

The challenge of 'protest' masculinities: how Arab riots have changed the representation of North-African masculinities in the public space

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Abstract

In the last decades, the rare analysis on Maghreb masculinities have usually linked them with violence, social exclusion and terrorism, preventing the full understanding of changing processes on-going in the area, reflected also by changings in masculinities' models. This article reports some preliminary reflections of a study in progress on masculinities in the contemporary Maghreb, focusing on the emergence of 'protest' masculinities in the public space after the so-called Arab Spring, through the analysis of the representation of masculinities in the Tunisian post-revolutionary street-painting. The aim of the paper is to theoretically discuss the challenges that 'protest' masculinities pose to the concept of masculinity in North Africa and to analyse the way in which 'emerging' protest masculinities represent themselves in the public space, through artistic narratives. Fluid protest masculinities, represented through arts, are, indeed, a clear sign of the extreme variability of gender subjectivities and the impermanence of models of masculinity, characterizing contemporary North Africa, in opposition to the dominant national and international narratives about its inherent immobility.

Key words: masculinities, representation, public sphere, Arap spring

'Protest' erkekliklerin meydan okuması: Arap ayaklanmalarının kamusal alanda Kuzey Afrikalı erkekliklerin temsilini nasıl deęiřtirdięi

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Özet

Son birkaç on yılda, Maęrip erkekliklerine iliřkin yapılan ender analizler onları genellikle řiddet, sosyal dıřlanma ve terörizm ile iliřkilendirerek bölgedeki deęiřen süreçlerin tam olarak anlaşılmasını engellerken, aynı zamanda erkeklik modellerindeki deęiřimleri de yansıttı. Bu makale, Arap Baharı sonrasında kamusal alanda 'protest' erkekliklerin ortaya çıkıřına odaklanarak, Tunus'taki post-devrimci sokak resimlerindeki erkekliklerin temsilinin analizi yoluyla çağdař Maęrip'teki erkekliklere yönelik bir arařtırmanın bazı ön yansımalarını sunmaktadır. Yazının amacı, 'protest' erkekliklerin Kuzey Afrika'daki erkeklik kavramına getirdięi meydan okumaları teorik olarak tartıřmak ve bu protest erkekliklerin "ortaya çıkarken" kendilerini kamusal alanda nasıl temsil ettiklerini sanatsal anlatılar aracılıęıyla analiz etmektir. Gerçekten de sanat yoluyla temsil edilen bu sabit olmayan protest erkeklikler, cinsiyet öznelliklerinin ařırı deęiřkenlięinin ve egemen ulusal ve uluslararası anlatılar hakkındaki doęal sabitlięe zıt olarak çağdař Kuzey Afrika'yı karakterize eden erkeklik modellerinin geçicilięinin açık bir iřaretidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: erkeklikler, temsil, kamusal alan, Arap baharı

Introduction

In the last decades, publications on Maghreb women and their religious, political, cultural, social and economic role have increased¹, while masculinities, especially hegemonic ones², have been left aside. In the rare analysis on Maghreb masculinities, they have been usually linked with violence, social exclusion and terrorism (Amar, 2011). The lack of a social and academic debate on masculinities, on the one hand, has favoured the reproduction of discriminatory gender relations' discourses (Pieroni, 2002) and, on the other, has prevented the full understanding of changing processes on-going in the area, that are, indeed, reflected and indicated also by changings in masculinities' models.

This paper reports some preliminary reflections of a study in progress on masculinities in the contemporary Maghreb, focusing in particular on the emergence and the representation of protest masculinities in the public space after the so-called Arab Spring. The latter have provided an opportunity for emerging masculinities, traditionally marginalized by the central states, to regain the public sphere, at the same time placing themselves in discontinuity with hegemonic forms of masculinities. The following considerations are referred in particular to the Tunisian experience. Tunisia, indeed, has

¹ Exceptions are those studies on marginalized masculinities, for example, because of their sexual orientation (Kugle and Hunt, 2012; Murray and Roscoe, 1997) and those on Islamic pietistic movements (Geoffrey, 2011). At the time of writing, there are only two studies on Arab or Islamic masculinities, edited by Ouzgane (2006) and Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb (2000).

