

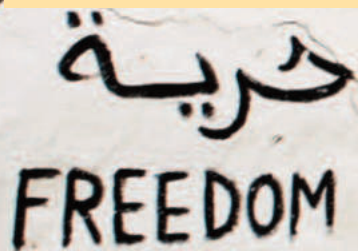
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Notions of the Arab revolts



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“Fuloulophobia” or the freedom of fear: Literature and Arab revolutions

Ihab Shabana

Five years after the Arab uprisings, the literary landscape in the Arab world has transformed, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia. Having the Arab novel as an axis, this article will explore the new or renewed literary forms, the notion of literature itself and the writers' interests after the thunderbolt of the massive protests.

A few years after the Arab revolts, the world seems confused more than ever on the results of these historical transformations. Some talk about the retrogression that the uprisings brought within the Arab societies and, especially, within the political regimes of the Arab countries themselves. Some others have underlined the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary procedures that took place in the Arab world, adding on top of it the specificities of the Middle Eastern societies and their complex web of power and resistance. But few have talked about the transformation of notions, if there is any, in a multi-layered dimension, that can affect the people's mindset. Felix Guattari and Pierre Bourdieu have noted that in revolutions a cultural transformation is necessary, which should take a parallel itinerary with political change. In our case, this cultural transformation has caused a few, but only marginal, debates. The main scholarship has been concerned with internal or international orientated political affairs. Our main topic here, literature after 2011, has also been marginally debated in the West, even though some forms of literature, like poetry – especially in vernacular Arabic or in ‘amiyah, have been directly connected with the physical space of the demonstrations. The use of ‘amiyah has signalled a kind of linguistic “protest”, breaking the traditional norms of Arabic literature, especially in Egypt. Many writers such as Youssef Rakha and Sonallah Ibrahim, have defended the use of ‘amiyah in writing poetry and novels, underlining, though, that ‘amiyah, at times, cannot fully express and depict the writer's imagination.¹

Other writers and literary critics have argued that the Arab novel has been a precursor of dissent in the Arab world, mark-



ing a wave of oppositional political writings that underline the authoritarian nature of the Arab regimes and the encroachment of the human, political and social rights in the Arab societies. Maybe, the best examples are novels like the ones of the Libyan Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men* (2006) and *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011), of the Syrian Khaled Khalifa who wrote *In Praise of Hatred* (2006), of the Egyptian Ahmad Khaled Tawfiq *Utopia* (2008), *The Map of Love* (1999) of Ahdaf Soueif, and the *Wings of the Butterfly*, written by Mohamed Salmawy in January 2011.² All of these novels engage with socio-political malaises, violence and war and the complex functional systems in the Arab world. The interesting thing is that all of these novels, and many others, have been translated or re-translated after the 2011 uprisings. The bulk of the literature that has been translated into western languages reveal an attempt of a strong cultural mediation and a targeted “anthropological” interest that, nevertheless, does not seem genuine at times. Youssef Rakha argues that “only the vulgarly politicized “imams” of contemporary literature seem to have a chance in the West — and they can tell the West nothing it does not already know”.³

Still, the Arab uprisings put new challenges and pressures on the artists and novelists towards both directions: first, to create and promote a new sort of “engaged” art without falling into the chauvinist trap, and second, to produce new forms endorsing things that “we don’t already know” about the situation in the Middle East. Thus, the endeavours and the initiatives regarding art production in the Middle East after 2011 are plenty. Only some of them include the *fan al midan* (art



is a square) initiative and the graphic-novel magazine *TokTok* both set in Egypt, or the *Inside Out Project* initiative, the opening of the B’chira Art Centre and the graphic novel magazine *Lab619* in Tunisia. All of these projects regardless of their form of art, aimed at promoting an enhanced political and cultural awareness and at reclaiming more public space, literally or metaphorically.

In an attempt to combine historical narrative, theatrical prose and a literature discourse, the initiative *Tahrir Monologues*, in early 2012, tried to capitalize the microhistory behind the 25 January revolution, by collecting stories being told in coffee shops and in the streets.⁴ This new form of literature writing and performance has been an innovation in the art scene of the Middle East and it can be credited to the open space that the dynamics of the social movements created. Alexander Key, a Middle East literature scholar, sees that the definition of “literature” is expanded after 2011. It encompasses song lyrics and



social media and blogs, which are wide platforms of free expression for writers and revolutionaries.⁵ In the literature scene, the production has seen a boost of publications and creation of new blogs that promote the narration or even the dialogue.

