Reflections on Political Change in North Africa and Its Influence on the European Union

Tsuyoshi Saito [*]

Introduction

Behind the theme of the international workshop, "European Identity in Political, Economic and Social Changes," there is an awareness that the international environment surrounding the European Union has experienced dramatic change in recent decades. In their prospectus, the organizers of the workshop invoke symbolic examples such as the boom in immigrants from North Africa to Europe after the so-called Arab Spring, and serious outbreaks of terrorism in Norway and France[1]. Undoubtedly, terrorism and illegal immigration are serious and intriguing issues that the European Union must deal with in order to preserve its security and identity. European societies seem to consider Middle Eastern societies as hotbeds of terror and illegal immigration, especially after the events of September 11, 2001, and the emergence of the Arab Spring at the end of 2010. Thus, awareness of the issues provoked in this workshop on European identity has significant relevance for understanding the influence of the Arab Spring on the European Union. With this understanding, I was assigned the theme, "Political Change in North Africa and Its Influence on the European Union."

However, what kinds of changes has the Arab Spring brought in terms of the identity and political consciousness of EU citizens? Further, in the first place, is it possible to grasp current drastic sociopolitical changes in various Middle Eastern countries as a monolithic phenomenon that influences the European Union as a whole? Is it not necessary to take into consideration both the diversity of emerging forms of the phenomenon known as the Arab Spring, and the interaction between each movement spreading across Middle Eastern countries, before analyzing its influence on the European Union? Furthermore, should we not pay deliberate attention to the particular perspectives that we use to comprehend the Arab Spring? In other words, even if we use the term Arab Spring only for convenience, should we not avoid overlooking the importance of the diversity of the phenomenon? Moreover, does exclusively connecting the Arab Spring with current problems facing the European Union not pose a danger of differentiating the European Union and the Middle East as intrinsically different entities, culturally and socially, which will result in over-emphasizing the threat and menace? Thus, is it not true that simplifying diverse sociopolitical movements in various Middle Eastern countries into the singular concept of the Arab Spring, and in turn regarding this as a threat to the European Union, becomes a discourse reproducing a representation of the Middle East that Edward Said once rebuked as "Orientalism?"

Based on an awareness of this problem, I slightly modified the title proposed by the organizer to "Reflections on Political Change in North Africa and Its Influence on the European Union" in order to restate our problem. Thus, I will shed light on how the Arab Spring influences, in an epistemological sense, European perception of Middle Eastern countries and Islam, instead of arguing directly that the Arab Spring influences the European Union in sociopolitical dimensions.

In the first section, I look at the historical and spatial context for clues to reexamining some

characteristics of the perspective on the Arab Spring. I will provisionally distinguish between the long-term, mid–term, and short-term perspectives for demonstrating the importance of comprehending the Arab Spring from a long-term perspective, and of emphasizing the danger of understanding the phenomenon only in terms of current affairs. Regarding "the spatial context," concern about the influence of globalization on local societies is currently increasing; however, it seems that nationalism is in the process of being reconfigured in relation to the spread of globalization. Thus, it is indispensable to understand the dialectic relationship between the local and the global. Such an understanding also holds true in the case of the Arab Spring, which means that elucidating the influence of political change in North Africa on the European Union requires diverse analyses of the interconnection between trends in transnational, national, and local societies and networks.

In the second section, I briefly overview some characteristics of the Arab Spring that previous studies have focused on in order to deepen our understandings on their tendencies.

Based on these understandings, I will address the case of Morocco in the third section. Because of the lack of drastic transition in its political order, Morocco seems not to have been paid much attention thus far, compared to other countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. However, this does not mean that Morocco has been immune to the influence of the Arab Spring. Rather, the monarchy has been engaged in creating countermeasures while applying various "global standards" in their new policy intended to stabilize the Moroccan socio-political climate. At the same time, demonstrators inspired by the Tunisian "Jasmine Revolution" have made various demands while not only appropriating idioms, vocabularies, and concepts that are widely circulated in the contemporary globalized environment, but also concepts and ideas produced in the process of colonial policy. These facts illustrate that current sociopolitical trends evoked by the outbreak of the Arab Spring have been driven both by appropriating concepts, such as human rights, democracy, and freedom, and by reconfiguring the colonial legacy to contemporary contexts. Explicating these points, I will claim that the interrelation between the Arab Spring and the European Union should be explored as a complex dialectical process of configuration with the participation of various socio-political actors in the milieu, and that it is too simplistic to see only the influence of the Arab Spring on the European Union.