² According to Connell (1995) hegemonic masculinity is the social dominant form of masculinity, defined through a process determined by leading groups, in a given culture, in a given historical time, legitimating both patriarchy in local practices and gender social stratification, implemented outwards on women and inwards on other men, lacking the social resources required to fully participate to hegemonic masculinity.

been the first country where riots have erupted, and rapidly led to dictator's fall - Ben Ali leaving the country few days after the first protest. Tunisia is also the only country concerned by revolutions that till now seems to be on the path of a democratic transition. The representation of masculinities in the public space has found in Tunisia a peculiar artistic declination. Arts have accompanied revolutions from the beginning, giving a particular insight on the processes and the changes underway in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Tunisia (see Sebastiani, 2014). This depends also on the improvement in the freedom of speech in the country, that far from being fully achieved, has improved to the point that Tunisia has been declared a free country from *Freedom House*, the first among near eastern and northafrican Arab countries³.

The starting point of the analysis is a reconstruction of the axes with respect to which maghrebian masculinities have been traditionally articulated. Thus, the Mediterranean patriarchy model of Kadioty (1988) is taken as a theoretical starting point in order to account for the forms of reproduction of a social and familiar model whose cogency does not stop at the Maghreb region but can be ascribed to different cultural frames. Through this reference, this reconstruction far from setting a static picture of the dominant models of masculinity, represents an attempt to define their main features, especially those enduring over time and being relevant to the re-articulation of post-revolutionary contemporary masculinities. These features are differently expressed depending on the country, its national history, its culture and politics, its social and institutional relationship with the religious sphere and the religion's organization. The paper will not analyse these different form of expression, in order to give space to the analysis and construction of more general models. The aim of the article is, indeed, on the one hand, to theoretically discuss the challenges that 'protest' masculinities pose to the concept of masculinity in North Africa; on the other, to analyse the way in which 'emerging' protest masculinities represent themselves in

³ <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/02/11/tunisia-declared-free-by-freedom-house>

the public space, especially through artistic narratives. The example deepened in the final part of the paper is street-paintings, as an artistic form particularly invasive in the public space.

Methodological note

In order to give an account of the dynamism and diversity of masculinities, the methodology chosen is the social-constructivist one, that recognize the variability of the concept of male and female between different societies, historical periods, generations and social, economic and cultural groups (Kimmel, 2010; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). That is why, different masculinities models, both hegemonic and subordinate, coexist in the same social space, not necessarily opposing to one another – as post colonial studies underline – but hybridizing and acculturating one another.

In order to give an account of possible relevant features in the construction of masculinities, Inhorn (2012) suggests to borrow, translating them in a gender perspective, some concepts from Williams' studies on social classes (1977), that of dominant, residual and emergent. The first coincides with hegemony, the second is related to the tradition, and the third refers to new meanings, values, practices and relationships continually created. The three elements form a dynamic inventory, which elements are activated and emphasized, depending on the spatial, historical and social circumstances. Following this perspective, the understanding of contemporary emerging Maghreb masculinities has to take into account hegemonic and residual elements that, in time, have affected their construction. In the article they are identified as the features of traditional Mediterranean patriarchy and gender discourses during colonialism and in the building of post-patriarchal nation states.

The traditional Mediterranean patriarchy in the Maghreb

Traditional patriarchy is the basic model of masculinities in the Maghreb. This is a conception of gender subjectivities and relations, not limited to the Arab-Islamic world, as generally understood, but that can be found also in other geographical areas and different cultural and religious systems (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 278). In his specifically Mediterranean declination, the patriarchal model is articulated with respect to the gender characteristics of monotheism, supporting and sustaining itself with the interpretations of a God that is male and father, functionally using elements of the religious message useful to its assumptions and denying or hiding contradictory ones. Religion is thus turned in a discursive and symbolic reference that legitimizes patriarchy, and, specifically, its basic cell, the family.

As Kandiyoti (1988) explains:

The key to the reproduction of classic patriarchy lies in the operations of the patrilocally extended household, (...) which gives the senior man authority over everyone else, including younger men. (...) Under classic patriarchy, girls are subordinate not only to all the men but also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-law. (...) Woman's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. (...) However, women have access to the only type of labor power they can control, and to old-age security, through their married sons. Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation(pp. 278-279).

