

Middle class transformations in the Arab World[†]

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The emergence of the middle class in the Arab world, was different from the emergence of this class in Europe. The difference was not limited to the beginning of this existence, but also extends to its transformations. In the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions, there was considerable debate on the role of the middle class in these revolutions, and this motivated the research on which this paper is based, during the period from February 2011 until May 2013. The paper aims to track civilizational transformations (economic, political, social and cultural) that affect the structure of the Arab middle class since independence until the present, with a focus on the past decade.

Keywords: Arab world; class structure; influential middle class; stable middle class; poor middle class; civilizational transformations; class formations; class consciousness; class relations

The study and its importance

Those who delve deeply into books and studies on Arab social classes come up with more new questions than there are answers, because the Arab social class structure is in a state of permanent flux, sometimes dramatically so. The Arab social–scientific tradition is rich with high-quality studies that, regardless of their theoretical and methodological tendencies, have tried to gauge the development of the Arab middle class from its origin and early development, monitoring unfolding class divisions and the changing role of the middle class in society.

Both the facts on the ground and the results of various studies indicate that the Arab class structure has not yet attained the level common in what might be termed ‘modern’ class societies. In addition, developments across the Arab world do not manifest similar or unified patterns of development, meaning that class structure differs from one country to another and traditional pre-class relationships are still struggling to survive in most Arab countries. In this historical context, scientific research on social classes becomes an urgent necessity, not only to monitor the situation but also to reveal the unfolding transformations, and to put various scenarios and alternatives at the disposal of decision-makers charting the course of development in the Arab world.

Development plans in most Arab countries are either retreating or deviating from the course of comprehensive sustainable development, following the failure of industrialization projects in most Arab countries, whose infrastructures and material and human resources are amenable to industrial expansion. Moreover, while the Arab

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oil-producing countries have shown only limited growth in the domain of extractive and petrochemical industries, industrial development is virtually non-existent in other Arab countries, where the majority of agricultural development projects have failed to achieve self-sufficiency and food security, and advantage has not been taken of available opportunities to produce basic crops. In addition, most Arab countries rely on distorted and incomplete forms of democracy that do not guarantee freedoms, while sharp disparities between rich and poor persist. In the midst of all this sits the modern Arab middle class, part of which has chosen to ally itself with the ruling class to satisfy its needs and benefit from the status quo, while the majority of its members as well as those of other popular classes are deprived and struggling to survive.

When the ongoing debate on the middle class in Western academic circles surfaced in Arab academic circles – i.e. the debate between those who say that the Arab middle class not only failed to play an essential creative role but also that its role in development has actually reduced, and those who say that its status and role have in fact grown – fate gave the Arab world another chance, namely the unique opportunity to rid itself of its authoritarian regimes. It also gave it the opportunity to reassess the role that the Arab middle class has played in the recent past, is playing at this extraordinary moment and will play in the future, a future that is still murky and in gestation. This is precisely what gave rise to the leading question that underlies this study, namely: what civilizational transformations (economic, political, social and cultural) did the Arab middle class experience from independence and statehood to the present?

In turn, this leading question and main research objective gives rise to the following series of questions:

- What are the main theoretical schools that address the middle class in the social-scientific tradition at large?
- How did the Arab tradition approach the middle-class issue?
- What were the circumstances that gave rise to the Arab middle class and helped it develop?
- What is the appropriate theoretical framework for Arab middle-class studies?
- What is the current position of the middle class in the Arab class structure?
- What economic transformation impacted the Arab middle class over the past quarter century?
- What is the link between the political transformations, the middle class and the Arab Spring revolutions?
- What relationships are there between the middle class and the social structure as seen from its members' perspective?

Theoretical importance:

- Coming up with a cohesive theoretical perspective on class-related phenomena in the Arab world is important for Arab social sciences, and could lead to alternative ways of understanding and explaining these phenomena.
- There is need to reconsider the Arab social science tradition associated with class studies, to avoid mechanically replicating the Western theoretical tradition that does not take into consideration Arab facts, variables and particularities. This study's importance lies in its effort to build on and complement a number of authentic Arab contributions in the class studies domain, particularly those of four

scholars: Halim Barakat, Mughniah Al-Azraq, Abdul-Basit Abdul-Mu'ti and Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb.

Importance of applying theoretical frameworks:

- There is need regularly to describe, analyse and explain Arab class phenomena, processes and relationships from a different theoretical perspective, a perspective that allows decision-makers in development-related fields to study future scenarios and alternatives.
- There is an urgent application-related need to study political and economic transformations of the middle class, in particular in order to understand, analyse and explain the historical moment that the Arab world is experiencing in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions.