During the last few years, Arab novelists have been promoting more courageously their political stance, being not necessarily profoundly political, but moving more obviously towards asserting more space for freedom of expression. A very interesting case is the Egyptian novelist Ahmad Naji, who published his novel *The Use of Life* in 2015 with Dar Merit, a publishing house that has been harassed by president's Sisi police for its progressive and independent political discourse. Naji has been accused of insulting public morals and has been jailed for two years (causing a global uproar), accusations caused for including in his novel sexually explicit material and drug use narration. Naji was also part of the project *Generation Tahrir*, which included a dialectical approach of arts (comic, poetry, novel, photography). In his powerful text, Naji calls the old regime remnants as "zombies" in the way Youssef Rakha sarcastically writes in his blog about "fuloulophobia", where *fuloul* in Arabic are disparagingly called the Mubarak regime officials.⁶

The notion of counter – revolution in Egypt and Tunisia is depicted in the 2013 novel of Basma Abdel Aziz *The Queue* and in Chakib Daoud's dark graphic novel *The Dump*. Abdel Aziz describes the fear that still lives among people and makes them give excuses to the authorities to have a vast control over their lives. Furthermore, Daoud gives a shadowy picture of Tunisia in the wake of the assassination of Shoukri Belaid, a leftist politician who was gunned down in 2013, apparently by Salafists.⁷

It, thus, seems that three new forms of literature are emerging or re-empowering in the Arab world. The first form is the dystopian novel which moves with parallel, but also contradictory, steps between a future dystopian Arab society and the mental illness that the socioeconomic marginalization or violence brings. The first example is best represented by the novel *Utopia* of Ahmad Khaled Tawfiq, while the second by the novel of Ahmad Alaidy *Being Abbas el Abd* or the poem of the Libyan Hawa Gamodi *Awaiting a Poem*.

The second form is the graphic novel, which it has been much celebrated in the Arab world even before 2011. Nevertheless, it now has new platforms of expression, like the magazines we mentioned above and of course a new readership. The examples of the graphic novels are plentiful: the Libyan–Egyptian Magdy el Shafee has written the *Metro: The story of Cairo*, which is a playful comic where Shihab, a young software designer who has been forced into debt by corrupt officials, decides to get out of his dilemma by robbing a bank, and eventually he becomes a "successful" beggar.⁸ Another excellent example is the Syrian Riad Sattouf, whose *The Arab of the Future: A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978-1984, A Graphic Memoir* oscillates powerfully between the second form of literature and the third, the memoir. Written into two parts (the second is yet to be published), the notion of this graphic novel appears to be the equivalent failure of the American dream, where the family of Sattouf is in pursuit of the Arab dream living in the historical times of colonel Gaddafi in Libya and al Assad in Syria. Another example comes from Yassine Ellil in Tunisia and his comic *Goodbye Ben Ali*, written in French and, subsequently, approaching, amongst other, a European readership.

The third form that has flourished after 2011 is the memoir, as mentioned above or, as it is described, the documentary literature. Some of these breathlessly written accounts have been translated in many languages, like the memoir of the 18-



day uprising in Tahrir square from Ahdaf Soueif, *Cairo: My City Our Revolution*, or Mona's Prince *Revolution is my Name*, in which she recounts her efforts with her fellow Egyptians to topple President Mubarak.⁹

In addition to these forms of writing, we should also mention that there has been a proliferation in the literary production distributed or translated in the internet, through blogs and other venues. A brilliant case of this example is the blog www.qisasukhra.wordpress.com with translations from emerging poets, like Ahmad Shafie and Malaka Badr. Moreover, another form of writing has re-emerged, especially under Sisi's Egypt, that of prison literature where political prisoners write from their prison cells. This genre is not new of course, since many writers have written from prison in the past, with the most renowned example being the masterpiece of Sonallah Ibrahim *That Smell*. Currently, with the regression of human and political rights in Egypt, the best example of this genre is Alla Abd el Fattah and Ahmad Douma who published the *Graffiti for two...Alaa and Douma*.¹⁰