The son, in this view, represents, on the one hand, the continuity of the family, its social advancement and economic security, on the other, the legitimation of the mothers. The superiority of the male is, therefore, reiterated through socialization that, as Dialmy (2004) underlines, is

based on a differential structure, which practices aim to establish two gender models, two sexualities, two distinct and hierarchically sanctioned gender performativity. Childhood games and rituals of birth, growth and marriage, mainly religiously grounded, emphasize the construction of a strong, aggressive and competitive masculinity, “evidently” superior to femininity, passing to the son from his father and his ancestors, following a typical masculine memory that reaches up to the Prophet and to God. The model established in this way is that of a heterosexual male, respectful of traditions, able of being a family man, to maintain familiar economic stability and social honour, especially through the control of women.

An important source of legitimacy of this model is religion, although some of the patriarchal elements contradict it. Women’s honour, for example, that legitimizes the ability of man to be the head of the family, is evaluated through the maintaining of their subordination and virginity (Moghadam, 1992). This is based on the concepts of honour and shame and the control of the female body and is embodied in a series of practices, symbolic and not, from marriage ceremonies concerning bride’s proof of virginity or the provisions concerning crimes of honour in the legal systems (Obermeyer, 2000). These practices are supported by functional interpretations of the religious, even if in some way they contradict its orientation. Islam, in fact, recognizes a positive value to sex, if it is practiced within legitimate relationships, for both male and female. Despite the difference in the definition of legitimate relationship (marriage and concubinage for men, only marriage for women), it forbids unlawful sexual relations, explicitly condemned as *zina*, fornication⁴, one of the five crimes *hudud* against religion and God, as apostasy. In the Mediterranean patriarchal system, however, the revision of the concept of complementarity as diversity and as

⁴ Unlike later interpretations, which tend to consider fornication all sexual behaviour not conforming to Koranic provisions, including homosexuality, at the time of the Prophet were considered as such only those performed outside legitimate relationships. See Sura 17: 32 and Sura 24: 1-3.

sanctioning of superiority of the male over the female, results in an differential interpretation of sexual behaviour, building only male wishes as natural and normative, then exercisable even outside marriage (Obermeyer, 2000)⁵.

The challenge of colonialism

The extended patrilocal and patrilineal family, base of the traditional patriarchy, in time, has been questioned, challenged, surpassed by demographic change, social and economic, but retaining a strong symbolic and evocative call, to the point that some of its characteristics are relevant in the construction of contemporary Maghreb hegemonic masculinities. One of the most traumatic experiences that influenced the evolution of Maghreb masculinities has been colonialism, a particularly violent challenge to the classic model of patriarchy, to the assumptions guaranteeing its reproduction, to the memory sustaining it and to gender models constructed according to it (Dialmy, 2004). Colonial experience, in fact, has been built on and accompanied by a narrative in which racism and sexism proceeded hand in hand to inferiorize colonized subjectivities, through a double discourse that ideologically endorses the social difference between men and indigenous, as an integral part of the gender production process typical of the “*colonial situation*” (Siebert, 2012, p. 64). Despite the different national declinations of the colonial experiences, depending on the institutional model of colonization implemented – for example, the occupation of Algeria declared in 1947 part of metropolitan France is different from of the protectorate in Tunisia and, even more, in Morocco –, the country’s political culture and pre-colonial history – for example the degree of independence from previous supranational political institutions – and, even considering the diversity in the penetration of

⁵ It has to be underlined, however that there are religious elements supporting traditional patriarchy, as those concerning traditional interpretations of homosexuality, see Guardi and Vanzan (2012).

colonial institutions between urban and rural areas, colonialism has definitively always influenced social, economic, cultural structures of the populations encountered.

Colonial gender narrative affects men in a peculiar way, through the creation of two unquestioned hierarchical masculine spheres, where European dominant white one is feeds and built through the brutalization and humiliation of North African one (Siebert, 2012). Loomba (2001) identifies two alternative discursive strategies sustaining this hierarchization: colonized male is either feminized, portrayed as homosexual or weak, incapable and unintelligent; or brutalized, described as lustful, vile, violent, particularly against local women, but threatening also European ones⁶. In both cases, the actual characteristics of Maghreb society and gender subjectivities are ignored. In both cases, the white European, therefore rational, male is called upon to intervene, to save the “indigenous man” from himself, according to the first narrative, or the indigenous women from the brutality and oppression of men, according to the second narrative.