Reviewing international and Arab studies on social class

In order to come up with a new theoretical framework adapted to current conditions in the Arab world, one that benefits from comparisons with different international class studies, the research began with a critical review of the intellectual bases that underlie class sociology in Western societies that experienced modern industrialization before others did. What this entails in terms of changes in the means and patterns of production, labour and market conditions, the condition of the people and countless associated cultural phenomena was also examined. Following that, the research proceeded to a critical analysis of class studies in the Arab world.

Review of Western class studies

The research focused on the theoretical and methodological approaches that ensued from the classical tradition – Karl Marx (1818–83), Max Weber (1864–1920) and Emil Durkheim (1858–1917) – alongside other contributions that went beyond this tradition by either developing it further or totally breaking with it. The latter include Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), L. P. Althusser (1918–90), Nicos Poulantzas (1936–79), Eric Olin Wright, J. Goldthorpe, J. A. Kahl (1923–2010) and D. Gilbert, David Grusky, Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) and Anthony Giddens.

This review of Western class studies, yielded the following summary conclusion:

- Marx and Weber's contributions¹ are the basis around which other Western class studies revolve. Although both base their theories on the same premise, namely the impact of economic factors on class structure, they differ in their definition of class relationships. Thus while Marx saw class struggle as a result of exploitation and a conflict of interests, Weber saw it as a competitive relationship imposed by the market. According to Weber, social stratification is linked not only to class but to social status and to political power as well.
- After Marx, class studies developed in two different directions: the first is the path of Marxist structuralism that tried to find a way out of Marxist predictions, and based on which Althusser and Poulantzas² developed ideas regarding the role of political and ideological factors in robbing the working class of its revolutionary consciousness. Marxist structuralism did not add anything new to class

studies except to raise questions for which it had no valid answers. Moreover, Marxist structuralism did not take account of the social change that took place in Western society in the second half of the 20th century, especially in its negative view of the expansion of education, which it saw as a consecration of the bourgeoisie's hegemony. Nor did Marxist structuralism admit the role that education played in the exponential growth of the middle class. The second is the path of the Neo-Marxist that brought these ideas – almost for the first time – from under the cloak of deductive theorizing and historical methodology and became, thanks to Wright persistent in the face of the quantitative and qualitative empirical testing, and gained legitimacy through conformity with national and local realities. The triple-class division (bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and proletariat) no longer held any practical significance once Wright proposed his 'contradictory conditions' within class relations, formed as a result of relations based on exploitation. Through this theory, he managed to create a classification system comprising 12 contradictory class locations based on a number of variables: exploitation of capitalist ownership, bureaucratic authority and skills.

- The neo-Weberian³ approach goes in two different directions: the first is the direction of European classifications, as proposed by Goldthorpe and his colleagues, that considers market and labour conditions as the basis according to which social classes are classified. It stresses competitive relations as the basis of class mobility, and considers inequality a natural phenomenon resulting from varying abilities to take advantage of available market opportunities, which is why they neglect the impact of education on class mobility. Their theory of classes rests on a hierarchy of occupations and forms of employment, depending on the degree of authority and control necessary to occupy a certain position, and is often blamed for the fact that its classification system does not take the owner class into account. The second path is linked to certain American classifications, as proposed by Gilbert and Kahl, where the trend is towards adopting an integral theory that centres round Weber's ideas. Its classification system, which is based on two sets of variables, brings together various cultural factors, rather than the economic factor alone. The first set of variables is income, which in turn is divided into two variables: the source of income and the level of income. The second set is linked to occupational variables, which themselves are divided into technological skill, education level and authority.
- We deduce from our study of the Durkheimian approach⁴ that, contrary to Weber, Durkheim admits the presence of a class struggle but predicts that the development of capitalism will prevent this struggle from becoming a force of revolutionary change, thanks to the emergence of institutions within the social structure that continuously try to impede the propensity to engage in conflicts, or what he calls the 'institutionalisation of the struggle'. The Neo-Durkheimian approach seeks to add the technological factor to other factors that affect class classification, while at the same time concentrating on expanding the concept of 'institutionalisation of the struggle'. This shifted, thanks to Grusky and his colleagues, the concept of class relations from the general Marxist-Weberian formula to an empirical (procedural) formula, used as an explanatory tool in macro- and micro-sociology.
- The Agency/Structure⁵ approach involves two class sociology paths. The first admits and endorses the premise that class affects social life, but adds another dimension to class studies to understand better the reason behind disparities and its different shapes and forms, by focusing on consumerism and the

culture surrounding it. By studying consumer culture, Bourdieu unmasks several ambiguous aspects of class stratification, how class disparities arise and what structural constraints – especially in the domain of education – are imposed on collective mobility. The second path of the Agency/Structure approach neither admits nor endorses the premise that class affects social life, considering this idea a defunct tradition. It claims that, in the age of globalization, the social system is no longer formed by the cultural system or social status within a given class, but rather by virtue of his freedom to act and choose from among the available options. In other words, the current social system has become a reflection of the free and active self.