I Temporal and Spatial Frameworks for Understanding the Arab Spring

After the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Tunisia at the end of 2010 and the severe conflicts in Libya, many people fled from the southern coast of the Mediterranean to its northern coast. It is not difficult to admit that such an enormous influx of immigrants and refugees to the EU zone raises questions about the nature of the Arab Spring and its influence on the EU. However, if we are trying to elucidate characteristics of the Arab Spring, we should also undoubtedly take into account the timing of when it occurred. In order to deepen our understanding of the Arab Spring, it is also necessary to situate Middle Eastern countries' political-economic situations in a broader historical context. In this section, I will first provisionally pose three temporal divisions (the "long-term," "mid-term," and "short-term" perspectives) that will help us to discern the importance of situating the Arab Spring in broader historical contexts. I will then address three types of networks that can deepen our understanding of how local, national, and global societies are intertwined.

1. Temporal Scopes

First, the long-term perspective can provide an understanding of the Arab Spring as a phenomenon formed in broader historical contexts that extend as far back as colonialism. This perspective sees the contemporary political order in the Middle East as a consequence of colonial rule, in that, it was colonial power that provided the basis for national orders for the various nation states in the Middle East (Itagaki 2012, Usuki 2011). According to this perspective, seeing many Middle Eastern countries' political order as authoritarianism and criticizing their current political situations as undemocratic can overlook the fact that authoritarian regimes are themselves historical products invented by the western colonial powers. According to this understanding, people's struggle in the Arab Spring to achieve democratization is invaluably precious; however, we should also make sure not to solely satisfy ourselves by criticizing the authoritarian regime, for such recognition will reproduce representations of the Middle East that essentialize difference between western countries and the Middle East, and situate the latter behind the former.

The second perspective, the mid-term perspective, focuses on the period from the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War. In the Middle East, there are two crucial points that we should not dismiss here in relation to our later argument. The period coincides with the diffusion of Arab nationalism as a political ideology for nation state building. At the same time, the period is marked by the Iranian Revolution (1979), during which the Pahlavi dynasty, which had been considered an exemplar following Western modernization, was overthrown. The Iranian Revolution has been seen in western countries as a religious resurgence that went against the modernization and secularization of the time. As E. Said vividly explicates in his work, *Covering Islam*, various media at that time produced and circulated news that emphasized the fanatic aspects of the Revolution (Said 1981). This period thus corresponds to the rise of nationalism in the Middle East, and of religious resurgence not just in the Middle East but also in other areas. In western countries, concerns about Islam and controversy over its merit have been widespread. In general, Islam has been seen as an obstacle for the integration of immigrants into European society where western cultural values are dominant.

Finally, the short-term perspective covers the period since the end of the Cold War, as determined by the collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist countries. During this period, the Gulf War broke out (1991), and the controversy around the wearing of the headscarf in the public domain culminated in France (1989). Further, the events of September 11 shocked the world. What followed was the development of the "War on Terror," initiated by the U.S. government, under G. W. Bush's direction, and the U.K. government, directed by T. Blair, to eliminate the fear provoked by al-Qaida's terrorism. What we should notice is the fact that *terror* becomes a convenient word to rebuke anti-establishment sentiment (Kuroki 2002), which means the potential fears of Islam and Muslims acquire a new mode of expression in the political dimension. Islamophobia has also emerged in various countries, and some incidents, such as a cartoon satirizing the prophet Muhammad, or a film creating negative images of the prophet, provoked massive demonstrations, reproach, and violent reactions not just in European countries but also in Middle Eastern countries. Such collisions seemed to reinforce the negative image of Islam, and later became one of the factors that produced the positive evaluation of the Arab Spring that seemed, from the beginning, to keep its distance from religiosity.

Simultaneously, satellite TV broadcasting stations such as al-Jazeera and MBC have been avoiding state censorship and have become popular among people living in Middle Eastern countries (Eickelman and Anderson 1999). These stations allow people to access information and participate in various public discussions that offer them a way to demand the introduction of democratization, freedom of expression, and human rights to Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, many people in Middle Eastern countries have experienced the advent of new communication technologies, such as mobile phones and the Internet, especially since 2000[2] (Ilahiane 2009). It has been said that these new communication technologies accelerate the exchange of ideas and thoughts among people, facilitate the construction of informal transnational networks, and shape a new worldwide discursive space.

2. Entanglements in Transnational Networks and States

The previous section provided us with a historical background of the Arab Spring, discerned the importance of comprehending the phenomenon from a long-term perspective, and recognized the general tendency of Western societies to negatively evaluate the Middle East and Islam in the latter half of the twentieth century, which paved the way for the reverse—a particularly positive expectation and evaluation of the Arab Spring.