The ability of the Maghreb male to protect the honour of the family and of women, one of the two poles on which was built its hegemony in the traditional patriarchal model is, therefore, challenged and weakened by colonial discourse. Men are asked to express their masculinity, protecting the nation and its women, from what is called, in a typically masculine military language, as the rape of the motherland (Nagel, 1998), a task, however, difficult to accomplish in a public sphere, constantly devaluating them.

Colonial narrative challenges the religious, the second axis of reproduction of traditional male models: Maghreb male inevitable inferiority is attributed, in fact, to its belonging to an inherently

⁶ As Loomba (2001) underlines, this double narrative affects also colonized women, that are either considered submissive, weak, victims of a continuous violence; or represented as 'Amazons', expressing a deviant femininity, whose sexuality represents a temptation and danger to colonizer males.

backward race and culture, preventing their full participation to the dominant masculine sphere. The "natural" cause of this inevitable inferiority, is the Islam, historically the *other* against which has been built a supposed European Christian identity, the absolute opposite and a main threat, specifically identified as "*an index and a metaphor*" for racial, cultural and ethnic differences (Loomba, 2001, p. 114).

The deconstruction of patriarchal masculinities' axes of reproduction involves an overinvestment just in the private and in the religious sphere, the most attacked by colonizer's racist gender narrative. Continually frustrated and marginalized in the colonial public sphere, colonized males focus on the private sphere and on the religious discourse, attempting in this way to protect the honour and integrity of the nation itself, turning the household and the woman in emblems of its culture and identity: using Loomba words (2001, p. 164) the outside world may be westernized but not all is lost till domestic space maintains its cultural purity. Islam and the traditional family become outposts of resistance, authentic and inviolable symbols of the nation. The tightening of pre-colonial patriarchal relations is supported, as pointed out, by the masculinization of the public sphere promoted by colonizers, on the one hand, institutionalizing a completely masculine administration, from the military, spiritual and cultural point of view, on the other, assuming the colonized male as its unique interlocutor, marginalizing female subjectivities.

Masculinities in Neo-patriarchal states

Colonial institutional, social and cultural processes influence the structuring of independent nation-states. The wars of liberation, despite their regional and national different declinations and evolutions, question, as often happened, gender subjectivities and relations, especially in the urban areas. The fight for independence leads, in fact, to the deconstruction of women' exclusion from the public

sphere, and the feminine active participation to its actions is a challenge, often unconscious, to the patriarchal familiar and institutional structure.

However, once gained independence, women are again marginalized in the national states project, typically structured as masculine regimes based on “a single party, a single memory, a single language, and a single dominant ethnic group. And, generally, a single sex (male and dominant)” (Siebert, 2012, p. 136). Within the institutions and the structures of the male nationalist project, women are typically considered as supporting actors, traced back to traditional roles, in order to be the biological and cultural reproducer, both in the public and in the private sphere, of the members of the community. Women are, once again, considered the symbol and the icon of national authenticity and identity and, in continuity with traditional patriarchal model and colonialist discourses, men are identified as the protectors of the honour and the integrity both of women and of the nation (Connell, 1995).

The independent nation-state is, thus, built on a single dominant, masculine memory, by emphasizing masculine themes – honour, patriotism, courage, duty – evaluating male institutions, such as the army⁷ and masculinizing its organization – hierarchical structure of authority, male domination in decision-making process, masculine regulation and division of labour and sexuality –, all practical and symbolic issues that make masculinities *happen* (Connell, 1995).

In the Maghreb post-colonial states, the re-articulation of dominant masculinities proceeds in two ways: on the one hand, perpetuating the masculinization of the public sphere and institutions in continuity with colonialism, on the other, revising and reinforcing

⁷ The army is always been relevant in the definition of masculinities at global level, for many reasons: the sexualized nature of the war, the emphasis on virility and strength associated with the military, the construction of the enemy as a sexual demon that threatens women, because of being incapable of a true manhood, the use of an heterosexual masculine imaginary on rape, penetration and conquest, to describe the same military actions (Nagel, 1998).

traditional patriarchal structure, in the private sphere. This duality characterizes post-colonial states, that, indeed, Moghadam (1992), following Sharabi (1988), defines as neo-patriarchal. In the political and economic public sphere, the reproduction of masculine institutions perpetuates a reverential relationship between citizens and power and administration (Mouiche, 2008). A particularly symbolic example of this relation is the process of personalization of power, highlighted by the constitutional arrangements of newly independent states and by the institutional and political establishment of the single party. The latter gives way to the glorification of the head of the state that, being male, embodies the power of man, charismatic, strong, typically tied to the military, the more masculine of the institutions, able to lead the nation and protect its honour and independence.