Review of Arab class studies

After reviewing the relevant Western social–scientific traditions, the research moved on to a critical analysis of Arab class studies.⁶ This entailed a comprehensive review that gives the reader an overview of the different works as a body, in terms of their theoretical tendencies, methodological tools and the knowledge they bring. These studies were classified here as follows: (1) class studies on Arab–Asian countries (Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen); (2) class studies on Arab–African countries (Algeria, Sudan, Mauritania and Egypt); (3) regional class studies (Arab Mashreq, Arab Maghreb, Arab Gulf and Arabian Peninsula); and (4) class studies that consider the Arab world as a single unit of analysis.

The above analysis led us to the following conclusions:

- Because the Arab world is not experiencing similar or identical stages of economic development, the class structure in certain countries is still at the embryonic stage, and is divided into three main levels (upper, middle and working classes, and the peasant or pastoral levels). In other countries it identifies with the Western class structure without being identical in every aspect, particularly due to the growing size of the middle class in these countries.
- Inherited political power – tribal, sectarian or ethnic – is the main source of wealth in most Arab countries, unlike Western countries where ownership of the means of production is the main source of political power and wealth.
- The Arab tribal structure would not by itself be an impediment to building a modern-class society had the right economic and political conditions been in place, as was the case with the Arab and Amazigh tribes in the Arab Maghreb countries, and some Arab Gulf countries.
- The national elite that took part in liberating the country from colonialism in some Arab countries gained control of the means of production, and was able to enshrine its wealth and power based on semi-capitalist/semi-socialist tendencies, unlike the Western bourgeoisie class.
- The military elite plays too big a role in Arab class structures due to its significant role in the economic and political spheres, and its use of force as a means to impose a *fait accompli*.
- All the industrial development plans of Arab countries with the infrastructure and material and human capacity to sustain industrial growth have failed, and the productive base of their projects has been exhausted, both materially and economically, turning them into decrepit projects ready for liquidation. While some Arab oil-producing countries managed to achieve a limited amount of growth in the

extractive and petrochemical industries, industrial development in the other Arab countries remained virtually non-existent.

- The majority of agricultural development projects in the Arab countries failed to achieve food security and self-sufficiency, which, coupled with their failure to take advantage of available opportunities to produce basic crops, weakened the agricultural bourgeois class.
- Most Arab countries suffer from inflation in their real estate, commercial and service sectors at the expense of their industrial and agricultural sectors, which led to chronic unemployment among the educated population.
- Because the Arab middle class failed to play a creative political role, and was prevented from institutionalizing its interests in some countries while in others its institutions were restricted, its role in national development has declined.
- In capitalist and socialist countries the middle class is experiencing a cultural conflict due to the popular promotion of the Islamist alternative, while in Islamist-leaning countries the liberal or socialist alternatives are promoted. This has led to confusion and an overlap between class consciousness and ideology among contemporary class formations (unions, associations, syndicates).
- All Arab countries have witnessed varying degrees of political and ideological extremism, manifested in the use of physical violence by the military and security services, and symbolic violence by religious, educational and media institutions.
- All Arab countries suffer from endemic financial and administrative corruption in all economic sectors, and from political corruption intertwined with financial and administrative corruption.

Theoretical framework and procedural definitions

After this critical analysis, the study posits a new theoretical framework designed to assess changes in the Arab middle class, one that adapts and harmonizes between the Gilbert–Kahl model, Wright’s theory and Bourdieu’s theory, on the one hand, and the theoretical contributions of Halim Barakat, Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb, Mughniah Al-Azraq and Abdul-Basit Abdul-Mu’ti (and to a lesser extent other Arab researchers), on the other. From these sources a theoretical analytical model was drawn capable of producing conceptual tools that help understand, describe and explain the Arab class structure, in particular the middle class, and that can be empirically tested. The above framework is based on the following accepted facts and assumptions:

- The Arab class structure is made up of six basic classes: central ruling class, influential middle class, stable middle class, poor middle class, working class and underclass. Members of each of these classes share a number of cultural characteristics, which in turn are influenced by five different variables: kind and level of income, education and training level, bureaucratic position within the workplace, way of life, and a set of variables that includes tribe, sect, ethnicity and political authoritarianism.
- The borderlines between these six classes are drawn in two different complementary ways. The first is the vertical approach that deals methodologically with the social structure as a comprehensive analytical unit, and relies on statistical demographic and economic data, and social surveys. The second is the horizontal approach that deals with each social structure as an independent analytical unit,

and relies on data from sample research, class mobility maps, interviews, discourse analyses and ethnographic tools.

