

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF GLOBALIZATION

DIANA COJOCARU*

Understanding globalization in its various dimensions requires focusing not just on globally scaled practices, but on locally or nationally scaled ones that are inseparable from the set of global dynamics associated with globalization. Globalization therefore denotes a variegated social process; one which is unevenly diffused and materializes differently depending on local practices and structures.

Richard Devetak, "Globalization's Shadow", in R. Devetak and C.W. Hughes (ed.) *The Globalization of Political Violence*, (Routledge, 2008)

Abstract. *Globalization is perhaps one of the most salient features of modern societies. It is also one of the hardest to grasp, considering its all-embracing content and the local particularities it acquires. The aim of the present paper is to capture its dynamics in the Middle Eastern context before and after the Arab Spring. The choice of this region as a study case was not at all coincidental. Middle East offers a unique reply to the challenges of globalization, according to its particular cultural and geopolitical infrastructure. Although it is still too early to predict to what extent the Arab Spring will influence the region's exposure to globalization, an overview of the phenomenon's interaction with the Middle Eastern culture, economy and politics will hopefully prove to be useful, in a time when acknowledging the market-driven forces is compulsory.*

Keywords: *globalization, Arab Spring, Middle East, geopolitics.*

An Analytical Framework

Within the last three decades, scholars have granted the intricate concept of "globalization" a plethora of works meant to assess the impact of a phenomenon whose spread echoes differently throughout the world. However, conceptualizing globalization has proved to be a real challenge for most, as its mechanism is subject to multiple disciplines, thus making it almost impossible to find a single, unanimously accepted definition of the term. It appears that in this case defining the concept implies restricting its meaning to a considerable extent; therefore my

* Alumna of the Faculty of Foreign Languages (Bucharest University), Master's Degree in Intercultural Management from the UNESCO Chair in Bucharest; diana87ro@yahoo.com.

approach in this chapter will focus on emphasizing the main characteristics of globalization — instead of narrowing them down to a definition — in an attempt to shape a putative paradigm of the process, and then analyze its compatibility with the Middle East region.

The debate around globalization, which has been firing the academic world from the early '80s¹, engenders, to this day, the most contradictory reactions. On the one hand, there are the neoliberal theorists who perceive globalization as the promise of all good, arguing that market economy, which fuels globalization, is “the only arrangement capable of generating sustained increases in prosperity, providing the underpinnings of stable liberal democracies and giving individual human beings the opportunity to seek what they desire in life”²; on the other hand there are the pessimistic anti-globalists who experience a “globaphobia”³, fearing that “integration into the international economy leads to disintegration of the national economy.”⁴

Exaggerated as they may be, these hopes and fears regarding the market-driven forces are not restricted to economic boundaries; they are also reflected in the political and cultural fields. Thus globalization is depicted by some political scientists as a promoter of democracy — through free trade, which leads to economic growth and ultimately to political stability⁵; whereas other scholars consider trade liberalization endangering for democracy, since it can result in income inequality and class polarization⁶. Moreover, skeptics argue that the sovereignty of nation-states is seriously affected by an “unstoppable techno-economic juggernaut that will crush all governmental attempts to reintroduce restrictive policies and regulations.”⁷ Consequently they foresee a shift of the political power from local to global and a considerable diminution of the government’s role. The counter-reaction comes from theoretical approaches which regard globalization not as a new phenomenon,⁸ but as a form of capitalism. They emphasize the historical dimension of the latter, arguing that over the past five centuries “in the countries with the most advanced and internationally integrated economies, governments’ ability to tax and redistribute incomes, regulate the economy, and monitor the activity of their citizens has increased beyond all recognition.”⁹ Thus globalization is not perceived as a cause of erosion of the states’ power.

The third dimension of globalization that is important for this study is the cultural one. Paralleling the preceding antithetic views, scholars who questioned

¹ Waters, Malcolm, *Globalization*, second edition, Routledge, 2001, p. 2.

² Wolf, Martin, *Globalisation and Interdependence*, UN General Assembly, retrieved from <http://www.un.org/esa/documents/un.oct.2004.globalisation.and.interdependence.pdf>, on March 15, 2012.

³ Langhorne, Richard, *The Coming of Globalization: Its Evolution and Contemporary Consequences*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2001, p. 1.

⁴ Sunkel, Osvaldo, apud Bhagwati, Jagdish, *In Defense of Globalization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, p. 9.

⁵ Kapstein Ethan, Landa, Dimitri, *The Pluses and Minuses of Globalization*, in, Plattner, Marc F., Smolar Aleksander (ed.), *Globalization, Power and Democracy*, USA, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, p. 135.

⁶ Li, Quan and Rafael Reuveny, *Economic Globalization and Democracy: an Empirical Analysis*. *British Journal of Political Science* 33, 29-54, 2003.