Although this personalization has different significances and consequences, being embodied in the king in the case of Morocco, in the Father of the nation, in the case of Tunisia, where Bourguiba rules from 1956 to 1987, and in the senior party officials in an Algeria that before the '90s Civil War changes six presidents, the men in power contribute to the definition of the hegemonic male models of that time, urban and nationalist, still retaining an evocative power. They are strong and powerful men, Muslims, they observe traditions, but are open to the challenges of modernity, heterosexual, family and nation men, whose biographies embody models of hegemonic masculinity. Their strength, honour, ability to protection is continuously enhanced by using a military language and reaffirmed by charging them of being supreme heads of the armed forces, but also referring to their participation, more or less active, to the wars of independence, or at least to their belonging to the army. Governments' ability to control the nation is supported and demonstrated through the action of a pervasive internal security apparatus, as the *mukhabarat*, defined by Sharabi (1988):

the most advanced and functional aspect of the neo-patriarchal state (...) In social practice ordinary citizens not only are arbitrarily deprived of some of their basic rights but are the virtual prisoners of the state, the objects of its capricious and

ever-present violence. (...) It is in many ways no more than a modernized version of the traditional patriarchal sultanate (p.145).

The masculine nationalists models are, thus, reproduced within a social and a political system dominated by dynastic governments in all his aspects: governed male are deprived of the opportunity to fully participate to hegemonic masculinities, being excluded from a full partaking in the economic and social life, controlled by power oligarchies.

On the other hand, the family, and not the individual, is the basis of new independent nations and is the subject of a strong discursive re-investment. The continuity of the national narrative in the family focuses again on women and their honour, that, once again, the good father, extension in the private sphere of the father of the nation, has to safeguard: men are self-erect in charge of defining the role of women, both at the national and at the family level. The narrative of post-colonial state repeats the same binary opposition of colonialism (European / North African), but highlighting the valorising character of traditions, family and religion. Islam becomes, in fact, one of the symbolic references of nation building, the legitimation of public power and a vexillum for the legal and social organization (Amour, 1997). Reference to Islam are contained in the new constitutions, as the state religion and as the religion of the head of state, a symbolical guarantee of government's authenticity and a source of its power's legitimacy, functionally used for the maintenance of neo-patriarchal order.

The latter, as pointed out by Moghadam (1992), through its family, religious and security institutions, establishes a strongly masculine continuity, between God, the ruler and the father. This line of male hegemony translates and projects the power of God over his believers, on the ruler 'one over its subjects, and on the father's one over his family. As noted by Sharabi (1988), between ruler and ruled and father and son there are only vertical relations: in both cases father's decision is absolute, transmitted and forced, in the society and in the

family, through a consensus based on ritual and coercion. The continuity God-ruler-father makes possible to participate in the strengthening of the neo-patriarchal masculinity hegemony, also for those properly Islamic models of masculinities, processed by the same religious movements, politically opposing the government in power. They propose, indeed, a different answer to social, cultural, economic and political challenges faced by post-colonial states, without questioning the neo-patriarchal structure in its entirety

The challenges to neo-patriarchal models and the emerging contemporary masculinities

Hegemonic neo-patriarchal masculinities, while remaining, with different variations, an important reference, have been challenged over time by social, economic, cultural and demographic processes and by the spread of new models of gender and masculinities especially through globalized media. In particular, since the 80s, with different national variations and between urban and rural areas, changes in family structure – decreased fertility, widespread use of contraceptives, increased age for marriage and raised rate of celibacy – correspond to changes in the public sphere, especially for what concerns the increase in the rate of female education and women's access to paid work and their representation in the political, economic, civil culture sphere, especially among the middle class (Obermeyer, 2000). Such access is often formally supported by governments themselves, through what in the case of Morocco and Tunisia can be defined as 'state feminism', a Governments' strategy to control social changes in the country, without giving up authoritarianism. This strategy inspires, for example, the constitutional reforms and the amendments to the codes of Personal Status, including the provisions on family law, over the 90s. As emphasized by Moghadam (1992), the processes of change affecting the countries of the area are, indeed, framed by the states in the attempt of conserving the neo-patriarchal order, traced by nationalism and by the single party. So the fluid emerging masculinities, developed in the last 50 years as an internal challenge to the social, cultural, economic, religious and political structures, have been excluded by the public narrative of an official,

hegemonic masculinity, limiting the political, social and economic space, that would allow the affirmation of new gender subjectivities (Adibi, 2006).