Literary production has been widely debated amongst writers themselves on whether it serves the purposes of the revolution or whether it should or not be politicized. Syrian author Rasha Abbas “worries that texts motivated by revolutionary fervour—like popular Egyptian texts set in Tahrir Square—might override themes of political struggle”. The more provocative Youssef Rakha mentions that the “Arab Spring industry geared toward the lucrative practice of political analysis,” while “the opinion piece, talk show appearance, and Facebook status update [...] have become the most popular ‘literary’ activity.”¹¹ In this environment of “disillusionment” in January 2016, a few days before the celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, the Guardian published a piece of some of the most famous Arab writers who made their own self-criticism about the things they wrote during or shortly after the Arab uprisings, concluding, some of them, that “they were terribly wrong”.¹²

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Feeling out Nation-State building in the Middle East

Stavros I. Drakoularakos

Although the states in the Middle East were largely defined in terms of national identity during the 20th century, a number of recent developments leading up and during the Arab Spring help shine a light on matters of state, national and religious cohesion. Identity-related issues have risen to the forefront and have established themselves as the new order of the day.

Defining the notion of the nation-state was one of the leading discussions in international law summits during the 19th and the 20th centuries. Through the signing of treaties and the implementation of customary international law, defining the nation-state and nationhood boiled down to three basic principles: national sovereignty, autonomous governance and nationals comprising the nation. Diplomatic immunity, respecting territorial borders and recognizing or refusing the national sovereignty of other states, result from these very principles. Although the practice of the states deviates at times from these legal norms and boundaries, it is their official and unilateral recognition and respect that provides the international system with a legal basis from which it can regulate itself, as well as evolve with the times.

The aftermath of the Millet system and the Sykes-Picot agreement

After the end of the Second World War especially, and the emergence of an even greater number of newly-proclaimed independent nations in contrast to the 1920s and the 1930s, a new status quo had taken effect. States in Africa and the Middle East claimed and gained their independence from colonial or mandate control. The results were, at best, ambiguous. While some states managed to build on the national identity of their population, others, bound by international law principles such as *uti possidetis juris*, were not as lucky.¹ It is generally considered that geographical borders were drawn “on the map”, and not taking into account the regional religious, ethnic and language differences. Although this was especially true for the African continent, this practice did not shy away from being applied to states in the Middle East. The Sykes-Picot agreement of 16 May 1916² during the First World War is the one that defined state borders for the territories of the former Ottoman



Empire and paved the way for an unstable future in the region.³ The agreement was put into motion via the various treaties throughout the 1920s, according to which France received control of Syria and Lebanon, while Great Britain held mandates over Palestine, Iraq and Transjordan. By setting aside the different religious and ethnic identities, it virtually primed the region for conflict.⁴

While the above-mentioned agreement of 1916 engineered a wide number of issues, the Millet system in place, during the rule of the Ottoman Empire, was not without its fair share of responsibility.⁵ The Millet system divided the population under Ottoman rule into semi-autonomous entities according to their religious beliefs, essentially institutionalizing religion and establishing it as the highest form of authority (after the Ottoman government). While not without merit when taking into account the inner workings and the need for a system of checks and balances within the Ottoman Empire, the Millet system planted the seed for the predominance of religious identity and authority over the ethnic one. That seed bore fruit during the latter part of the 20th century, and effectively exploded during the 21st. In most cases, governments in the Middle East were dominated by one religious or ethnic group, relegating the

rest of the fragmented populations struggling to maintain their own identity amidst the state-sponsored one. Although Syria and Lebanon make for prime examples of this situation, the region of the Middle East is riddled with religious and ethnic minorities striving for autonomy and self-preservation. The list is all-encompassing and ever-expanding: Maronites in Lebanon, Copts in Egypt, Sunnis in Iraq, Shias in Saudi Arabia, Alevis and Kurds in Turkey, Arameans, Sunnis and Kurds in Syria – to name only a few – are merely recent and frequently referred-to cases.



