The Political Factors that affect Contemporary Art in the Arab world, Descriptive Analytical Study

Mohammad Ahmad. Bani Salameh1, Yakup Mohd. Rafee1, Tamara Adnan. Al Smadi1

1School of educational sciences, the University of Jordan, Jordan, Amman 11942

DOI: https://doi.org/10.15520/ijcrr.v11i01.787

Abstract

This paper examining the determine the political factors that affect contemporary art in the Arab world. through what the Arabic artworks (study sample) contained ideas, there was internal and external political factors that affect contemporary Arabic art. the researcher will extract these factors by evaluating the findings made in respect to the political factors (internal and external) that influence the selected artworks (sample study). This step also includes the drawn conclusions in respect to the political factors (internal and external) that cause these political situations in the Arab world. The study sample contained seven Arabic contemporary installation artworks from 2010-2015 to determine the political factors that affect contemporary art in the Arab world. The findings were list combines the external and internal political factors that influence contemporary Arabic art in general because these factors include all the political factors and its comprehensive and appeared in contemporary Arabic artworks.

Keywords: Political factors, Political situation, Contemporary Art, Arab world.

Introduction:

According to Tolstoy from his book “What is Art?”, he believed that the importance of art lay in its connection with life and its contemporary issues. Additionally, it would lose its value if it moved away from the main goal. And Marcuse, a philosopher, noted that art was essential in contemporary communities, and he confirmed the revolution of this art and the role it played in the contemporary issues in its community (Spens, 2013). Where the political situations were considered as among the most prominent issues and situations that affect and affected contemporary art in the world in general and the Arab world in particular, due to many of the difficult political events.

Haidar (2012) confirmed that the Arab region faced more difficult situations than other regions in the world. He stated that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the Arab region witnessed shocking events that exacerbated into a dangerous political juncture that caused the birth of Arab Spring. Based on what Haider said and what we see in present from internal conflicts and revolutions and ruling class repression, we can conclude that the Arab nation region is one of the most conflicted regions in the
world, because of the internal and external political strife, where these events certainly affect various life areas positively or negatively. Mar'ae (1985) noted that the internal and external dangers and challenges in the Arabic community have a huge impact on its development. He further noted that art is an important field in life that affect and would affect the surrounding situations.

ALyasiri (2011) agreed with Mar'ae that the relationship between the individual and society and surrounding environment are shared; he noted that the surrounding environment was the external influence of stability, peace, development, culture, freedom, and others. All these influences help to create scientific, technical, literary, technological, industrial and social development aspects. The political situation is considered more influential in current time.

The Director of the International Art Exhibit of Contemporary Art (Minas Art), Laure Diotevil, confirmed the political challenges that faced the Middle East region as well as "Arab Spring" contributed to the rapid growth of contemporary art in some Arab countries (Bashir, 2011). We noticed in the contemporary Arab art that it was affected by surrounding political situations, and these are shown through many of the artworks that studied in this research. This research examining the determine the political factors that affect contemporary art in the Arab world.

**Problem Statement:**

According to Spens (2013), Steyerl (2010), Melkonian (1997), Ramadan (2014), Herd (2014), Seismopoliire (2015), Demirel (2012) and Obaidat (2013) were some researchers who studied the impact of political situations in the installation art. Most of these studies and researches focused on the relationship between art and politics in general. However, some of them such as Smith (2012) and Melkonian (1997) discussed generally the impact of political situations in contemporary art in the Arab world and Middle East. Smith (2015) viewed the problems faced by the Egyptian community and showed the artistic interventions that happened in public space in the period of the revolution in Egypt, and he showed the effect of art in these places with the political changes.

Further to that, Melkonian (1997) argued about the effect of the political situations in many artists' experiences from the Middle East who lived as refugees and how they were able to express their issues, thoughts and feelings through contemporary artworks.

Ramadan (2014) confirmed in his essay that it was necessary to develop the art system to face art history needs. He also thought that it was time to change the art strategy in the Arab world, and he saw that goal of art was to participate in directing the future.

Nevertheless, there were no previous studies or researches that examining the determine the political factors that affect contemporary art in the Arab world. Therefore, this study is important to extract the list of external and internal political factors that influence contemporary Arabic art.

**Methodology:**

This paper will be examining the determine the political factors that affect contemporary art in the Arab world, Where the researcher will use the descriptive analytical approach to achieve its goal. The researcher will collect the information available on the artworks (study sample) and describe, analyze it, then identify the political factors (internal and external) that affect contemporary Arabic art, in addition to collecting what is published on the political situation in the Arab world, analyzing and categorizing it. He will deduce the political factors (internal and external) that influence the Arabic artworks (study sample) and match these findings with the political factors concluded through what written about the political situation in the Arab world.
Figure 1: Descriptive Analytical framework

Artwork 1

Figure 2: Suspended by Mona Hatoum (2011)

Brodiel (2014) point out that “Suspended” is considered as an example of contemporary artworks that present the issue of displacement. Also, it gives a sense of strangeness to the visitors and create a sense of geographical isolation (White Cube, 2011).