A further challenge to the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity models, less controllable by central states, is the spread of new supra-national and regional models, especially through global media, satellite television and the internet, facilitating the penetration of new models of gender subjectivity, that have become possible references for the construction of Maghreb masculinities. As Kimmel (2010) emphasizes, in fact, globalization changes gender constructions, renews the field where local and national masculinities are articulated, that become transnational, reconfigures economic, political and cultural structures, both traditional and post-colonial, challenges domestic and public patriarchy. It allows, in particular, the circulation of what the author defines as a globalized hegemonic model that, regardless of its cogency and pervasiveness at a regional level, engenders both emulation of resistance “*to the incorporation in the global arena as subordinate entities*” (*ibid*, p. 154). These forms of resistance are often expressed in religious terms – as in the case of the neo-traditionalist Islamic movements – but not necessarily are dichotomous compared to all the elements that characterize global hegemonic models. The re-articulation of masculinities in a transnational context is itself fluid, appropriates hegemonic and non-hegemonic elements belonging to different models, developed in different contexts that co-exist in a transnational and de-territorialized space.

The Arab Spring and the emergence of protest masculinities

Within the framework outlined, the so-called Arab Springs and their consequences have been a peculiar opportunity for the representation of emerging masculinities in the Maghreb⁸.

⁸ For a deeper analysis of the Arab Springs, see Corrao (2011). According to Ventura (2014), the riots that have crossed the North Africa and the Near East

Previously, as underlined, models not conforming neo-patriarchal narrative were generally reproduced on the edge of the official discourses, marginalized by the state, subjected to its moral and social control and were unable to be fully reproduced in the public sphere. Alternative gender subjectivities were, therefore, expressed through informal networks, both passive – like fashion and food – and active – like music, art and football supporters club. Through these networks, they re-invent, aside the political scene, their affiliation behind the sectarianism of ethno-religious organizations and political elites in order to recreate a new social solidarity against fragmentation. By the very fact of their exclusion in the nationalist patriarchal frame, their activities are built upon dynamics of inclusion, control and responsibility and develop discourses on governance and democracy (Bayat, 2013). This subjectivities, therefore, express themselves mainly through what Bayat (ivi) calls *social non-movements*,

collective actions of not collective actors; they embody shared of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though this practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leadership and organizations (p.15)

Emerging gender subjectivities are fluid even for this reason, using different references, re-interpreted in a different form, adapted to the needs to escape the control of the neo-patriarchal states.

from 2010, with different evolution and forms, were announced events, although most observers and analysts have been surprised. For decades, in fact, Arab societies were crossed by deep fractures, by popular movements exerting a pressure from below on neo-patriarchal corrupt and authoritarian regimes. These pressure was often channelled into religious movements, themselves functional to the perpetuation of regimes that, claiming themselves as banners of stability and freedom, implemented a systematic repression of civil, political and economic freedoms, strictly controlling changes generated in the society.

Regardless of the outcome of Arab uprisings on the economic, political, social, institutional level, in the different countries involved, they have undeniably represented a strong challenge to neo-patriarchal systems, allowing ordinary subjectivities and protest emerging masculinities to express themselves in the public sphere, particularly in the case of the Maghreb. The revolutionary events, both large and limited in scope and scale, are identified by Moghadam (1992) as the only ones that in the Middle East have proved to be able to effectively challenge central states' neo-patriarchal structure. Unlike social, demographic, economic changes that regimes legally and institutionally guide and control, in fact, revolutions and uprisings, are often uncontrollable and cause a sometimes involuntary de-construction of gender relations.

In the specific case of the Arab Springs, they have had a particular impact on emerging masculinities. It is important to emphasize that these masculinities were already present and articulated in the social and cultural context of Maghreb countries, but their expression in the public sphere had traditionally been inhibited as, destabilizing the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity (from sexual, religious, generational, political etc. point of view), it represented a major challenge of the assumptions of the neo-patriarchal model and of the cultural substratum in which it was reproduced. During the Arab Spring, emerging masculinities have, instead, had the opportunity to express themselves in the public sphere and to spread globally through global media. International media coverage, however, has been often concentrated on the relationship between Islam, marginalization, violence and masculinities in continuity with the classical analysis on Arab masculinity⁹. These analyses, however, fail to grasp the potential and the characteristics of male subjectivities as protest masculinities.