- The poor middle class comprises educated groups situated above the poverty line, working mostly in business management, uncomplicated technical or intellectual professions, and executive-type positions. They lead middle-of-the-road social lives with difficulty, often at the expense of mortgaging the fruits of their future work or revenue. The stable middle class comprises groups with at least a basic level of education (12 years or more), mostly involved in medium-sized projects or intellectually complex positions that tend to be supervisory in nature. Their income is enough to help them reach if not surpass the average standard of living, and some are able to save and invest. The influential middle class comprises those with a basic level of education and above involved in complex intellectual professions and holding leadership positions at the level of regional state institutions (provinces and governorates). It also includes business people and capitalists who manage the economy at the regional level, most of whom can access local government positions by monopolizing one, several or all of the sectarian, tribal, ethnic or party factors. They lead highly consumption-oriented social lives and identify with the lives of central ruling class members and the global capitalist class, and are able to save and invest.
- Relations of exploitation appear at varying degrees of severity; these relations retreat when society progresses towards more relative justice and equality, and increase when social injustice and inequality increase. The Arab class structure comprises three different kinds of exploitative relations: exploiting ownership and control of the means of production; exploiting bureaucratic power; and exploiting monopolistic tribal, sectarian, ethnic and political relations.
- The supports making up the class structure has semi-static cultural characteristics, and when there is individual mobility from one class to another, instead of taking the characteristics of their old class with them, these individuals try to liberate themselves of it and identify with the cultural conditions of the new class supports.
- Class division occurs when cultural characteristics develop within society in general in a manner that leads to contradictions within the same class; if these contradictions are not absorbed with time, a new class is subsequently formed. When this historical process happens quickly the structure is known as fertile; when it happens slowly it is known as a low fertility structure; and when it stops completely it is known as an infertile structure. Conversely, class regression happens when the cultural characteristics of certain classes deteriorate, causing them to overlap with those of an adjacent class until they are entirely absorbed by it and disappear, thus causing the class structure to regress.
- There are three kinds of class mobility: collective, sectoral and individual, and each has an ascending and a descending track. They are linked, on the one hand, by mutual bilateral relationships and, on the other, by society's cultural conditions, especially its economic, political and social dimensions. We can understand sectoral and individual class mobility based on collective mobility's ascending and descending tracks. The lower the rate of collective mobility, the higher sectoral mobility becomes and individual mobility takes the form of leap-frogging. Conversely, the higher the rate of class collective mobility, the lower the rate of sectoral mobility and the more individual mobility is self-motivated.
- The Arab class structure witnessed a period of collective ascending mobility in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by a period of descending mobility. We are

currently witnessing the early signs of yet another period whose features are as yet unclear, though the direction is towards regaining the collective ascending track by resisting sectoral monopolistic relations of exploitation (tribal, sectarian, ethnic and political party) to ensure freedom and social justice for all.

- Not only did Arab class formations not play a significant role in institutionalizing class struggle, but also they failed to fulfil various class interests, especially in the economic and political domains. This is due to their forced submission to three socio-political forces: the central ruling class, through enticements and coercion; the opposition that chose class as its political arena; and communitarian, ethnic and tribal groups that resist the role of class formation in mitigating discrimination and traditional partisanship. This turned the institutional class struggle into a dispersed and sectoral struggle without strategy or loyal unionized leadership.
- Class consciousness means awareness of the cultural characteristics of the particular class to which the individual belongs, of the inter-class relationships that link these to each other, and of the class interests that members of a certain class seek to achieve. This consciousness could be spontaneous, social or, in rare cases, remain internalized. The central ruling class allied to the influential middle class tries to distort genuine class consciousness through the media as well as religious and security institutions, under the guise of protecting the nation, religion or the group's shared history. Our assumption is that class consciousness in the Arab world has failed to develop from spontaneous self-consciousness into social class consciousness, due to the absence of party and democratic practices, and deviation of class formations from their path.
- Arab class contradictions based on the above-mentioned relations of exploitation remain an enigma without a solution. The working and poor middle classes have not been able to achieve their interests due to the impotence and timidity of various class formations, and the absence of democratic parties and practices. This has rendered their struggle to achieve their class interests appear fragmented, sectoral, temporary, unfocused and repressed by the instruments of material and moral violence.
- Although the Arab class structure undoubtedly suffers from relations of exploitation and is beset by deep contradictions, the Arab countries have not experienced a class struggle in the real sense of the term. They have submitted themselves to the dictates of the class system, whereby they all failed to resist the power of the central ruling class, and its ally the influential middle class. Contributory factors include: the fact that political struggle is not institutionalized; confusion within the economic struggle as a result of sectarian, ethnic and tribal discrimination; and the extreme repression and violence exercised by the military and security forces in their bid to protect the central ruling class and its ally the influential middle class.
- This forced submission has fostered sentiments of resentment and violence in Arab social relations, and led to various forms of corruption in an effort to coexist with these contradictions and submit to the power of the central ruling class. Despite all that, the stable middle class managed to develop symbolic, technical and literary mechanisms aimed at raising genuine awareness and highlighting class contradictions and different forms of exploitation.
- In 2011, the chains of submission to the central ruling class and its ally the influential middle class were broken in several Arab countries through similar

revolutionary activities not led by any particular class. This revolutionary activism was imbued with the spirit of youth from the poor middle class, the working class, the unemployed and the hardworking grassroots, with the stable middle class joining in when revolution reached its peak.

