

Survey of the Causes and Consequences of the Arab Spring: Storm Warning for Tourism

Mimoun Hillali

Professor and Researcher

Institut supérieur international de tourisme (ISIT),
Tangiers

Arab countries are experiencing a delicate period of social, economic and political turbulence. Already de facto fragile¹ or weakened by skewed governance, some have felt the full effects of the spontaneous revolts, known by the laudatory name of Arab Spring. After the euphoria elicited by the fall of dictatorships, the situation in countries in the grip of violence turned into a nightmare. Not only has nothing changed for the majority of the people concerned, but uncertainty has also come to aggravate their daily lives even more. Three years of wait-and-see politics (2011-2013) have sufficed to disrupt the economies of the stable countries and crush those of the vulnerable ones. Bearers of great hope at first, these uprisings have revived dormant ideological rivalries and antagonisms of a religious or ethnic order. They have also revealed the insidious side of façade agreements compelled by the role-playing of the fallen systems.

In any case, the political upheaval along the South shore of the Mediterranean Basin took the world, including geopolitical experts, by surprise. One of the most astonishing factors was how quickly the regimes considered unassailable right up to the eve of their downfall collapsed. This was a first! Even more surprising was the fact that these radical revolts were taking place in the Arab countries along the

shores of the Mediterranean,² known for their “willing servitude.”³ An entire, old socio-political and economic structure was fissuring. In consequence, the production systems implemented by the fallen regimes began to flounder, seriously affecting tourism in countries economically dependent on that activity. With its keen interest in political stability and highly sensitive to social peace, tourism is experiencing a difficult period, even dangerous in certain areas. Ironically, in Mediterranean countries that were spared the violence, the tourism sector is beginning to benefit from the instability of the countries shaken by uprisings.

Do misfortunes never come singly to the Arab World? From the 2001 attacks to the Gulf War in 2003, and from the 2008 financial crisis to the Arab Spring sparked in 2011, popular revolts, fostered by the crisis and the population’s despair, have shattered the idyllic image of charismatic Heads of State, not to mention of unalterable regimes, which, let us recall once again, were or are great allies of the West. How can such a rapid, unexpected change be explained? The dilapidation of Arab nationalism, the clinical death of progressive parties, the decadent usury of historical parties, as well as political parties prefabricated and manipulated by the overthrown regimes have made the Islamist parties and movements seem like long-awaited messiahs. But once the latter are at the helm, they prove inexperienced and fumbling. Because from preaching to governing, the ways of power, just like those of the Lord, are inscrutable. Two to three years in power have sufficed to erode the popularity of the

¹ In the sense of absence of natural resources.

² With the exception of Yemen.

³ Étienne DE LA BOÉTIE: *Discours sur la servitude ordinaire*, written in 1548, cited by Bichara KHADER in: *Le Printemps arabe à l'épreuve de la transition: la Tunisie confrontée à d'autres expériences historiques*. Paper presented at the 39th Conference of the Contemporary Thought Forum (Forum de la Pensée Contemporaine) organised by Fondation Temmimi and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Tunisia.

acclaimed saviours. The practice of power has stripped theory bare by contradicting optimistic promises turned wishful thinking.

In any case, the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCs), which experienced changes between 2011 and 2013 ranging from preventive policy adjustments (Morocco, Algeria, Jordan) to radical change imposed by force (Tunisia, Libya, Egypt), in addition to Syria, which unfortunately has experienced cruel scenes of *hara-kiri*, are somewhat disillusioned. And it is rumoured that the Arab Spring, increasingly qualified as the 'Arab Storm' by the disenchanted and other pessimists, is beginning to emanate a certain nostalgia for the past that is shocking at first glance. A nostalgia displayed by the majority of the upper classes and part of the middle classes hard hit by the crisis that has been ongoing for three years now. Some demonstrators, although very rarely, have replaced the famous expression "Get out!" with "Come back," alluding to the overthrown Heads of State! Is it Stockholm syndrome? Clearly, the Arab Spring has revealed the importance of tourism in certain countries of the region; and the tourism crisis has, in turn, demonstrated the fragility of non-diversified, satellite economies.