⁹As Amar (2011) underlines the New York Times has been one of the main agent of this kind of gender discourse about Arab Springs. In continuity with analysis already deployed in the aftermaths of September 11, the journal linked masculinities and protests, from the same origin of the latter, underlining how frustrated masculinities were embodied in the symbolic men of riots: Mark

Those representing themselves and being represented in the global public sphere during the Arab Springs, are, in fact, young Arab men with fluid identities and different references, with unstructured models of masculinity and family, some in continuity, other in discontinuity with hegemonic patriarchal ones.

The case of Tunisia is particularly illustrative of post-revolutionary forms of public representation of emergent masculinities in the Maghreb. The relatively rapid fall of Ben Ali allowed a direct regain of the Tunisian public space (Sebastiani, 2014) by until then marginalized subjectivities, leading to the re-construction of a new space of freedom of speech and expression, that has a valuable social and daily dimension, aside from the institutional one¹⁰.

In this re-opened space, one of the most pervasive discourses concerns the social, religious and cultural identity of the country and its citizens. In the post-revolutionary context, indeed, the development of the Tunisian identity proceeds through the breaks opened in the narratives of the neo-patriarchal state, deconstructing the meaning of religion, politics, family and generational relationships, hitherto not debatable and taken for granted. In this discourse, the re-articulation of gender narratives, especially those concerning masculinity, is particularly relevant.

The representation of protest masculinities in the public sphere: street-painting in Tunisia

Artistic representation was one of the main ways of expression of the revolt and of the protest male and female subjectivities, in continuity

Zuckerberg invented Facebook because his girlfriend broke up with him, while the pride of Mohamed Bouazizi, had been hurt by a policewoman slap!

¹⁰ Apart from the recognition received by the NGO Freedom House, the issue of freedom of expression has been central in the debate around the new constitution, see for example art. 31, guaranteeing freedom of opinion, of thought, of expression, information and publishing, and art. 32 ensuring the right of access to information.

with the historical relationship between art and revolution. Stuart Hall (2006) speaking of popular culture, points out that it is not to be conceived as a fixed set of criteria, but as a struggle that involves different dynamics of incorporation, distortion, resistance, negotiation and recovery, a struggle that becomes part of the historical process, whose social forces disappear and reappear in various forms. It is not, therefore, a way of living separate from historical evolution, but a way of fighting. From this point of view art has historically accompanied movements, riots, revolutions, protests, being the main narrative of collective movements in many countries.

In Tunisia art forms chosen to narrate the revolt have been different. In the case of music, a special role has been deployed by rap. The most significant example is the song *Rais le bled* by El-General, a very hymn of the revolution. Its video begins with a vintage broadcasting of a dialogue between Ben Ali, father of the nation, and a child, representing the governed, interrupted noisily by the song's beginning, as the revolt interrupted his power. An important role has also been played by theatre performance, with many actors arrested in days following the 14th January (Solera, 2013).

Street-painting, an expressive form born during the 80s in the United States, in particular, provides some useful reflections to our analysis. Regardless of the form it takes – writings, drawings, stencils, graffiti – it is a peculiar form to narrate the revolution, as it represented a special re-appropriation of the public sphere by the same subjectivities until then excluded. As Korody (2011) emphasizes, Tunisian street has always been occupied by powers, being divided before between Islamic and colonial symbols, and then between religious and central power' ones. The symbols of the single party and of Ben Ali were everywhere, exemplifying the pervasiveness of power itself, expressed, also, through a direct repression of the street painting itself, whose author were often arrested, their jobs immediately deleted. The spread of drawings and writings in symbolic places – as Kasbah square or private and governmental presidential palaces – but also in the suburbs, signs the entry of ordinary subjectivities in the public sphere, the de-construction

of the same public/private border, supporting neo-patriarchal system. From this point of view of particular impact is the work of the French-Algerian JR, who, immediately after the revolution, has filled the streets of Tunis with black and white photographs of young people, superimposing the images of the regime¹¹.