Artwork 2

Figure 3: ‘The Chair’ by Faisal Samra (2014)

The Chair has been dismembered with an axe to indicate the destruction of Arab countries in the Middle East. After re-building the chair, the artist wrote “Made in the West” and “Global economic power” to indicate the rebuilding of the Middle East after its destruction by western powers (Kuebler,
The artist highlights the negative effect of the political interference of Western powers in the Arab world.

Artwork 3

Figure 4: ‘Liberating the Idol’ by Faisal Samra (2014)

This work was made from clay, and the solid shape of the completed form was broken into parts. The artist Samra presents in this work philosophical, political and artistic concepts to prove that the process of perfection is closely linked to the process of destruction (Kuebler, 2014). In this installation the artist points to the atrocities and destruction resulting from war and the role of Western countries in this destruction and subsequent reconstruction.

Artwork 4

Figure 5: Arab Spring by Faisal Samra (2015)

The artist comments on this installation and the other artworks that form part of the exhibition: "I tried to link the artworks of the exhibition to what is happening in terms of war and destruction and the geopolitical influence, they are all related to each other. The exhibition contains three projects, all of which focus on the same subject, which is the crisis of the humanity condition" (Haider, 2017).

Artwork 5

Figure 6: Western Gate by Khaled al-Hamzah (1997)

In “Western Gate” al-Hamzah reflected the idea that we all live in the same world, which has no natural limits and borders. The political boundaries in this world are not identical with the natural borders, and neither are cultures. The artist intended in his installation to be a direct contribution to creating a more democratic world since a global human society cannot be achieved without democracy. The artist wanted to launch a message based on the concept of dialogue and openness, a dialogue between East and West through cognitive communication. The artist emphasizes that cultural dialogue in all societies plays a positive role in overcoming violence, extremism and intolerance (Alfar, 2008).
Artwork 6

Figure 7: Chair and Signature by Khaled al-Hamzah (2003)

Al-Hamzah (2005) says in his article "A Seat in Quasi Utopia", “The details attract the viewers to the project and raise the debate. This project aims to open its political and artistic content through its visual symbols or context within the elections”.

Artwork 7

Figure 8: Human Rights by Khaled al-Hamzah (2008)

The artist presents in his installation “Human Rights” all what people need to enjoy a decent standard of living such as housing, food, water and security. The artist realized the importance of this subject at the time. People were deprived of these basic things as a result of war, conflict and class division in Arab society (Alfar, 2008). The researcher sees that the artist tried to highlight inequality, sectarianism and the impact of wars and conflicts on society.

The political factors affecting the situation in the Arab world:

Al-Khawaldeh (2016) summarizes the political reasons for the protest movements in Jordan as follows; The slow reform process eroded democratic process, fraudulent parliamentary elections, lack of political freedom and failure to respect human rights.

Othman (2012) believes that internal political factors are behind the prevailing political situation in the Arab world. These include the strained relation of the people and incumbent regimes and the absence of strong leadership at the national and pan-Arabic level. The danger posed by Israel constitutes one of the most important external political factors which affect the Arab world, in addition to the competition among the regional and international powers to interfere in their internal affairs.

Al-Wahishi (2012) stresses that there are a number of core factors responsible for the political situation in the Arab world such as popular frustration with the government, high inflation, unemployment and poverty, outdated and ineffectual governance patterns that require extensive repairs, corruption and disrespect for the rule of law.

Al-Hayajneh (2004) lists the reasons for the internal political situation and conflicts in the Arab world as follows: The cancellation of the elections, the doctrinal roots, the nature of governance, the relationship with Israel, sectarian issues, and issues related to the political role, the external interference by some neighboring countries and sectarian issues, the failure of the democratic experiment, the king's overriding authority, and the inadequate representation of all segments of society in the elections, the government withdrawal of the convention on local government in Southern Sudan, the Palestinian question and the forced displacement of Palestinian refugees and the tribal system and the problem of national unity imposed by military force.

Al-Shwabkieh (2012) point out that the writings Mohammad Jibril was contain with the social and
political reality, the conflict between the individual and the community, and the impact of political and social transitions on Arab society. He focused on the absence of democracy and the lack of political freedom, social justice, cultural subordination, psychological alienation, and repression.