It is noteworthy to briefly consider what symbolizes the new aspects of the Arab Spring compared with the former social movements in the Middle East. These would include the diffusion of unofficial transnational networks on the basis of the emergence of new technologies and social media, represented by the Internet, cellular and smartphones, and satellite TV broadcasts that have marked the advent of the age of globalization; they facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and the creation of connections beyond state borders.

However, not only did the unofficial networks of the "ordinary people" or the youth express their interest in building a transnational relationship to strengthen their stability, but the nation-states did so as well. Many countries have collaborated to form new alliances in reaction to the domestic problems they experienced. For instance, Saudi Arabia invited not only Jordan but also Morocco to the conservative regional organization known as the Gulf Cooperation Council of the Arab States (GCC), in order to reinforce their ties, regardless of the fact that Morocco is geographically quite distant from the Gulf region.

Thus, as the Japanese political scientist Sakai Keiko recently indicated, one can distinguish three "layers" that were crucial in the network formations in the Arab Spring: (1) transnational organizations founded on the basis of nation-states, such as the United Nations, the European Union, Arab League, and GCC; (2) nation-states; and (3) transnational networks of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other networks that are not necessarily based on a nation-state framework (Sakai 2012). Transnational networks are formed on the basis of both the unit, that is, the nation-state, and the associations and networks that have no direct basis on or relation to the nation-state. The case of the GCC shows that pressures arising from the Arab Spring protests forced

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[2] The estimated number of Moroccan internet users in 2000 was 200,000, whereas, the number reached as high as 10,300,000 in 2008 (The World Data Bank 2011). If we take into consideration the fact that Morocco approximately had a population of 31.9 millions in 2010 (Royaume du Maroc 2010: 2), the rapid increase of the number of internet users is obviously remarkable.

states to redefine their cooperation with other states and to reformulate the concept of areas.

Thus, the diffusion of unofficial transnational networks, which are estimated to surpass the control of the nation-state, has also resulted in the reinforcement of the framework of the nation-state. If we attempt to explore the influence of the Arab Spring on the European Union, the policy and sociocultural background of each state should be taken into consideration in this context. As I mentioned earlier, only analyzing the influence of the Arab Spring as a whole on the sociopolitical dimensions is insufficient. Following this introduction, in section 3, I will consider the case of Morocco to elucidate the interrelationships of social movements evoked by the Arab Spring, the state's response, and the influence of Western ideas on the discourses applied by the state during social movements.

II Characteristics Noticed in the Arab Spring

The massive sociopolitical change in the Middle East triggered by the "Jasmin Revolution" of Tunisia is still in the on-going process, and it is difficult to expect the future of various countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. However, if one reflects on these two years, one can admit that there are some preferred subjects and perspectives for the arguments on the Arab Spring.

To deepen understanding on the phenomena, the media and studies seem to have focused their attention on the following points: (1) the critical role of the people, especially the youth, in movements and demonstrations; (2) the use of the social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and mobile phones, to organize networks and demonstrations and to shape public opinion and escape suppression by authorities; (3) the concerns on transnational networks; (4) the understanding that Middle Eastern countries are in political transition from authoritarian regimes to more democratic political order; (5) the distance from religiosity—that is to say, those points are associated with nonreligious, secular movements that will not lead to results such as the Iranian Revolution in 1979. One can admit a trace of such understanding even in the arguments on "post-Islamism" that interpret the influence of Islamism as diminished, and state that we have entered into the new era—(6) nonviolence in various movements, although there are exceptions in Libya, Syria, and Yemen; and (7) precaution against Islamic political parties that have become the ruling power after elections[3].

In these respects, one can suppose that the Arab Spring is comprehended in its most ideal sense, in that the people and the youth will realize "democratization" by using nonviolent demonstrations in the Middle Eastern countries where authoritarian regimes have suppressed citizens' voices, freedom of expression, and human rights. As a reaction to such an expectation toward the democratization of the Middle Eastern countries from the secular standpoint, the remarkable progress of Islamist political parties is seen as a potentially dangerous symptom. At the same time, with the encouragement from the people and the youth to self-sacrifice for democratization in opposition to an authoritarian regime, the fact that those regimes have been shaped and preserved by western countries' support becomes invisible in public discourse.

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[3] See El-Alaoui (2013), Ferrié (2012), Filiu (2011), Gelvin (2012), Joffé (2011), Mizutani (2011), Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian (2011), and Sakai (2011, 2012).

