mechanisms responsible for having hindered poverty-reduction and the overall human development goals in the region had to do with the inheritance of status inequality. By restricting the chances for successful institutional and social interactions (social mechanisms of boundary de-activation and de-brokerage) (see MacAdam *et al.* 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007), inheritance of status inequality limited, through institutional lock-in and self-reinforcing

mechanisms, the possibility of autonomous self-advancement. This was the case of most countries of the regions, but especially of Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Tunisia, where being close to the dominant ruling families was a determinant factor for societal success.

A second set of institutional and social mechanisms was related to the issue of lost childhood and the need to invest in children and youths. As Esping-Andersen (2008) has shown, if not adequately addressed by adequate political, economic and welfare institutions, the impact of social origins on child outcomes tends to persist, greatly affecting the chances of the economic and social development of a society. Institutional mechanisms of exclusion, which locked-in vulnerable children and youths in disadvantaged social spheres, included those concerned with poor health, and cultural and working environments. As income inequality increased, the capacity of parents to provide a better future for their children became more unequal, distancing the poor and their children from the broader opportunity structure (boundary de-activation and de-brokerage). Likewise, by limiting the chances of access to better education and training in those sectors of the economy where private investments would be too expensive and would offer a limited direct return, deficient investments in child and youth well-being, enhanced by welfare institutions, reduced the possibility of finding an adequately trained workforce in the labour market (Estevez-Abe *et al.* 2001; Hall and Soskice 2001). In the countries of the MENA regions, especially in Egypt and Tunisia, access to universal education was not associated with an access to better jobs, thus precluding the youths a full integration in the society and increasing the reasons for mass mobilization.

A third set of institutional and social mechanisms of inequality reproduction was concerned with the cyclicity of poverty. Through a self-sustaining and self-reinforcing institutional mechanism of exclusion, poverty reduced the chances of the affected from accessing the most valuable resources, often elitist institutions, such as good schools, universities, centers of excellence, better equipped hospitals, safe neighborhoods and so on (Petersen 2009). Membership of rotary clubs, of elitist sports associations or of prestigious universities are probably the best examples, but further important illustrations are represented by the confessional involvement. Confessional involvement was, for example, determinant in accentuating the formation of particular interest groups creating a dangerous links between religious belonging and access to the job and the social security market (see Cammett 2014; Cammett and McLean 2014). This was clearly the case of the Sunni Muslim *Future Movement* and the Shiite Muslim Hezbollah in Lebanon, the *Dar Al Aytam* (Muslim Sunni) and *Emdad* (Muslim Shi'a – affiliated to Hezbollah) in Lebanon, the *Jami'yyat Da'wa Islamiya* in Libya, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and in Jordan, the Caritas in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, or the *International Islamic Relief Organization* in Saudi Arabia, the *Human*

Relief Agency in Egypt and national *Red Crescent Societies* in Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Yemen (see discussion above).

A fourth set of institutional and social mechanisms was associated with the presence of negative cultural, ethnic or religious repertoires with particular reference to those that hindered access to key positions by excluding individuals based on class, gender, race or ethnic origin. Sociological studies within this topic are innumerable and a list of the most important articles or even books would fill several hundred pages. To provide only some very elucidative examples of cultural, ethnic or religious exclusive mechanisms specifically tailored to the MENA context, in countries where a hard version of Islam is predominant, as in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), but also of the new religious fundamentalist formations in the Mashreq (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and Gaza, Egypt) and Maghreb (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) regions, women have more often been subjected to several different exclusionary practices. These have ranged from exclusion from employment to normal cultural activities (e.g. access to schools and hospitals).

A final set of institutional and social mechanisms of exclusion concerned the access to political power and associated local governance dynamics (Ostrom 1990; 1995). Excluding poor people from education in the best universities implied not simply having less access to the labour market but also having fewer chances to access political positions in democratic ways. Clearly, when all institutional doors were closed by the elites, poor people turned to political mobilization and eventually to violence to ensure the representation of their interests and access to the few power positions available (Justino 2010).

As argued before, these negative mechanisms inevitably hinder mutual long-term peace, stability and growth, representing an unbearable cost for everyone. As a suitable response, the establishment of new institutional and social complementarities (Hall and Soskice 2001; Hall and Lamont 2013), associated with a more fruitful private sector development (see Mallik and Awadallah 2013), would not only allow a faster socio-technical change (Dolata 2014), but it would also result in a better integration in the labour market, expand the citizens' access to political and economic resources (North *et al.* 2009) with subsequent socio-economic progress (Offe 2009).

7. Conclusions

This article has shed light on the important role played by a politicized administration of social protection in the reproduction of existing power relations. The inefficient contemporary systems of social protection in the MENA region have, in fact, left a large section of the population unprotected. As the

governments in this region have greatly benefited from the abundance of natural resources (especially oil and gas) or from the acquisition of state assets, several distorting mechanisms have set in their economies over the decades. These have involved the creation of particularly powerful lobbies, dishonest competition, and corruption, which have, subsequently, hampered economic growth and social progress. In the absence of efficient political institutions, the misappropriation of resources for the redistribution of welfare benefits and of social services by the elites has also had a significant negative effect on the poverty relief strategies of these countries. While the formal system of social protection has proved to be both extremely resilient and inefficient in tackling poverty and income inequality, it has been exceptionally successful in reproducing existing power relations, and in keeping a well-entrenched system of clientelism alive, while enlarging the power of the reigning families. The informal system of social protection has become, in this sense, the last resort for the most vulnerable citizens and those in urgent need. In this process of welfare marginalization, religious non-state actors have been key agents in reducing poverty and extreme deprivation. But in the absence of a clear Weberian bureaucratic apparatus for the collection and redistribution of resources, religious and ethnic divisions have materialized, often with one local, ethnic or religious entity granting access to better services to its members at the expense of others. The doors for sectarianism and for ethnic and religious fundamentalism have, in this way, been opened. In the context of such complex institutional and social structures, improving the efficiency of the systems of social protection through a more comprehensive approach to the reduction of vertical and horizontal inequalities must be seen as the key for success. The hope is to contribute to the implementation of new more suitable public sector reforms and private sector development that will help to foster the process of democratization and the consolidation of democratic institutions in the region.

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