⁷ Steger, Manfred B., *Globalization — A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 61.

⁸ Wolf, Martin, *Will the Nation-State Survive Globalization?* *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2001.

⁹ Wolf, Martin, *op. cit.*

the influence of globalization on national identities have come up with two different results: the first one illustrates how, in the face of the global threat, states reconstruct their identity on the basis of nationality¹⁰, appealing to elements like language, territory, ethnicity and common historical background. However, this reaction is not specific to modern nation-states alone, it also characterizes regions (like Palestine, for instance), where the expression of cultural and territorial identity is so strong, that it acquires a national character¹¹.

The second aspect reflects globalization as the symbol of “the cultural victory of the West over the rest”¹², where the West is portrayed by the USA in the role of the hegemonic power aiming to impose its system of values and beliefs on the developing and less developed countries of the Global South. If we consider that national identity lies at the very core of the cultural constellation of a country, and if we add the contribution of the media in rapidly spreading the “culture of dominance”, we understand why traditionalist countries, particularly the Muslim ones, strongly oppose global cultural homogenization.

This short overview of the perspectives on globalization is by no means an exhaustive one; its purpose is mainly to emphasize the controversial nature of the phenomenon in question. There is, of course, a more “moderate” point of view, which acknowledges the potential dangers of globalization, envisioning, at the same time, the possibility of creating policies that could overcome them¹³. Now considering these three standpoints, we shall try to imagine what the position of the Middle East might be, in the light of recent events.

Arguably, before the Arab Spring, most IR scholars and globalists found it highly unlikely for any reaction other than a skeptic one to prove valid in the context of the Middle East, where radical Islam, autocracies, and the lack of traditional liberalism leave little place (if any) for economic integration. But could it be that the new democracies which are now under construction in the region bring with them the seemingly inherent phenomenon of globalization? Perhaps at this point, venturing to find an answer to this question is too difficult a task. Therefore the paper will focus on exploring the premises, rather than the conclusion.

The Paradigm

But in order to do so, it is compulsory to first sort out what lies behind the much debated concept that is subject to this work. A review of the literature on globalization shows a constant expansion of the meaning encapsulated in the term. Globalization made its entrance in the academic world referring to *economic* activity. Theodore Levitt, who is credited with coining the notion in his famous

¹⁰ Castells, Manuel, *The Power of Identity: The Information Age, Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. II, Blackwell, UK, 2010, pp. 30-32.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, *Globalization and Geopolitics in the Middle East: Old Game, New Rules*, Routledge, 2007, p. 17.

¹³ Bush, Andreas, *Unpacking the Globalization Debate: Approaches, Evidence and Data*, in Hay, Colin and Marsh, David (ed.), *Demystifying Globalization*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2000, p. 30.

article “The Globalization of Markets”, epitomized: “two vectors shape the world — technology and globalization. The first helps determine human preferences; the second, economic realities.”¹⁴ Initially globalization was understood as an *integration of markets*, which facilitates *cross-border interaction* of economic spaces and leads to a *denationalization of economic processes*.¹⁵ Using Dasgupta’s terminology, we shall describe this dimension as “capitalist globalization”¹⁶. But as the phenomenon began to gain momentum, it also acquired new content. Thus it came to designate (apart from economic) either a political, technological, social, cultural, environmental, military or legal process or all of them together. The following definitions are a proof of the phenomenon’s multifaceted nature:

1. “Globalization refers to the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between the states and societies which make up the modern world system. It describes the process by which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe”.¹⁷

2. “Globalization may be thought of as a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions — assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact — generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power”.¹⁸

3. “Globalization is not solely the devaluation of the nation state as a major political identification focus, but also the addressing of interactions now operating between the national levels of political, social, cultural and economic life, and global players with varying degrees of influence (multinational corporations, NGOs, media and so on).”¹⁹

They are also helpful in sketching essential characteristics of globalization, which include:

- *increased interconnectivity* in almost every sphere of social existence, from the economic to the ecological, from the “intensification of world trade to the spread of weapons of mass destruction”;²⁰
- *diffusion of national borders and stretching of social relations and activities*, which result in local happenings being influenced by events which take place in remote parts of the world;

¹⁴ Levitt, Theodore, *The Globalization of Markets*, 1983, p. 20, retrieved from <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/~caplabtb/m302w07/levitt.pdf>, on April 4, 2012.

¹⁵ Schirm, Stefan A., *Analytical Overview: State of the Art of Research on Globalization*, in Schirm, Stefan A. (ed.), *Globalization, State of the Art and Perspectives*, Routledge 2007, p. 3.