III Morocco and the Arab Spring

Morocco and the Arab Spring

Morocco, geographically situated at the far-western part of North Africa, is a constitutional monarchy. It has been under the reign of King Mohammed VI, who was enthroned in 1999. After the outbreak of the massive demonstration in Tunisia in December 2010, the "Jasmine Revolution," Moroccan youth have called for demonstrations by using Facebook to diffuse their requests. The sociopolitical movement is named after the date of their demonstration, the "February 20th Movement"[4]. Many people, not only men but also women, not only youth but also middle-aged persons gathered with various demands, such as the abolition of corruption, countermeasures against unemployment, the creation of new employment, the reinforcement of women's rights, the release of political offenders from prison, the admission of stricter religious observance, and the official recognition of the language of the Amazigh (Berber) people, who have been known in recent years as an indigenous people, a minority in the North Africa, as an official national language.

The king and the royal palace quickly responded to these various demands in an attempt to calm down the demonstrations by delivering an official speech promising to change the government and to deal with the problems raised in the demonstration. The official speech by the king was made on March 2011, only a month after the formation of the 20th February Movement. After the public speech, in 2011, a general election was conducted in September after the dissolution of the national assembly, and the Amendment of the Constitution was determined by the plebiscite. The government also made a campaign to diminish unemployment and attempted to raise the salary of the public servants. Further, the Amazigh language acquired official recognition as an official Moroccan language. As for the results of the general election, the Islamic political party obtained overwhelming number of votes, and became a leading party[5].

The 20th February Movement continues to organize demonstrations regularly in numerous cities; however, two years have passed since the outbreak of the first demonstration in Tunisia, and the numbers of the people who participate in the demonstrations are decreasing.

Thus, although Morocco shares the experience of the Arab Spring with other countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and so forth, Morocco's current situation is different from other major countries that have experienced drastic socio-political change in these years. One of the major reasons is that the monarch has succeeded in demonstrating their will to respond to the various demands of citizens.

Furthermore, Moroccans have experienced changes in their everyday lives, from the last years of the late King Hassan II. After the enthronement of the King Mohammed VI, known as the "king of the poor" (*al-malik al-miskīn*), various political and economic reforms have been initiated. Such endeavors and the popular image of the king among the people show clear contrast with the policy and image of the late king, who was known to use the power of the state to suppress the "rebels" and other political oppositions. The reign of King Mohammed VI has reached the 15th year, and it seems that Moroccans feel the differences between these two kings. Such experiences have

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[4] For more detailed accounts of the February 20th Movement, see Beurdeley (2012).
[5] On the Moroccan policy after the enthronement of King Muhammad VI, see Dalle (2004), Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine (2013), Vermeren (2001, 2009).

worked as factors that keep many people away from participating in the demonstrations.

Considering these points, it becomes clear that it is essential to understand the background of the Arab Spring according to each nation-state's short-term and mid-term contexts. In the next section, I will take up the case of the Amazigh movement that has determined the Amazigh people as an indigenous group in North Africa and demanded the rights of language, education, and resources from the state.

Amazigh Movement in Morocco

The Amazigh movement has been formed under the particular sociopolitical climate that followed the independence of Morocco in 1956[6]. At that time, Morocco's most important problem was the need to achieve the national integrity to overcome the legacy of French colonialism and its ethnic policy, which differentiated ethnic groups and tribes to weaken the force of anticolonial movements. Thus, after the advent of the new nation-state, "Moroccanization" and "Arabization" became the most urgent foci of the Moroccan people. However, in parallel with Arabization, the use of the Berber languages (known as dialects at that time) in the public domains was strictly forbidden. At the same time, many Berbers had fled from their homeland in the countryside seeking jobs in the urban setting. Such urbanization led to the loss of customs and traditions among the younger generations, and the crisis for the preservation of their mother tongue, the Berber. Some activists launched associations for the preservation of cultures, customs, and languages in the late 1960s.

However, this movement did not gain popularity until the official recognition was made by the late King Hassan II, which was announced through a TV broadcast in three major Berber dialects. After the enthronement in 1999, King Mohammed VI recognized the Amazigh culture (using the word *Amazigh* to follow the determination made by the activists) in 2001 as one of the authentic Moroccan cultures. The king admitted the creation of the Institut Royal de la Culture Amazigh (IRCAM), and initiated the teaching of the Amazigh language in public schools. With that national support, the Amazigh movement started to acquire popularity.