Khazandar (2004) contributes the internal conflicts and the political situation in the Arab world to the following internal and external factors: Internal political factors; the crisis of legitimacy of the power, the alienation of the authority from its popular surrounding, ignorance of religion and the political history of society, the role of the elite in the political system, the forced formation of the country and existence of problems in contemporary Arab thought. External political factors; the negative role of colonialism in the Arab world, insecurity in the region and Arab conflicts, competition among international powers to influence the Arab world and the role of Zionism.

Mahdi and Yasien (2014) point out those certain internal and external political factors led to the Arab Spring revolutions as detailed below: Internal factors; the role of active young as a driver of change in the Arab region, widespread of economic and social marginalization and political and administrative corruption. External factors; To re-establish US control over of the Arab world, to secure its control of energy sources in the Arab region, and to strengthen the standing of “Israel” in the region.

Maatouk (2012) identifies the political factors that led to the current political situation in the Arab world as follows: Absence of the concept of peaceful transfer of power and the survival of the idea of succession in governance, rule of a single-party system and the absence of pluralistic democracy, absence of fair and free elections that guarantee the appointment of qualified candidates and pressure, exclusion, marginalization and strict control of the population.

**Discussion:**

Based on above of writing about the artworks (study sample) of internal and external political factors that influence contemporary artworks, and the internal and external political factors affecting the political situation in the Arab world. We can extract list of these factors, it's comprehensive and match and complement each other, as follows:

- The perpetual threat posed by "Israel"
- Competing regional and foreign powers to interfere in internal affairs
- Forced displacement of Arab citizens due to war and conflict
- Cultural subordination.
- The negative role of Orientalism, proselytism and colonialism in the Arab world.
- Insecurity in the region and inter-Arab conflicts
- Competing international powers to influence Arab governments
- The Zionist agenda of creating internal Arab conflicts
- Western designs to secure control of energy resources in the Arab region
- Western policies to support "Israel's" allies in the region.

**Figure 9: External political factors affecting the contemporary Arabic art.**
### Internal political factors

- Slowness of the ongoing reform process
- Erosion of the democratic system
- Fraudulent parliamentary elections
- Lack of political freedom and failure to honour human rights
- Strained relations between the people and their regimes
- Absence of effective leadership at the national and pan-Arab level
- Widespread public frustration with the government
- Outdated governance patterns that require extensive repairs
- Administrative and political corruption
- Disregard for the rule of law
- Democratic practices misused to legitimize those in power
- Doctrinal conflict with the aim to gain political influence
- Failure of the democratic experiment.
- Monarch overriding representational authority
- Limited representation of minorities
- Suppression of legitimate local governments
- The Palestine conflict and forced displacement of Palestinian refugees in 1967
- Surviving structure of the tribal system
- Political repression.
- Crisis of legitimacy of state authority
- Political and cultural alienation of the ruling class
- Religious ignorance and intolerance
- Lack of modern political culture and civil society
- Minority elites dominating the political system
- Forced creation of artificial nation states by imperialist powers
- Lack of development in contemporary Arab thought
- Political activism and engagement limited to the young generation
- Widespread economic and social marginalization
- Authoritarian regimes and absence of political freedom
- Poor performance of state institutions under the regimes
- Absence of peaceful transfer of power, traditional succession in governance
- Single party rule, absence of pluralistic democracy
- No fair and free elections, access of unqualified candidates
- Exclusion, marginalization, and excessive control of the population.

---

**Figure 10: Internal political factors affecting the contemporary Arabic art.**

### Conclusion:

Listed above (Figure 9 & Figure 10) are the internal and external political factors that influence the artworks as discussed. They have been extracted from the available published material on the artworks, and match them with the internal and external political factors affecting the political situation in the Arab world. It can be observed that these findings match and complement each other. Thus, the above list (Figure 9 & Figure 10) combines the external and internal political factors that influence contemporary Arabic art in general because these factors include all the political factors (internal and external) as appeared in what written about artworks (study sample), and the internal and external political factors affecting the political situation in the Arab world, and it's comprehensive and appeared in contemporary Arabic artworks.
(study sample). So that, we can consider that the Arabic contemporary art interacts with the political situation and the issues surrounding it and represents them. Thus, contemporary Arabic artworks constitute an attempt to draw public attention to this reality, expose its devastating effects on the Arab people, and criticize it in a peaceful and constructive manner.

References:

1. Al-Hayajneh, A. (2004, October 3). Internal conflicts in the Arab world. future vision. Retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.net/specialfiles/pages/38f664e9-bf31-4f7f-badd-20771e9f9a25

2. Al-Khawaldeh, S. (2016). The impact of the popular Arab movement on political reform in Jordan. revue de droit et de sciences politiques, 3(1), 9-37. Retrieved from https://www.asjpceristdz/en/article/10195

3. Alfar, M. (2008). The contemporary orientations in the Khaled Al-Hamzah works (Unpublished master's thesis). Yarmouk University.