¹⁶ Dasgupta, Samir, *Introduction: A Reflection on Politics of Globalization and Textual Entrails*, in Dasgupta, Samir and Pieterse, Jan Nederveen (ed.), *Politics of Globalization*, Sage Publications, 2009, p. 9.

¹⁷ McGrew, Anthony and Lewis, Paul (ed.), *Global Politics. Globalization and the Nation-State*, 1992, Cambridge: Polity, p. 23.

¹⁸ Held, David, apud Steger, Manfred, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁹ Pesqueux, Yvon, *What is Globalization? The Paradoxes of the Economic and Political Substance of Markets*, in Milliot, Eric & Tournois, Nadine (ed.), *The Paradoxes of Globalization*, Palgrave, 2010, p. 14.

²⁰ Held, David and McGrew, Anthony, *Globalization/Anti-globalization: Beyond the Great Divide*, Polity, 2007, p. 3.

- *enhanced mobility of human, capital and information flows* which “give rise to a profusion of fluid, irregularly shaped, variously textured and constantly changing landscapes”²¹;
- the existence of influential *global players* acting like agents of globalization and diminishing the role of state actors;
- *compression of time and space*.

According to Dasgupta, there are four (other) fundamental criteria which give substance to the meaning of globalization: the first is the *electronic revolution*, the second is the *postcolonial revolution*; the third is the creation of *transnational social spaces*, and last, the apparition of “qualitatively new forms of *cosmopolitanism*, where relations between the national and the international can be increasingly re-conceptualized in terms of relations between the local and the global”²².

Paradoxically, the local-global nexus marks more than an opposition; it is the enmeshment of the two spatial delimitations that makes it possible for events and activities in one part of the world to have such a powerful echo in another. This is also the case with other forces commonly associated with globalization, such as *fragmentation* and *de-territorialisation*, for instance. As Rosenau notices, there are continuous interactions between these forces and their opposites — integration and re-territorialisation — “interactions that are sometimes cooperative, more often conflictual, but at all times ongoing”²³. The prominent political scientist even comes up with the term “framegration”, a combination of fragmentation and integration, which is meant to “capture the centrality of the inextricable and endless interaction between the poles for the course of events.”²⁴ In a radical and oversimplifying view, globalization could be reduced to a series of dichotomies, where notions like local and global, integration and fragmentation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation simultaneously entangle and reinforce each other.

Nevertheless, this is not an exact definition of the phenomenon, since it leaves out substantial features of globalization, and offers a unilateral perspective of a multi-valence process. It is best to consider this yet another characteristic meant to add an extra piece to the globalization puzzle.

Benjamin Barber brings his own contribution to this puzzle. In his article “Jihad vs. McWorld”, he brings about the importance of the *market imperative* in the dynamics of globalization, warning that “all national economies are now vulnerable to the inroads of larger, transnational markets within which trade is free, currencies are convertible, access to banking is open, and contracts are enforceable under law”.²⁵ In their pursue of complete economic liberalization, these markets gave rise to *regional groupings*, like GATT and WTO and *multinational*

²¹ Hay, Colin and Marsh, David, *Introduction: Demystifying Globalization*, in Hay, Colin and Marsh, David, *Demystifying Globalization*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2000, p. 2.

²² Dasgupta, Samir, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²³ Rosenau, James N., *The Governance of Framegration: Neither a World Republic nor a Global Interstate System*, 2000, p. 2, retrieved from http://www.lanna-website-promotion.com/moonhoabinh/lunar_material/GovernanceOfFramegration.pdf, on April 7, 2012.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ Barber, Benjamin R., “Jihad vs. Mc World”, 1992, p. 2, retrieved from <http://www.wisecampus.com/uploads/notescans/Barber.pdf>, on April 9, 2012.

corporations, “that neither reflect nor respect nationhood as an organizing or regulative principle.”²⁶ This gives us a hint about the challenges that the state is facing in a globalised world: on the one hand powerful economic transnational actors try to limit the state’s ability to constrain their economic activities, and on the other hand they depend on the state to protect their returns.²⁷ In other words, states must have the institutional power to facilitate and control the penetration of the forces of globalization through policies and regulations, but at the same time they must “sacrifice portions of their sovereignty in order to enhance their collective capacity and affluence.”²⁸ But partial loss of sovereignty in favor of multinational institutions is only possible for states which have reached a high stage of development, allowing them to accept foreign intervention without worrying it would jeopardize national economic and political interests. Therefore the developing and less developed countries that have yet to acquire the adequate regulatory capacity do not benefit from economic liberalization, which is believed to completely undermine state sovereignty. With this in mind, it is not difficult to understand why there is a real fear of globalization in the Middle East.²⁹

There is, of course, more to the phenomenon we are dealing with than what was highlighted in this brief overview. As the quote from the beginning of this chapter suggests, globalization knows different shapes which vary with its location. Next we shall try to explore the dimensions of the “local” in the Middle East region, hoping to add some flesh on the globalization skeleton.