- The unfolding struggle in the democratic ‘Spring’ countries and others indicates the presence of widespread class polarization, pitting the central ruling class and its ally the influential middle class (military, civilian and traditional) against the stable and poor middle classes, workers, working grassroots and the unemployed. The difference is that although the Arab Spring countries managed to resolve the problem temporarily, after wreaking havoc with the central ruling class they became mired in an ideological conflict when religious movements imposed their hegemony on the post-revolutionary scene, a conflict whose outcome is so far impossible to predict. As for the other Arab countries, they have no option but to take the necessary steps to dispel this polarization by implementing a series of policies and measures that ensure social justice, freedom and democracy. Having tried and exhausted all repressive measures at their disposal, the central and influential middle classes in these countries have no choice but to introduce radical reforms in order to avert a revolution.

Methodological framework and the study’s findings

Quantitative approach

Quantitative analyses in this study relied on three main sources of information: (1) The Human Development Reports of the United Nations Development Programme (<http://hdr.undp.org/en>); (2) The Joint Arab Economic Report (<http://www.amf.org.ae/content/joint-arab-economic-report>); and (3) reports by national statistical and planning departments. For several reasons, most of the data were drawn from the Joint Arab Economic Report. Among these reasons is that the report is compiled by a group of specialists in a wide variety of fields, and that it has been published on a yearly basis since 1980, which indicates a considerable amount of expertise and precise data. The credibility of the report’s data emanates from the institutions that helped compile it: the Arab Monetary Fund; the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development; the Arab League’s General Secretariat; and the Arab Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Although we cannot include here the statistical tables adopted in the statistical inference, it is worth noting that all tables in this study were compiled with the aim of arriving at a timeline for the data, starting in the year 2000, then 2005 and ending in 2010; a number of difficulties were also encountered in the course of collecting this data. One problem arose from receipt of different data for the same year from international, regional and local sources. To resolve this issue, the basic values appearing in the Joint Arab Economic Report were adopted. Another difficulty was that the subjects of country-specific indicators were different from those of international indicators, meaning that the Human Development Report lacked data for certain indicators in a number of Arab countries. To resolve this issue, the required indicators were extracted through tabulation and inserted into the tables.

The Arab countries were divided into two groups: the first comprises the nine oil-producing countries (the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Libya); the second the 13 non-oil-producing countries

(Jordan, Tunisia, Djibouti, Sudan, Syria, Somalia, Palestine, Comoros Islands, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania and Yemen). This allowed the examination of statistical data and information based on similarities between economic and social development patterns in a manner that helps advance research on change in the middle class, and class studies in general.

The study's findings based on quantitative analyses

Based on statistical findings, the number of citizens belonging to the Arab middle class is 146 million, or 44.5% of the total population of the Arab world. Around 80 million of these live in non-oil-producing countries, and account for 38.3% of the total population; and 66 million live in oil-producing countries, and account for 57% of the total population. A total of 100 million citizens belonging to the middle class live in six Arab countries – Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Iraq – or 42% of these countries' total population.

If we consider the size of the middle class by region, we would find it a fertile structure in the Arab Gulf and Levant countries. The former has a middle class population of 27.5 million, or around 60% of the total population (both citizens and migrants); if we omit the migrants this figure rises to 80%. This is also the case in the Levant (excluding Iraq) where the middle class population is 34 million, or 50% of the region's total population.

In the Arab Maghreb, where there is a low fertile class structure, the middle class population is 36 million, or 40% of the total population. On the other hand, we could say that the class structure in East Africa (excluding Egypt) is infertile since the middle class population is 48.5 million, or 28% of the total population. In any case, what we have in all the Arab countries is a male service-oriented Arab middle class, economically and socially exhausted in most non-oil-producing countries.

It is expected that the middle-class structure will regress in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya. In a historic transitional moment accompanied, as it seems so far, by the destruction of the country's economic infrastructure, significant deterioration takes place in the civilizational characteristics of the subclass, whereby its membership evaporates until it is entirely depleted; when this happens, its members go back to their original class. At this exceptional historic junction, which could last several decades or only a few years, the class structure regresses to become a triple or even dual structure, depending on the strength, breadth and length of the collapse or deterioration. This only increases the historic challenges and responsibilities that the new central class will have to shoulder in these countries in order to breathe new life into the destroyed economy against the backdrop of a democratic transition.