Islamists under the Test of Power: Tourism at Issue

From 1990 to 2010, numerous sporadic attacks were made against renowned tourist centres and resorts in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey. Violently shaken, tourism has nonetheless come out unscathed or with minimal damage, demonstrating great resilience. Not having suffered too greatly from these indiscriminate aggressions and after continually rising from the ashes of hotel and car bombings, experts have concluded that this industry has particular immunity. Hence, in the face of repeated violence and crises, it is vulnerable on the short term but enduring on the long term. Observers, each in their own way, attribute this astonishing immunity to an unfathomable *baraka* due to the secular heritage of this cradle of humankind which is the Mediterranean. But given the geographic extent of attacks (In-

onesia, Kenya...), other, more rational analysts have attributed this enigmatic resistance rather to the perseverance of tourists. A commendable defiance represented by the recreational idleness of *bons vivants* in the face of the murderous folly of the faith-crazed. In other words, the adventurous or oblivious spirit of holidaymakers. On the other hand, everyone agrees that the major enemies of tourism are war and its adulterous sister, civil war.⁴ It is highly likely that the atrocious recollection of the murderous follies of the recent past will haunt the memory of tourists travelling to the SEMCs in these times of uprisings, anarchies and wars. In principle, the apparent dispute seems to pit libertarian celebration against orthodox faith. But for those who know the secrets of political Islam well, attacks against tourism would seek to fulfil three functions that are broken down into objectives meticulously planned in time and tactically limited in space. In its overzealousness, fundamentalist activism aims in the long term to introduce Sharia, purify Islam and bring about a return to the origins.

On the political level, the effect sought by targeted strikes on important tourist areas is both immediate and concrete. The media make these actions, those responsible for them and their demands known across the globe, providing free, direct propaganda. Ironically, far from tarnishing the image of pugnacious religious movements, the echoes of these attacks are tacitly appreciated in many developing countries. That is because those behind the violence claim to be avengers and defenders of the people, who are the victims of the world powers in collusion with the local regimes on their payroll. Combining communication with emotions, after each attack, they make consoling claims (condemnation of the military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya...), or, in the height of contradiction, they denounce the violation of human dignity (the case of the Guantanamo Bay Detention Centre...). Allegedly avenging oppressed peoples, a large part of these attacks are appreciated or at least tolerated. Obviously, the Palestinian cause, considered constant and just, continues to constitute the grounds or pretext for certain conflicts, whether they claim to be holy or progressive.

⁴ The wars ravaging the Mediterranean Basin have paralysed tourism for years in the areas in question, with adverse effects on the entire Mediterranean Region, i.e. war in the Balkans: 1991-2000; the Gulf Wars: 1991 and 2003; Lebanon: 1975-1990; Algeria: 1991-2002; and Libya and Syria since 2011.

Economically, these attacks seek to destabilise the countries concerned by indirectly affecting foreign exchange earnings, direct employment and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Aware of the impact of poverty, exclusion and injustice on the spirit of the pious destitute, the hunters of 'hotheads,' the future fighters of the faith, have always known how to exploit the precariousness of the masses to gain their sympathy and eventually convince them to join their cause. Psychologists, ideologists and preachers of the Islamic revival have learned by experience (targeted aid, organic solidarity,⁵ gradual indoctrination...) that rallying based on frustration is easily turned into fury at the right time (cf. jihad in Syria). How has it come to this? In reality, in the post-independence Muslim Arab world, all of the hopes dashed in the wake of governance inspired by exogenous ideologies and imposed on the people have paved the way for the emergence of the "last" hope of the masses: Islamist power. Turned into a powder keg over the course of decades, the Arab region finally burst into flames at the first spark, lit in Tunisia in December 2010. But three years after the social explosion and the economic implosion, the movement is already running out of steam, with dashed or mixed hopes! Which leads to the gnawing question: what now?

Tourism and the Arab Spring: Revolutions for a Better Future or for a Glorious Past?