Geopolitical Setting in the Middle East

The context is well described by the following quote: “The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the ‘War on Terror’, the Palestinian elections, the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and economic growth in Islamic Asia, have all unleashed forces that will be difficult to contain. Likewise, globalization, the spread of new media, the natural and unnatural turnover of long-time leaders in many authoritarian societies, and youth bulges, among other factors, continue to erode the status quo. Whether the West advocates it or not, political change, and not always positive change, will be the result of these old and new forces”³⁰.

The Middle East — a Geopolitical Unit?

One purpose of the first chapter was to provide a paradigmatic configuration of globalization in its ensemble. Now the next step is to place the phenomenon

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Evans, Peter, *The Eclipse of the State? Reflections on Stateness in an Era of Globalization*, World Politics, Vol. 50, No. 1, 1997, pp. 62-87, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054027> on April 10, 2012.

²⁸ Ayoob, Mohammed, *Security in the Age of Globalization*, in Aydinly, Ersel & Rosenau, James, N. (ed.), *Globalization, Security and the Nation State — Paradigms in Transition*, State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 16.

²⁹ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³⁰ Anthony Bubalo, Greg Fealy and Whit Mason, *Zealous Democrats*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2008, p. 4.

in the social and political context of the Middle East, in order to have a thorough understanding of how the realities of the latter shape and condition the globalization forces.³¹ As we have previously seen, globalization, as a research subject, has, without a doubt, a fair share of controversy swirling in the minds of scholars from various disciplines. When it comes to analyzing the Middle East, the situation is not much different. The region is often perceived as “the locus of an international question, rather than a geographically or culturally definable region.”³² Its location and exact boundaries are constantly fluctuant, according to the context of the analysis. Most commonly, scholars relate the Middle East area to that of North Africa (MENA) or to the wider geographical area to its east, which is known as the “greater” Middle East.³³

In order to avoid any ambiguity, we will use the definition in which the ME encompasses the territories around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, extending from Algeria to the Arabian Peninsula and Iran (Appendix 1).³⁴ For the purposes of this paper, Turkey will also be regarded as part of the region, on the grounds of its strategic geographic position, at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, as well as its historical connection with the Middle East. Also, considering that after the 9/11 events, the international political discourse about the Middle East is constantly linked to Osama bin-Laden’s iconic figure and his Afghanistan based terrorist network Al-Qaeda, this country will be included in the regional system as well, in spite of its rather remote geographical location in regard to the Arabian Peninsula.

A region consisting of so many countries is a heterogeneous one, with many particularities. The first question that needs to be addressed here tries to establish if there is a cohesive element in the Middle East that justifies the analysis of the area as a unit. For a region with a majority of Arab states, a simple and reductionist approach would point to common language, religion, ethnicity and culture. However, according to Owen, these elements are not enough to bind the states together. The theoretician suggests a different perspective that sees the Middle East “first and foremost as part of the Third, or non-European, World, and subject to most of the same universally historical processes, from colonial rule, through the era of planning and control, to the much more eclectic contemporary combination of opening economies and continuing monopolistic political practice.”³⁵ This perspective emphasizes the importance of the region’s geopolitical setting, while putting a special highlight on traditional common history. The usage of the term “the Third World” is particularly interesting, as it is meant to differentiate the Middle East politically and geographically from the Global North.³⁶

³¹ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

³² Yilmaz, Huseyin, *The Eastern Question and the Ottoman Empire*, in Bonine, Michael, Amanat, Abbas & Gasper, Michael Ezekiel (ed.), *Is There a Middle East?*, Stanford University Press, 2012, p. 11.

³³ Yilmaz, Huseyin, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Enciclopedia Universală Britanică, Ed. Litera, 2010, p. 261.

³⁵ Owen, Roger, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Second Edition, Routledge, 2000, p. xiii.

³⁶ Dodds, Klaus, *Geopolitics, a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, p. 5.

Another cohesive element, shared by almost all the countries from the region, is the anger and resentment towards Israel and the USA.³⁷ This strong rejection is rooted in the postcolonial era, when the newly-created State of Israel was unanimously perceived as “a Western-sponsored intruder and a legacy of the colonial period.”³⁸ Its alliance with the US, who endorsed Israel in the Six-Day War against Palestine in 1967, engendered a virulent reaction from the Arab world towards America. This reaction is still valid today, even more so in reference to globalization, whose leading figure is thought to be the USA.