4. Al-Hamzah, K (2005). Un siège aux portes de l'utopie. Recherches en Esthetique: RevueduC.E.R.E.A.P, 11. Retrieved from http://berthetdominique.wixsite.com/site-du-cereap/n-11-utopies

5. Al-Shawabkieh, S. (2012). The Point of View in the Political Prison Novel “The Walls as a Model”. Human and Social Sciences, 39(1), 37-21. Retrieved from https://journals.ju.edu.jo/DirasatHum/article/viewFile/3227/2795

6. Al-Wahishi, A. (2012, January 31). The current Arab situations and the future vision. albayan. Retrieved from https://www.albayan.ae/opinions/articles/2012-01-31-1-1583101

7. ALyasiri, S. (2011). Art and its social and educational role and the possibility of activation in Arab societies. Journal of Kuja Studies Center, 1(79), 65-88. Retrieved from https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=11748

8. Bardaouil, S., & Fellrath, T. (2014). Mona Hatoum Turbulence. In Mathaf Encyclopedia of Contemporary Art and the Arab World (1st ed.). Retrieved from http://www.encyclopedia.mathaf.org.qa/en/essays/Pages/Mona-Hatoum-Turbulence.aspx

9. Bashir, M. (2011, July 11). Minas Art... The Arab Spring contributed to the rapid growth of contemporary art in Arab countries. Kuwait News Agency. Retrieved from https://www.kuna.net.kw/articlePrintPage.aspx?id=2179524&language=ar

10. Demirel, I. N., & Altintasb, O. (2012). Relationship Between Art and Politics. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 51, 444-448. Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042812033241

11. Editorial: The Politics of Southeast Asian Contemporary Art. (2015). Journal of Arts and Politics, (13). Retrieved from http://www.seismopolite.com/editorial-the-politics-of-southeast-asian-contemporary-art

12. Haider, R. (2017). Revolutions of the Arab Spring, and the future of the Arab political system. Alasmarya University Journal, 24, 511-576.

13. Haider, H. (2015a, March 27). Arab Spring balloons. Alwasat News. Retrieved from http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/975697.html

14. Herd, C. (2014). Cultural Politics. Aesthetica Magazine, (56). Retrieved from http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/cultural-politics/

15. Khazandar, S. (2004, October 3). The causes and drivers of internal Arab conflicts. Retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.net/specialfiles/pages/0f3a3346-a14e-48bd-9d9a-7063e2408465

16. Kuebler, L. (2014, December 8). Review - Faisal Samra: Construction, Destruction, Reconstruction - Asfar. Retrieved from https://www.asfar.org.uk/review-faisal-
17. Maatouk, N. (2012). *Culture of change*. Retrieved from https://www.philadelphia.edu.jo/arts/17th/day_three/session_ten/nazem.doc

18. Mahdi, A., & Yasien, A. (2014). External and International Factors of the political Changes in the Arab Region. *Journal of International studies*, (58), 77-113. Retrieved from https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=98306

19. Mar'ae, T. (1985). *Studies in the Arab Society* (1st ed.). Amman: Arab Universities Union.

20. Melkonian, N. (1997, June). Between Heaven & Hell: Contemporary Art from the Middle Eastern Diaspora. *Al Jadid*, 3(19). Retrieved from https://www.aljadid.com/content/between-heaven-hell-contemporary-art-middle-eastern-diaspora

21. Obeidat, A. (2013). *Constructing Transformations of Image In the Jordanian Contemporary Art* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Granada). Retrieved from https://hera.ugr.es/tesisugr/21970580.pdf

22. Othman, O. (2012, April 6). Arab world through of current changes. *elaph*. Retrieved from https://elaph.com/Web/opinion/2012/4/727534.html

23. Ramadan, K. (2014). New Arab art order. *Contemporary Practices*. XV, 28-33. Retrieved from http://www.contemporarypractices.net/essaysv15.html

24. Smith, C. (2015). Art as a diagnostic: assessing social and political transformation through public art in Cairo, Egypt. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 16(1), 22-42. doi: 10.1080/14649365.2014.936894

25. Spens, C. (2013). Contemporary Art and Political Violence: The Role of Art in the Rehabilitation and Healing of Communities Affected by Political Violence. *Journal of Terrorism Research*, 4(1), 19-41. Retrieved from http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.621

26. Steyerl, H. (2010). Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy. *E-flux*, (21). Retrieved from https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/

27. White Cube. (2011). Mona Hatoum Bunker. Retrieved from https://whitecube.com/exhibitions/exhibition/mona_hatoum_masons_yard_2011