Qualitative inference and results of the research on political transformations

We used qualitative analyses to monitor political changes in the Arab middle class with a focus on the Arab Spring countries, and arrived at the following conclusions:

- Contrary to the rise of the Western class, political power in the Arab world, which is based on ethnic, sectarian and tribal relations, is seen as a basis of wealth creation, and it is from there that the new Arab class structure took shape under Ottoman rule for some, and European colonialism for others. In a very few

Arab countries, the middle class was formed prior to independence, as in the Levant and North Africa, save for Libya.

- In the first quarter century that followed independence or statehood, most Arab countries had fertile class structures with a flourishing middle class in the Levant and North Africa, while in the other Arab countries the new middle class emerged almost from nothing. The middle class assumed its role in helping develop various sectors; it comprised several strata including the bureaucratic, technological and service-oriented sectors, alongside businessmen and small landowners. Then there were the first development projects in the Arab world, accompanied by a decrease in negative sentiments towards the ruling regimes among the middle and working classes, and the peasants. This period was also characterized by the ruling regimes' attempt to distribute the fruits of development in a relatively equitable manner.
- In the second half of the 1970s, the middle class's stable and poor strata suffered from unhealthy growth due to the spread of secondary and university education, and the economic boom that followed the oil boom. The reason was that the central ruling middle class and its ally the influential middle class were intent at the time on investing revenues in the economy's service and social sectors, at the expense of the deteriorating industrial and agricultural sectors. At the same time, the political role of the middle class was deteriorating, and there were signs of an impending return of the monopolistic traditional sectarian, ethnic, tribal and party relationships, in tandem with opportunistic sectoral and individual leapfrogging mobility. This deeply destabilized middle class values, and narrowed the margins of freedom that the middle class had been enjoying since independence, due to the invention of vacuous, flavourless and *pro-forma* democratic systems, devoid of genuine democratic practices.
- Arab societies entered the age of globalization almost penniless; the non-oil-producing countries are laden with debt and the oil-producing countries have to contend with continuously falling oil prices. In the meantime, the world is turning towards a ferocious brand of liberalism, the state is ridding itself of its social burdens, and not a single Arab country was able to exploit the few positive aspects that would have enabled it to access the market economy, an economy that requires conditions that the Arab world could not fulfil. There are no free markets, democratic Arab countries or development strategies based on productive investments; this is why the consequences were so dire for the entire economy of the Arab world, and why the middle class suffers from increasing regression and marginalization.
- Corruption and social injustice in the distribution of the country's wealth, together with the suppression of freedoms, exist in every Arab Spring country. However, though corruption and social injustice were the main reasons for the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, the main reason behind the Libyan revolution was the country's desire to rid itself of a despotic autocrat. In Yemen, where a series of small revolutions had been taking place since the country's unification in 1990, exacerbated by the settlement of jihadist elements returning from Afghanistan, interests converged in a popular intifada aimed at thwarting the constitutional amendment that would have allowed the Yemeni president to remain in office for another term.
- The middle class is strongly present in all the Arab Spring revolutions, acting as leaders of revolutions with no particular leadership. Religious forces were

strongly present in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya's middle class, while tribal forces were strongly present in Yemen, with religious and tribal forces showing equal presence in Libya. In Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the religious forces are attempting to impose their (undemocratic) hegemony on the transitional stage.

- The speed with which the revolution's main demand (toppling the head of the incumbent regime), albeit at a slower pace in Yemen, is due to the military establishment's bias towards the revolution. However, since the latter did not side with the revolution in Libya and Syria, the regime in Libya fell only when NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) intervened militarily, while in Syria the conflict still rages between the Syrian Army and the protestors.
- Tunisia's chances of a successful democratic transition are better than those of Egypt, and Libya's chances are better than those of both Tunisia and Egypt, provided security is brought under control and the revolutionaries' weapons withdrawn. The political performance of Libya's national non-religious political movements was more advanced and aware than that of Tunisia and Egypt's liberals and leftists, as evidenced by the results of the elections to the General National Congress, and the Libyan people's resistance to various calls for division. The situation in Yemen is different from that of other Arab spring countries, since the fate of the democratic transition is yet to be determined.
- All the Arab countries were affected by the popular intifadas in the Arab Spring countries; however, while small changes were introduced to placate public opinion in some countries, in others more repressive measures were used. Nevertheless, even if the democratic transitions were to fail in the revolutionary countries, political, social and economic conditions in the Arab world are not expected to improve significantly over the next decade.