After placing the Middle East in a geographical context we shall proceed by exploring how the “facts” of the region’s physical geography, i.e. the location of the countries, their demography and natural resources, make the “laws” of its international politics.³⁹ In other words, we will subject the area to the deterministic principle of geopolitics, which credits territory and resources for shaping the condition of states. Considering the recent uprisings in the Arab world and their geopolitical implications, which, in turn, offer two different perspectives on the developing of the globalization forces in the ME region, we have chosen to dedicate a part of this chapter to the “old” geopolitical setting, prior to the Arab Spring, and another one to the “new” geopolitics foreshadowed by the current events.

The “Old” Geopolitics of the Middle East

According to Ehteshami, the international politics of the region is relevant in asserting the impact that globalization could be having on regional politics, and on the relationship of the ME with the rest of the world.⁴⁰ As it is commonly argued, every incursion in the politic realm, regardless if it is on a national or international level, must have the state as its starting point, since this is “the central institution for understanding politics”.⁴¹ The state in the Middle East regional system could largely be perceived as a product of external powers. The “architecture” of the modern Middle Eastern states, including their arbitrarily imposed boundaries and their coercive and administrative apparatuses, was shaped in the colonial period. The influence of the external factors is felt even in those states where colonialism never prevailed, like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.⁴² Unlike in any other part of the world, the impact of Western imperialism on regional politics is very intense, making the Middle East a “penetrated political system”⁴³, in Brown’s terms. The particularity of such a system is that, when confronted with an outside challenger, it is neither absorbed by the latter, nor does it manage

³⁷ Amanat, Abbas, *Is There a Middle East?, Problematizing a Virtual Space*, in Bonine, Michael, Amanat, Abbas & Gasper, Michael Ezekiel (ed.), *Is There a Middle East?*, Stanford University Press, 2012, p. 6.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ Dodds, Klaus, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴¹ Halliday, Fred, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 41.

⁴² Halliday, Fred, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁴³ Brown, Leon Carl, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game*, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 4.

to completely evade it. The result is a politics which depends on the interaction between the local and global forces. This aspect must be well highlighted, as it represents a premise for the existence of globalization in the region.

Due to its strategic geographic position at the crossroads of three continents, its harboring of the world's most concentrated petroleum resources (66% of the globe's reserves⁴⁴), and its increased economic potential, the Middle East has been an objective of outmost importance on the agenda of the colonial and imperial powers, which aimed to protect their interests in the region, by trying to develop what structuralist analysts denominated "core-periphery" relations.⁴⁵ The purpose of these relations was to subordinate the weak, peripheral states of the Middle East to the Western "core" and to divide the unified regional market into small economies dependent on Western imports.⁴⁶

However, far from being a successful strategy for conducting regional politics in the Middle East, these core-periphery relations are permanently undermined from within the regional system and they generate constant anti-imperialist movements. The model of the core-periphery relations is conceived to function in the presence of two factors: a hegemonic power (the USA) which makes the rules "on behalf of the world capitalist system"⁴⁷, and a divided regional system, whose local rivalries are easily exploited by the external power. Regarded as an appanage of the hegemonic power, globalization plays an instrumental role in establishing the core-periphery relations. According to Thompson, the particularity of the Middle East which hinders the functioning of such relations in the area relies in the trans-state cultural unity which exists in spite of economic and political fragmentation.⁴⁸ It is on this basis that solidarity against the core is built. But are culture and ideology really blocking the Middle East's economic and political integration, or are they just tools skillfully used by the states to protect their rights and national identity, or serve the interests of the ruling elites? This is a very intriguing question, which we shall address in the chapter to come.

One of the many paradoxes of the geopolitics of the ME in regard to globalization has to do with the strong political and cultural resistance engendered by the latter, in spite of its secular presence in the area. According to Stearns, globalization, in its basic form of inter-regional trade exchanges, dates back to the classical era, when the major civilizations of the world began to extend over large territories. In order to integrate these new territories into their empires, the conquerors began to build an internal infrastructure meant to facilitate trade and travel. The Persian Empire was a champion of such developments, possessing a system of highways which covered more than 8,000 miles of the Empire's huge territory.⁴⁹ Thus "the Middle East, including Persia, became an entrepôt for

⁴⁴ Anderson, Ewan W., and Liam D., *An Atlas of Middle Eastern Affairs*, Routledge, 2010, p. 39.