In addition to these domestic factors, the global context has also been important for the development of the Amazigh movement. From the establishment of the first Amazigh association in Morocco, Moroccan Amazigh activists have had a relationship with the Amazigh activists from Kabyle, an Amazigh linguistic group from Algeria. The Kabyle-Amazigh activists who had immigrated to France have their base both in France and Algeria. Further, in parallel with the increase of the world-wide concerns on indigenous populations in the 1990s, a Moroccan Amazigh association sent their representative as an observer to participate in the Working Groups on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) of the United Nations (UN). Such associations have strong desires to form alliances with the associations of indigenous populations of other regions. That is to say, the Amazigh movement has formed a transnational network by using international organizations such as the UN to draw international attention to their demands and to apply pressure on the state.

What we should take into consideration, in addition to such usage of transnational networks to appeal their demands, is that their self-recognition is based on the academic and administrative results of the French colonial rule. French ethnic policy was based on the differentiation of the Arab

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[6] For accounts on the Moroccan Amazigh Movement, see Ben-Layashi (2007), Bensadoun (2007), Crawford (2005), Errihani (2013), Maddy-Weitzman (2001, 2006, 2011, 2013), Rachik (ed.) (2006), and Saito (2006).

from the Berber to fulfill the aim to "divide and rule." Such differentiation was legitimatized by the academic research that ensured that the Berbers were seen as the first people who lived in the region before the first arrival of the Arabs in the seventh century, which means that the Berbers are Muslims who superficially converted to Islam. Thus, the Berbers are kept away from the Arabs who have stronger affinity with Islam. Discourses aiming at overcoming the pressure of Arabization and reclaiming rights have often been applied by the Amazigh activists in the contemporary context.

Self-recognition based on the ethnic policy and the particular point of view on the ethnic group published as academic contributions in the colonial era now have acquired new idioms and appearances for their expressions and representation, such as their being indigenous persons, which will support the subjectification of their existence as a collected subject whose preservation is "politically correct" in the global contexts.

Thus, the Moroccan Amazigh movement has developed with the involvement of transnational networks of associations and international organizations represented by the UN, and by attracting public attention in Western countries by using idioms that are familiar to Westerners. The outbreak of the Arab Spring, which is supposed to be characterized by democratization and nonreligiousness, was a golden opportunity for the Amazigh activists to enlarge their requests, and they have succeeded in gaining the recognition of the Amazigh language as an official national language.

Concluding Remarks

I have so far tried to illustrate the characteristics and meaning of the Arab Spring in general, with reference to the case of Moroccan and the Moroccan Amazigh movement in particular. In my concluding remarks, I will indicate several points that we can learn from the argument.

First, taking up the Amazigh movement as a case, the appropriation of academic contributions and the legacy of colonial policies to form the identity and legitimatize the demand for their rights as an indigenous/minority group in the Arab Spring show clearly that we should not narrow our scope for understanding what is going on in this new sociopolitical change. Rather, we should see how people are trying to appropriate various idioms and concepts to reconfigure their collected identities to adjust to the changing world contexts, and to appeal to the international, national, and local contexts.

Second, we can acknowledge that the movements, in using transnational networks and seeking to participate into the global context to diffuse their voices, are in fact strongly regulated by the nation, or by the state. Using transnational networks and gaining backup from international organizations, the Amazigh movement poses their demands to the state. At the same time, they are concentrated on improving the situation within Morocco, that is to say, within the state, without paying too much concern on the improvement of the situation of the Amazigh people in the other countries. The state also takes advantage of approving various rights claimed by the Amazigh movement to show internationally their concerns on the indigenous/minority group.

Third, concerning the theme of the self-recognition of EU citizens written in the prospectus, the current concerns on the Arab Spring seem to trace, principally, previous concerns on Islam and the Middle East at the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution, and the emergence of the Islamic resurgence, or "Islamic fundamentalism." Focusing on the "nonreligious," "nonviolent"

demonstration by the youth, the advent of democratization in the Middle Eastern countries has been expected in the Western countries. However, it becomes more and more clear that the Arab Spring is not a short-term phenomenon but an ongoing process that is allowing the emergence of the Islamist political party as a ruling party elected through democratic ways. In seeing these trends in various countries, the initial positive evaluations on the Arab Spring seem to be changed into worry about the diffusion of the religious influence in the Middle East. However, if we follow such a way of understanding we will reproduce the differentiation of self and other that originated previously. In reverting back to the apparently convenient categories of differentiation of, for example, religions and ethnic groups, what is at stake is our understanding of the new phenomena.

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