Findings of the field research and results of interviews in Egypt, Kuwait and Morocco

This section summarizes how the theoretical assumptions reached were turned into questions to test the validity of those assumptions as a prelude to embarking on field work in search of answers (data) concerning middle-class perceptions. Although the initial plan was to create a questionnaire for a large sample (500 entries in Kuwait and Morocco, and 1000 in Egypt), we had to change the methodology when we began implementing the questionnaire in Kuwait due to the many obstacles encountered in the process. We immediately shifted to in-depth interviews that allow direct contact between the researcher and the interviewee to gauge people's attitudes, explain the research objective and dispel any doubts or reservations that the interviewees might have. We finally decided to choose for our in-depth interviews 50 individuals in Kuwait, 50 in Morocco and 150 in Egypt.

We encountered a number of methodology-related problems, the most important among which were the large quantity of raw material produced by the interviews and the fact that three different dialects were involved. Having learned retrospectively from earlier studies (Nasr and Dubar 1976), we focused only on those core terms that reflect the general direction of the answers. As for the different dialects, we used the classical form of various Arabic terms while doing our best to preserve the spirit of the interviews. The methodology forced us to choose an intended sample to pinpoint the cultural, economic, social and political variables that affect the nature of the middle class in all three countries. For the Kuwaiti sample, we chose the snowball

approach to determine the characteristics of our hypothetical sample, after changing the data collection method from questionnaires to interviews, as mentioned above. In Morocco and Egypt the samples were chosen in coordination with key figures in each country. The interviews' results were as follows:

- In Egypt, the state's general economic situation affects the size and make-up of the middle class within the class structure, whereby the deteriorating economic conditions have strengthened partisan political and family-based relations, which began playing a bigger role in the distribution of assets and revenues. This led to an increase in the size of the poor middle class at the expense of the stable middle class. In Morocco, although the general economic situation is not that different from Egypt's, the state's commitment until recently to maintaining a decent standard of living, coupled with the labour market's thirst for an educated workforce, have helped reduce the size of the poor middle class. Despite that, Morocco suffers from the exploitation of ethnic and political partisan relations, although these remain partial and hidden from view. However, because these relations do not adversely affect all avenues of employment and promotion within the Moroccan labour market, the stable middle class grew larger than both the poor and influential middle class. Kuwait, on the other hand, is different from Morocco and Egypt in that its citizens are guaranteed access to the stable middle class. Despite that, however, the deteriorating value of work and production in that country has rendered the Kuwaiti middle class lethargic and lazy, in particular the bureaucracy.
- Inter-class relations in all three Arab countries are exploitative in nature, though this exploitation differs from and surpasses modern-class societies in the way sectarian, ethnic and tribal relations are exploited, including relations with the ruling party. In this context, it is the coalition between the influential and central ruling middle classes that determines the kind and strength of these relations at any given point in time. This intermingling and overlap between the traditional relations of exploitation and relations of exploitation linked to the market and economic activities will likely cause a problem later on, namely confusion in one's class consciousness due to the intrusion of the religious, ethnic and tribal identity, an intrusion that eventually suppresses and dwarfs this consciousness.
- All three countries are plagued by varying levels of corruption alongside the three relationships of exploitation: ownership and control of the means of production; bureaucratic power; and the exploitation of tribal, sectarian, ethnic and political power. Sometimes these factors intermingle and reinforce one another allowing corruption to take root in the entire social structure, and turning ability, skill and personal initiative into empty words, words touted by the media and social education institutions to enshrine the status quo.
- It became clear that the 1960s were the golden age of the middle class in all three countries, though the acquisitions of the middle class varied from one social context to another. In Nasserite Egypt, social justice was used as a means to save the Egyptian middle class from the yoke of the capitalist and semi-feudal relations that had prevailed prior to the July Revolution. Under Hassan II, Morocco embarked on rebuilding its basic infrastructure in a spirit that combined socialist and capitalist elements, which led to the emergence of a modern middle class where once the entire structure had relied on the relationship between the old

aristocracy and the peasants. Kuwait has been implementing since the 1960s an ambitious development plan that sparked a significant cultural transformation, one of the results of which was the creation of the Kuwaiti modern middle class from almost nothing, thus establishing a new status quo of classes that brought the old quasi-class system to an end.