Change has come quickly; indeed, very quickly. The upheavals took everyone by surprise. Unexpectedly, the adversaries of tourism, a phenome-

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non synonymous with alcohol, mixing of genders and semi-nudism, were projected to the summit of the power pyramid. Almost by accident. With the head of states having based a large part of their economy on tourism, some for decades (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey...), the supposedly repentant inspirers of bombers were faced with the fait accompli of their rise to power. In other words, with the importunate consequences of their actions or those of their associates. A major dilemma! In order to govern, the new masters of the political arena are forced to make painful decisions, beginning with the choice between continuity or rupture with their past. In other words, should they support tourism, a perverted activity in the eyes of fundamentalists, or eliminate it from their development policy? But without this well-established, profitable sector, funding for the flagship projects of their electoral promises would be compromised! Suffice it to look at tourism revenue on the eve of the Arab Spring, in 2010: (Table 9).

Following the 2011 uprisings, revenue from tourism slumped in certain SEMCs. The countries most affected by the revolutions (Libya, Tunisia, Syria) or having experienced collateral effects (Lebanon, Jordan) were unable to regain tourist confidence, although there was a slight improvement in 2012. That

Country	2010	2011	Loss or Gain	2012	Var. 12/11
Algeria	219	209	- 10	-	-
Egypt	12,528	8,707	- 4,811	9,940	+ 21.1%
Israel	5,106	5,305	+ 299	5,493	+ 1.2%
Jordan	3,525	3,000	- 525	3,460	+ 7.4%
Lebanon	8,064	6,871	- 1,193	-	-
Libya	60	-	-	-	-
Morocco	6,703	7,281	+ 578	6,711	+ 20.0%
Palestine	667	795	+ 128	-	-
Syria	6,190	-	-	-	-
Tunisia	2,645	1,914	- 731	2,183	+ 6.5%
Turkey	22,585	25,054	+ 2,469	25,653	+5.6%

Source: "Tourism Highlights," World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2013 Edition.

⁵ According to Durkheim, mechanical solidarity occurs in developing countries whereas organic solidarity is at work in developed countries.

year, despite a modest recovery, socio-economic indicators were still struggling to return to normalcy. Having spent years addressing their prayers to Heaven, upon arriving in power, the Islamists have discovered more mundane realities. Their unease has risen in crescendo once they realised, or pretended to realise, that the tax on alcohol, to mention only a disliked yet highly valued industry, constitutes one of the mainstays of taxation and the balance of public finances. But even more inconveniently, government salaries – for ministers, councillors, members of parliament, civil servants... – indirectly come from products that are not quite *halal*: casinos, alcohol, prostitution, speculation...

After some equivocation, realism has had the last word. The pill, very bitter, was swallowed by the expurists, closing their eyes to the dogmas and other pious principles in order, so to speak, to keep the economy in good health. Tourism can now breathe easy and tourists can once again travel. For the moderates, this acclimatisation is courageous;⁶ for the hardliners, this sacrilege is both an affront and an imposture. The diehard members of the Islamist movement feel betrayed. It must also be kept in mind that the case of Turkey is a serious precedent and a solid argument, justifying the turnaround of the Islamist governments newly settled in power. To recap, tourism brought Turkey over 25 billion US dollars in 2012. Pragmatic, Turkey even innovated in the tourism sphere: “On the Mediterranean coast in the region of Antalya, resorts are renowned for their clientele of nude Russian women, beer-loving European tourists and foam parties in nightclubs. At the Şah Inn Paradise, young women in bathing suits are swaying their hips along the edge of the pool to the rhythm of the latest tunes in fashion. But in contrast to other establishments, the pool at this Islamic hotel is surrounded by a fence to protect users from the male gaze. [‘I feel comfortable and can sunbathe as I please’], says Havva, a ravishing Turkish woman, who switched her bikini for loose trousers and a vivid orange foulard upon leaving the women-only complex.”⁷ This demonstrates that, in tourism, discreet luxury, personalised service and particular flexibility, in addition to quality, pay, as opposed to the classi-

cal mass tourism, which nonetheless constitutes the symbol of the freedom and democratisation of holidays!