⁴⁵ Hinnebusch, Raymond, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Hinnebusch, Raymond, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Thompson, William R., *The Arab Sub-System and the Feudal Pattern of Interaction*: 1965, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 151-167, apud Raymond Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Stearns, Peter N., *Globalization in World History*, Routledge, 2010, p. 20.

exchanges between east and west, a central point in interactions between much of Asia and key parts of Europe and north Africa.”⁵⁰

Another proof of the cosmopolitan nature of the region was the presence of the so-called Silk Road, the network of trade routes connecting Asia with the Mediterranean and the European world, which provided Middle Eastern elites and the Roman Empire with Chinese products. We can see that the region was, from its earlier times, a dynamic and open regional system. To this we can add the *mélange* of cultures which has been a characteristic of this part of the world from the pre-Christian era, when the Greeks and the Persians fought for control over the Near East, and the Hellenics integrated various Eastern practices into their polity.⁵¹ Later, under the domination of the Roman Empire, which was built around the entire Mediterranean basin, further connections between southern Europe, the ME and North Africa was facilitated. The creation of classical empires could be considered a historical precedent of globalization, since interaction within the territory of the empire reduced local isolation.⁵² The role played by the pre-modern Middle East civilization in shaping globalization is undeniable. The Muslim conquests of the Byzantine Empire in the second and third quarters of the 7th century led to the diffusion of Greek ideas into the Arab world. The Greek works were translated and commented by Arab scholars in the 8th and 9th century and then they were retransmitted to Europe through the Muslim kingdoms which arose in Andalucía, in the 9th century. The Arab centers of education which flourished between the 10th and 12th century, notably in Cordoba in Al-Andalus, were famous throughout the world for being great sources of wisdom and science.⁵³ The Orient’s interest in assimilating new cultures and establishing contacts with Europe is a proof that the region was never historically or geographically isolated. Moreover, with the spread of Islam in the 7th century, trading communities were set up and travelling to holy sites, like Mecca and Medina, stimulated the creation of new linkages with the rest of the world.⁵⁴

Given this initial prefiguration of globalization in the Middle East, we may conclude that outside forces manifested within the region long before they did in the modern states.⁵⁵ This historical aspect is one worth taking into consideration, as it was supposed to have guaranteed a smooth path for the consequent development of the market driven forces in the area. However, the modern history of the Middle East strongly contradicts this assumption. Globalization is perceived as a real threat by most Middle Eastern states. This perception could spring from the negative image that is associated with globalization in this part of the Oriental world. As Pieterse explains, the phenomenon tends to be experienced in the global South as “yet another round of northern domination and concentration of

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵² Stearns, Peter N., *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵³ Lehmann, Jean-Pierre, *Will the Arab Spring Free the Orphans of Globalization?* In *Global Compact International Yearbook*, 2011.

⁵⁴ Stearns, Peter N., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁵⁵ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

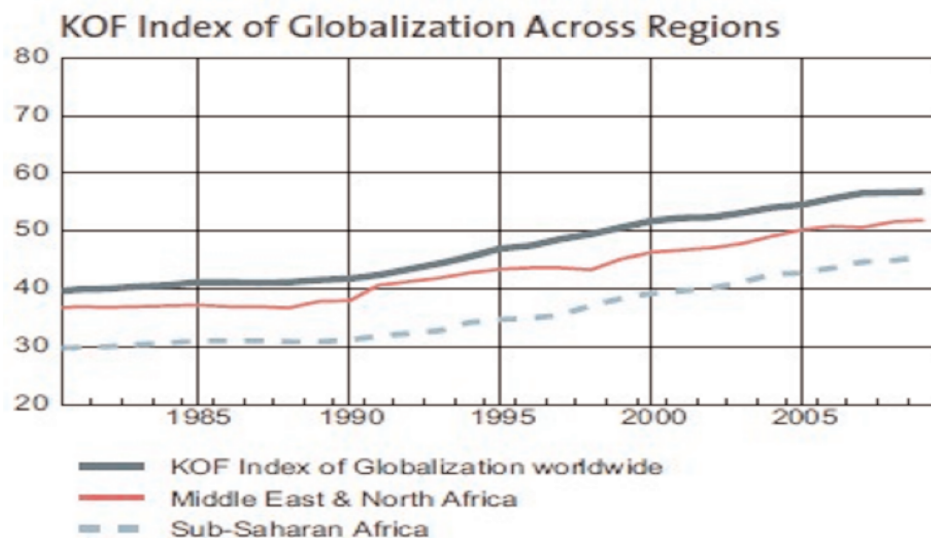
power and wealth. In the split stream of hundreds of years of weary experience, the common metaphor for globalization in the South is imperialism or neocolonialism revisited.”⁵⁶

Although we may argue that the metaphor is an exaggeration, since both imperialism and neocolonialism involve a greater extent of intrusiveness in the state’s affairs than globalization does, we must acknowledge that globalization is a new form of domination, which affects the states’ political, economic and social spheres alike.