The representation of youth challenges the basic element of patriarchy, the authority of the father and of the state, and the traditional moral order. Tunisian protest masculinities are portrayed as young, heroic and martyr, as it had already been described the Iranian one during the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The images of the martyrs of the revolution, embodying the new Tunisian, are a constant in the street painting, first of all Muhammad Bouazizi, the guy whose immolation had symbolically started the riots and whose image is often reproduced using stencils, that recalls the British artist Banksy¹². The same stencils are used to reproduce the image of Ben Ali, as a symbolic regaining possession of the possibility of representing the power.

The images of the martyrs are often juxtaposed to those of international heroes representing the struggle for freedom, such as Che Guevara. A similar ideological link can be found also in those writings directly recalling the *ultras*. The latter have been active during the riots in North Africa: although their different political references, they have proved to have the ability to deal directly with the power during the clashes and a strong anti-authoritarian motivation.

There is also a widespread representation of the popular critical to social cultural and economic arrangements. Anti-capitalists References – as resuming the style of Coca Cola logo to write *Enjoy Capitalism* – can be found in the work of the *Ahl al-Kahf*, the group born during the sit-in Kasbah 2, which name recalls the Abrahamic tradition of

¹¹ <http://anewhype.com/2011/06/28/tunisia-revolution-in-street-art/>

¹² Some example can be found in

<http://observers.france24.com/content/20110606-graffiti-artists-show-support-tunisian-revolution>

a group of young people that in order to escape from a despotic power refuge in a cave where they fall asleep for years. By choosing this name, the group intends to emphasize the cultural awakening needed by post-dictatorial Tunisia.

Also, noticeable is the questioning of religious authoritarianism and of the arbitrary management and monopoly of religious signifiers and meanings that, as underlined, is an important part of the neo-patriarchal legitimization system. Examples of this are the Calligraffiti (graffiti using Arabic calligraphy) made by eL-Seed, a Franco-Tunisian artist, to decorate the highest Tunisian minaret that of Jara in Gabes, with a Koranic phrase against intolerance. This is a protest against the attacks of Salafist groups generally tolerated during the three-year rule of the Islamist party En-Nahda.

Street painting in Tunisia, thus, criticise strongly all the constituent elements of the God-father-governor line supporting North African neo-patriarchy: the representation of youth, indeed, challenges the basic element of patriarchy, the authority of the father and the state, as well the traditional and religious moral order, rising new possibilities for the representation and articulation of family, gender identities and relationships.

Conclusions

The example of Tunisian street-art exemplifies how Arab Springs have opened new spaces for the deconstruction of North African neo-patriarchy. In Tunisia, the opening of these spaces has been supported by revolution's outcomes, but even in countries where protests, for different reasons, have not lead to government's fall, but to some concessions, it is possible to identify different forms of deconstruction of the patriarchy's axes. Examples can be found in the heterogeneous contemporary movements questioning religions' legitimacy to inform public and private life – as Moroccan MALI (*Mouvement alternatif pour les libertés individuelles*) a collective of

activists that from 2009 fight for freedom of thought and expression, promoting the campaign *Masayminch* (“we do not fast”), during Ramadan; or the networks of the so-called inclusive Islam and of the LGBTQIA mosques, discussing religious normativity of heterosexuality as a gender defining feature, especially in the case of masculinity. These movements have recently acquired more and more visibility in the regional and international public sphere, representing a major social and cultural challenge.

In this sense, artistic expression can be considered a privileged field of observation for the changes in the representation of gender identities and in particular of masculinity in north African countries, a field where often different gender and social relations’ models confront and collide. Taking once again Tunisia as an example, it is not a case that Salafi’s action has often focused on different forms of art: as in 2012 assault on the headquarters of a television channel (and to the house of its owner) for having broadcasted the animated film *Persepolis*; or the attacks against an art exhibition in the Tunis suburb of La Marsa. Salafi groups, indeed, have themselves been long marginalized, as government monopolized institutional and social control of religion. As a consequence they compete for the affirmation of their social and gender models, in the same public space where emergent protest masculinities have been affirmed.

The latters’ ability to reproduce themselves will depend on the longstanding outcome of the revolutions, the cultural policies of the new governments, the repositioning of the economic and social assets, the pervasiveness of the possible re-structuring of the neo-patriarchal states. Despite this, fluid protest masculinities are a clear sign of the extreme variability of gender subjectivities, their continuous change, the impermanence of their models, the multiplicity of their religious, cultural and social references.

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