In any case, once past the shame, the practice of power is beginning to deliver its secrets to the new leaders, who are growing more and more audacious. They are taking it upon themselves to protect hotels and tourist complexes against the attacks of the brothers and colleagues who have not managed to put a little water in their... soft drinks and tone it down. Islamic tourism, after the fashion of halal markets in Europe, is slowly but surely advancing.

South Shore Mediterranean Countries: Between the Grip of Tourism and Dependence on Oil

As chance, or conformity, would have it, the south shore Mediterranean countries’ economies primarily revolve around tourism or oil. The two oil and gas giants of the Maghreb (Algeria and Libya) have never granted tourism its place, despite their fabulous natural and cultural potential. Is this state of affairs attributable to the requirements of international division of labour? Because on the south shore of the Mediterranean, from Morocco to Egypt, tourism plays leapfrog: it is present in every other country. This situation goes back to the period of bipolarity, when it sufficed to swear allegiance to one of the two world powers – The US or the former USSR – to gain infallible protection.

Tunisia has opted for mass tourism, in addition of a single type: seaside tourism⁸ represents 90%, in contrast to approximately 60% in Morocco. The fact remains that the mixed success of Tunisian tourism masks structural anomalies, according to certain observers. It is compromised by the proven stranglehold of tour operators on the reservation system and the systems of distribution of tourist flows, and thus of the price policy. “As with industry, tourism in Tunisia falls within the framework of a dependent, outward-looking economy. As we have amply explained above, it seemed to us profoundly dependent on international Western and

⁶ cf. the flexibility adopted by the Islamist parties in power in Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey.

⁷ Laure MARCHAND. “Bains de mer à la mode islamique sur la côte égéenne,” *Le Figaro*, www.lefigaro.fr/international/2009/08/06/01003-20090806ARTFIG00264-bains-de-mer-a-la-mode-islamique-sur-la-cote-egeenne-.php.

⁸ The percentage that follows (90%) is calculated on the basis of the number of overnights in seacoast lodgings.

Arab capital, and dependent on a world market concentrated on and thoroughly controlled by the major tour operators, which direct and orient tourist flows, essentially driven by speculative interests that often do not coincide with the interests of the host country.”⁹ Morocco, champion of “change within continuity,” and post-Nasser Egypt, known for its sudden about-faces, have slightly different practices and outcomes. But when viewed attentively, Morocco is advancing only at a measured pace towards globalisation, for it must deal with both conservative or traditional movements and the highly enterprising ultraliberal or speculative minorities. At the cost of enormous financial sacrifice, the Kingdom of Morocco has set itself the goal of balanced tourism, while Egypt, with its strong historical past, particularly the period of the Pharaohs, has managed to develop a tourism industry with good returns.

Country	2009	2010	2011
Tunisia	288.09	289.07	271.16
Morocco	402.51	544.38	561.80
Turkey	597.32	581.30	563.59
Egypt	647.20	672.56	658.63

Source: Robert Lanquar 2012, according to data from the UNWTO.

From the start, Tunisia settled, incomprehensibly, on a single, low-cost tourist product (see Table 11), i.e. mass seaside tourism. Shaken by chronic crises in the 1970s, Morocco has a difficult time maintaining its brand image, which oscillates between midrange and high-end. On the whole, it is the Turkey of the Justice and Development Islamist party that stands at the head of the tourism countries in the region, having attracted 29 million of the 69 million tourists travelling to the SEMCs in 2011. With an intelligently diversified offer and a religiously Fordist management, the Turks have demonstrated magnificent pragmatism! They have understood that it is time to render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s.

⁹ Nouredine SETHOM: *L’industrie et le tourisme en Tunisie (étude géographique du développement)*. Publications de la faculté des Sciences humaines et sociales, Université de Tunis I. Deuxième Série : géographie, Volume xxxii, Book II, Tunis 1992, p. 381.

¹⁰ Direct expenditure is expenditure made directly in the destination country. It does not include any material, transport or agency commission expenses incurred in the country of origin.

¹¹ CEPS-FEMISE, MEDPRO 2030, Cordoba, 2012.

¹² Press release, Hospitality-On Think Tank, MKG, Paris, 19 September 2013.