In the Middle East the weak economic infrastructure gives rise to insecurities and fears regarding international economic domination. As shown in the first chapter of this paper, globalization may lead to the state’s partial loss of regulatory control. And this is only one of the many risks it involves. Therefore many developing countries are reluctant to opening their economies and “riding the globalization wave”. In spite of the efforts made by some states (Tunisia, Israel, Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, Turkey)⁵⁷ to accommodate to the market driven forces, most governments in the ME region shirked, at least before the Arab Spring, from taking the chance of exposing themselves to globalization.

As shown below in the KOF Index of Globalization 2012 chart, there has been a progressive upward trend in globalization in recent years worldwide. The MENA region also experienced a small increase in terms of economic, social and political integration;

However it still lags behind significantly in comparison to the general trend. According to the index, the most globalized country in the region is Israel, with a score of 77.23, ranking number 30 out of the 187 countries.⁵⁸



⁵⁶ Pieterse, Jan Nederveen, *Globalization or Empire?*, Routledge, 2004, p. 109.

⁵⁷ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁵⁸ KOF Index of Globalization 2012, retrieved from http://globalization.kof.ethz.ch/static/pdf/rankings_2012.pdf on May 110, 2012.

As opposed to it, Afghanistan is placed among the world's 15 least globalized countries, with a score of 31.35.⁵⁹ It is important to note that the current index does not capture the effects of the Arab Spring in the ME.

The region's most active participants in the world economy could be considered the GCC countries — six countries of the Arab Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, UAE, Qatar and Bahrain) which formed a free trade area in 1981. Since then, they "have relied on the rest of the world to sell their major source of income, oil, and buy in return almost all their needs of consumer goods, capital goods and labor services."⁶⁰ However, the integration of these economies on a global level is limited by their failure to sustain economic growth and to attract other FDIs than those invested by the oil companies.⁶¹

Even though the region has an increased economic potential, in the form of natural and human resources (the population of MENA reaches almost 350 mil., according to a World Bank report released in 2011), macroeconomic analysis show that the Middle East is still economically backward in comparison with other emerging economies. The ME's annual growth rate of GDP in the last three decades was of 3.4 percent, in line with the evolution of the world economy, whose average is of 3.3 percent. However, this growth is insufficient when compared to the pace of evolution of the emergent economies, which is 4.5 percent.⁶² A series of factors existent in the region, like corruption, a high level of inflation, authoritarian regimes, inherited leadership, overreliance on oil income, the lack of a middle class, the increased unemployment rate, the poor legal system, the lack of political transparency and the high military spending contributed to hampering economic development in the ME.

The countries of the ME vary from the very poor ones, such as Yemen and Afghanistan, to the very rich, such as Kuwait or UAE. There are significant disparities regarding income distribution between these countries. The UAE, for instance, a country with a population of 5.314 million, has a GDP of \$358.1 billion, whereas Egypt, a country with almost 84 million people, has a GDP of \$231.9 billion.⁶³ Globalization is expected to make this hiatus between the rich and the poor even more prominent. This is another important factor which accentuates the pervasive fear of globalization in the ME area.

The main objective of this part of the chapter was to sketch the pillars that are part of the region's political and economic structure. Now we shall explore how the recent popular movements from the Arab World are bound to alter this structure, and to what extent could the new structure be compatible with globalization.

Shaping a "New" Geopolitics

The beginning of a new chapter in the history of the ME was marked on 17 December 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, set himself

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ Al-Yousif, Yousif Khalifa, *Oil Economies and Globalization: The Case of the GCC Countries*, p. 9, retrieved from <http://www.darussalam.ae/magazine/oileconomicsandglobalization.pdf>, on May 11, 2012.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² Rădulescu, Andrei, *Lumea Arabă și Globalizarea*, retrieved from www.wall-street.ro, on May 11, 2012.

⁶³ CIA World Factbook, retrieved from www.cia.gov, on May 11, 2012.

on fire to protest against the abuses of the local administration. His desperate act was the start of the so-called “people’s revolution” that spread to the rest of Tunisia, and went on, like a domino effect, to shatter despotic Arab regimes in several countries from the region (Egypt, Libya, Yemen). It also spurred social unrest in Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Morocco. The Arab Spring shed a new light on the Middle East region, illustrating a greater degree of social homogeneity and the people’s shared quest for democracy, openness and political accountability.⁶⁴ The consequences of this revolution are of major importance, since they bring democracy on the political forefront of the region, and they completely overthrow the myth of the perennial and infallible Arab authoritarian order. Bringing democracy on the political forefront means shattering the old external depictions of the region, clustered on Islamism, terrorism and secularism, and envisaging the possibility of creating a more globally integrated ME. However, it is to assume that the impact of the popular protests on the long term will be much more intense in the states of North Africa than in the more intricate geopolitical web of the Levant and Gulf states,⁶⁵ where the elite neopatrimonialism still prevails.