- The middle class is in regression in both Egypt and Morocco, a process that began in Egypt in the mid-1970s and continued until the beginning of the new millennium, due to the increasing rate of unemployment among middle-class members. What distinguishes Morocco from Egypt, however, is that it still enjoys an effective social security system that helps mitigate the people's anger and prevents social conditions from reaching the point of eruption. In Kuwait, the class structure turned from fertile to low fertility primarily due to socio-political differences over wealth management, rather than economic issues.
- A close monitoring of professional and educational mobility over three consecutive generations shows that the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a wave of collective ascending class mobility. It also showed that this mobility could not have happened for class-related reasons but was the result of a collective class mobility sparked by these countries' early development projects following independence and statehood.
- All three countries currently suffer from sectoral class mobility following the retreat of the ascending collective mobility. In Egypt and Morocco, sectoral mobility begins at the poor middle-class level and rises to the influential middle class, while in Kuwait it only takes place between the stable and influential middle classes.
- In Egypt and Morocco, individual leapfrogging mobility takes advantage of the traditional relationships that rely on robbing the country's resources and unjustly acquiring their benefits, which happens sometimes when black market capital is converted into socio-political capital. However, although Kuwait never experienced individual leapfrogging mobility, it did experience a wave of downward individual mobility when consumerism became a value and a means of social discrimination. Downward individual mobility occurs when the family's revenue fails to satisfy the demands of consumerism, and the labour force is held hostage to the repayment of loan instalments.
- In all three countries, various class formations remained under the control of the central ruling and influential middle classes, which is why members of different classes were not afforded the required protection, and why they remained the weaker party in the equation. In Egypt and Morocco, class formations did not play a significant role in institutionalizing the class struggle due to their submission to different socio-economic forces, namely the central ruling class, through enticement and coercion, and the opposition that chose class as its field of political activities. In Kuwait, the real challenge facing labour and professional unions and associations is the presence of unions and associations of highly influential businessmen, in which migrant workers – a group robbed of their rights – are the weaker party in the equation.
- Due to political, cultural and traditional reasons, class consciousness did not develop from a spontaneous self-consciousness into a socio-institutional consciousness in any of the three countries. These reasons could be summarized by the absence of a climate amenable to genuine democratic practices, the presence of a controlled and guided culture (education and official media), and the

prevalence of traditional relationships (sectarian, ethnic and tribal). There were also distortions and confusion between national interests and class interests in all three countries, aimed at neutralizing the social classes and enshrining the power of the central ruling class and its ally the influential middle class.

- Because political parties and unions do not play any effective role, class consciousness remained in its spontaneous individualistic state, alongside a weak and eroded class consciousness. This is taking place alongside weak and eroded class and party formations in Egypt and Morocco, and a total absence of political parties in Kuwait.
- There are no signs of a class struggle, in the real Marxist sense, in any of the three countries, and what took place in Egypt was actually a cross-cultural conflict. The poor and stable middle classes are still subjugated by the other classes, a situation further entrenched by the alliance between the influential and central middle classes who employ similar tactics in all three countries: material and symbolic violence, dodgy politics, bartering and falling back on traditional relationships.

Conclusion

If one looks retrospectively at this study, its conclusions actually become recommendations for decision-makers in the Arab world. At the end of this summary, the fact that the Arab people expect genuine democratic transformations based on equity, transparency and accountability cannot but be highlighted. They also expect these transformations to absorb the social struggle and turn it into a class struggle, through solid reform-oriented or revolutionary programmes that ensure equal opportunity for all. The new Arab generations are no longer patient or willing to keep perpetuating the vicious cycle of sectarian, ethnic and tribal struggles, and will accept nothing but these transformations, be they reformist or revolutionary.

Notes

1. For this review of various classical approaches (Marx and Weber), the following sources were consulted: Turner (2001), Fontana (2002), Eyerman (1981), Weber (2010) and Gane (2005).
2. When analysing Marxist infrastructure and neo Marxism, the following sources were consulted: Poulantzas (1971), Craib (1992), Giddens and Held (1982), Betz (1992), Kaplan and Sprinker (1993), Layder (2006), Castellani and Hafferty (2009), Wright (1989, 2005), and Baxter and Wright (2000).
3. In reviewing and analysing the Neo-Weberian approach, the following references were relied upon: Goldthorpe (1977), Goldthorpe and Marshall (1992), Gane (2005), Wright (2005), Jackson et al. (2007), and Gilbert (2008).
4. This review of the Durkheimian approach drew on Wright (2005), and Grusky and Weeden (2001).
5. This review and analysis of the Agency/Structure approach relied on the following references: Giddens (1989), Salem (1989), Bourdieu (1984, 1990), and Badawi (2009).
6. This review and analysis of Arab class studies drew on the following references: Al-Azraq (1980), Nasr and Dubar (1976), Abdul-Fadeel (1988), Al-Naqeeb (1989), Al-Harasi (1992), Al-Jayed (1998), Abdul-Mu'ti (2005), *Al-Mujtama' al-Iraqi* (2006), Barakat (2008), Sneitan (2008), Hassan (2009), Al-Sharjabi et al. (2009), Baraka (1998), Al-Surani (2010), Qareh (2011), Baalbaki (2012), Hopkins and Ibrahim (1998), Lutfiyya and Churchill (1970), Abu-Laban and McIrvin Abu-Laban (1986), Berger (1962), Selvik and Stenslie (2011), and Niblock (1987).

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