Country	2000	2010	2011	Variation 2011/2010
Algeria	866	2,070	2,395	15.70%
Egypt	5,506	14,051	9,497	- 32.41%
Israel	2,672	2,803	2,820	0.61%
Jordan	1,427	4,557	3,975	- 12.77%
Lebanon	742	2,168	1,655	- 23.66%
Libya	174	271	26	- 90.41%
Morocco	4,420	9,288	9,342	0.58%
Palestine	1,055	522	446	- 14.56%
Syria	3,015	8,546	5,070	- 40.67%
Tunisia	5,244	6,902	4,782	- 30.72%
Turkey	10,428	27,000	29,343	8.68%
Total	35,549	78,178	69,351	- 11.30%

Source: Robert Lanquar, “L’état du tourisme des pays Med 11 à la mi-2012”.¹¹

The countries having made tourism the driving force of their economy and having experienced serious unrest (Tunisia, Egypt...) have sustained significant loss of employment, currency and investments. In 2011, they approached economic strangulation. Ironically, the countries that were spared the unrest rather profited therefrom (Morocco and Turkey). “Over two years after the onset of the Arab Spring, the perception of both Egypt and Tunisia abroad continues to weigh down the performance of their international hotel business. Morocco went relatively unscathed by the regional geopolitical context, whereas in Turkey, hitherto greatly benefiting from a transfer of foreign clients, this recent trend is becoming less positive due to the country’s own internal upheaval.”¹²

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Conclusion

Considering the poor state of their economic and social affairs, the South Mediterranean countries are no longer immune to violent social upheaval. The five countries along this shore (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Egypt), which are home to an overall population of over 160 million inhabitants, of whom over 40% are less than 25 years old, are already up against the wall: either ethical development or permanent unrest. The empty rhetoric of yesteryear, designed to caress the chauvinism painted in the colours of the regime in power, has run its course, despite some atypical vestiges. Generation Y, obsessed with faith, football and internet, dreams above all of access to consumption and employment. And not just any employment: a decent, well-paid job!

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Moreover, although the Arab Spring has failed to attain the bulk of its objectives, it has at least attained a less visible goal but one of paramount importance: it has vanquished fear. The ruling classes are aware of this, but habits die hard. Half a century after these countries gained their independence, certain state dignitaries no longer differentiate between Public interest and their own, if, of course, 'cleanliness,' in the sense of integrity, still means something in politics. Certain members of

the government are trying to address this issue, though without a great deal of success. In any case, they know that to stem future revolts, they will have to create hundreds of thousands of jobs that the oil and tourism industries cannot provide. They also know that the solution lies in development; a development that is impossible without the leadership of autocratic or theocratic regimes. Because repression – breaker of peaceful demonstrations and maker of forced consensus – has become, since 2011, a product flammable to contact with uncontrolled or explosive revolts.

Insofar as tourism, it will continue to create poorly paid jobs (in the future), generate currency and help balance state accounts. Always detestable for its heterodox facet, it will remain significant for its economic contribution and will thus continue to fuel controversy. In sum, the "illegitimate" child of Islamists and adoptive child of liberals, it will survive the "plots" against it, whatever the regime in power. Seen from this perspective, it has been playing the role it should have for decades, namely, being open to criticism and serving as a cash cow. Tourism, as stated above, holds a small place in the heart and a large one in economies. Need we recall that France alone received more tourists – 89 million in 2011 – than all of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries put together – 69 million in all?

In these countries, tourism, "the child of industrialisation and democracy, a good student of globalisation and consumption,"¹³ lacks the battery of resources specific to developed countries it needs to thrive. High technology, however, is a fifth element that is possibly responsible for the generalisation and success of protests (cf. Egypt). Virtual but capable of being mastered by youth, information and communication technology (ICT) escapes the throttlehold regimes have on information and freedom of expression. And this is only the beginning.

¹³ Hillali MIMOUN: *Le tourisme international vu du Sud ; essai sur la problématique du tourisme dans les pays en développement*. Presses de l'Université du Québec, Sainte-Foy, Montréal 2003.