One significant consequence of the Arab Spring is a shift in the balance of power in the region. In the last decade, the geopolitics of the ME was marked by a symbolic regional division of what Bush administration called “the Axis of Evil”.⁶⁶ On the one side of this axis were the “moderate” pro-US states (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel), facing an alliance of “radical” anti-US states, combining state actors (Iran and Syria) with highly active non-state actors (Hamas and Hezbollah).⁶⁷ Today, with the US withdrawal of troops from Iraq, Israel deprived of its main ally, Hosni Mubarak, Syria torn by civil unrest and Iran’s economic hardship and loss of political legitimacy, the old status quo is no longer valid. A triangle of competition for regional influence is likely to emerge, with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the US at one vertex, Iran on the second, and Turkey on the third.⁶⁸ Soon the moderate-radical anti-Western-pro-Western divides may turn out to be increasingly irrelevant for the understanding of regional politics in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the aim of the Arab Spring protestors was not necessarily to interfere with the regional status quo, but to create a new one locally. Similarly to the revolutions of Eastern Europe in 1989, people fought to break the old exploitative order and gain political freedom. It is very important to point out that the defining struggle was not between the “moderate” pro-Western and the “radical” anti-Western bloc, nor between Shi’a and Sunni or Muslims and Jews, but, according to the rallying call of protesters, the fight was for dignity and democracy.⁶⁹ But apart from that, the revolutionary voices of the ME also raised against outside powers (particularly the US) dictating policies in the region.

⁶⁴ Amanat, Abbas, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Spencer, Claire, *The New Mediterranean in a Changing World: New Geopolitical Dimensions in the Middle East*, retrieved from http://www.iemed.org/observatori-en/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/anuari/med.2011/Spencer_en.pdf, on May 12, 2012.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ Spencer, Claire, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ Marashi, Reza & Parsi Trita, *The Geopolitical Battle for the Arab Street*, Cairo Review of Global Affairs, retrieved from <http://www.niacouncil.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=7345>, on May 11, 2012.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

Changes have indeed occurred, but the road to democracy in the ME is long and full of challenges, both internal and external. According to a recent IMF survey, the main internal challenge for the post-authoritarian regimes on an economic level is to preserve and rebuild macroeconomic stability, while evolving toward a model for inclusive growth that does not depend so heavily on government transfers.⁷⁰ The same survey shows that “the external challenges come from two main sources — oil prices and trade linkages with Europe. For oil exporters, a renewal of crisis in Europe could depress oil prices and undermine the recent increases in government spending on social support. In North Africa trade, remittance, and tourism links with Europe are historically important and currently depressed.”⁷¹

On a political level, the structural redefinition of Arab governance which is under way in the post-authoritarian countries must involve concrete policies regarding political freedom and economic growth, based on the rule of law.⁷² On an external level, it is hard to imagine that the EU and the US will allow developments in this strategically important region to run their course without trying to engage in domestic and regional policy in any way. Outside powers will inevitably play a role (although a more modest one) in the evolution of the new geopolitics of the region. Only this time, their approach will be different. As the American diplomat Richard Haass correctly anticipated in 2006, “shaping the new Middle East from the outside will be exceedingly difficult, but it (...) will be the primary challenge of U.S. foreign policy for decades to come.”⁷³ It is likely that China and the Gulf states will also have a say in the developing of democracy in the region, especially in North Africa, where they made their presence felt through investment and construction contracts.⁷⁴

Another challenge that puts pressure on the region is its demography. Nearly one in five people living in the MENA region is between the ages of 15 and 24 — the age group defined as “youth”.⁷⁵ The region also has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world (Appendix 2). Unless MENA countries put their efforts into adapting their economic, social and political institutions in order to meet the educational, vocational and participatory demands of the young people, the demographic pressures are likely to increase in the years to come.⁷⁶ The recent educational expansion in the area has facilitated the ‘young bulge’s access to information and new means of communication. It also enabled young people to form their own opinions and have different worldviews than those provided by official state media.⁷⁷ This is an important premise for the global integration of young generations.

⁷⁰ World Economic Outlook, International Monetary Fund, April 2012, p. 69.

⁷¹ World Economic Outlook, International Monetary Fund, April 2012, p. 69.

⁷² Marashi, Reza & Parsi Trita, *op. cit.*

⁷³ Haass, Richard N., *The New Middle East*, Foreign Affairs, November/December 2006.

⁷⁴ Spencer, Claire, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ Assaad, Ragui and Roudi Fahimi Farzaneh, *Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: Demographic Opportunity or Challenge?*, retrieved from <http://www.prb.org/pdf07/youthinmena.pdf> on May 22, 2012.

⁷⁶ Spencer, Claire, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ Spencer, Claire, *op. cit.*

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