Difficult-to-define entities

Flashing forward several decades ahead into the late 2000s and early 2010s, it certainly seems that the “Arab Spring” brought about a number of key issues that originated from the state-dealings following the two World Wars of the 20th century. Although the sectarian narrative brought forward by the rivalry between the two leading Shia and Sunni states in the Middle East is not without its merits, the reality on the ground lends itself to a grassroots reading of the current situation.⁶ Recently, two issues related to state creation have come to the forefront. On the one hand, the Kurds of Northern Syria have set themselves apart from the wider Jihadist conflict, and have gone ahead and created their own state entity and system of state sustainability, known as “Rojava”.⁷ On the other hand, the forces of the Islamic State (IS) have attempted and have largely succeeded in creating a state entity claiming borders ranging from the Iraqi to the Syrian territories. In both cases, and espe-



cially in the IS one, regional borders can be considered as *in flux*. As a result, a new concept has emerged in international law lingo: the notion of the hybrid state. The latter is an entity that does not conform to the full extent of international law to the usual principles that make up statehood and state sovereignty. The root of the problem is located in the legal vacuum created by the border delimitation instability. To make matters more complicated, its sovereignty hinges on its ability to care for its citizens and the will or likelihood that other states would eventually go through the process of state recognition. Consequently, state legitimacy rests upon the international community. However, while this interpretation satisfies international law and politics, the reality on the ground is quite different. The Islamic State's domestic legitimacy relies on its ability to replace the failings and to avoid the trappings of the former official government in place. Through its revenue-making oil facilities, the establishment of public, social, administrative and health services, a strong sense of promotion through excellence and hierarchy, and, most importantly, the nurture of a narrative of a shared cultural and religious belonging, as well as a shared foreign foe, the Islamic State has managed the impossible: to bring order amidst the meticulously planned chaos.⁸ By effectively shaking the very foundation of order in the region, the Islamic State has brought about the past ways of nation-state-making: as a direct outcome of military warfare.

Identity-grounding the issue

On the other end of the spectrum, the template for states in the Middle Eastern region seems to be shifting slowly but accordingly. Countries that used to rest on their ability to enforce their will on their citizens are eyeing processes of re-legitimization, at least in the eyes of parts of their population.⁹ For instance, the Coptic community in Egypt, ever since the toppling of the Muslim Brotherhood, witnessed a renewed interest in their right to religious activities – at least when it comes to the government – as well as the implementation of a parliamentary reform introducing a new quota system and aiming to promote the presence of marginalized groups within the Egyptian parliament. The reform resulted in a record-breaking Coptic parliamentary presence and the first time that a Coptic woman became a member of the Egyptian parliament.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the open and public support of the Coptic community (as represented by Pope Tawandros) for current Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi should not go unnoticed as a deciding factor regarding this development.

It is widely acknowledged that the modern nation-state is the cornerstone of the current international system. Accordingly, its preservation is of utmost importance for the international actors. The developments following the “Arab Spring” concerning state legitimacy could have an impact on the principles in effect since the 19th century. In any case, redefining state identity can only lead to redefining the concept of the nation-state in the Middle East. Whether this process is one that will provide some real and concrete results remains, as of yet, to be seen.



NOTES

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The evolution of the notion of Sectarianism

Zakia Aqra

The notion of sectarianism is viewed as a constant factor when referring to the Middle East, especially with the negative sectarian implications of the Syrian crisis. In contrast, this article will attempt to shed light on this notion and offer some insight on the drastic transformation it has endured since the colonial era, both on a level of conceptualisation and as a political tool; especially in Bahrain and Lebanon, where the “Arab Spring” never was.

Despite the popular demands for dignity, freedom and bread during the so-called Arab Spring, the uprisings in some countries swiftly took a sectarian turn that did not awe the international community. For most analysts, the notion of sectarianism in the region plays a significant role—in a way or another—in the developments either on a regional basis or in domestic affairs in the Middle East and even in how the societies relate to each other. Far from being an inherited trait of Middle Eastern societies, the notion of sectarianism hardly implies religious, theological or dogmatic differences, instead it reveals socio-political dynamics, which have instrumentalised the religious differences into sectarian differences. Even though, there are dogmatic differences between the Shia and Sunni since the death of the Prophet Mohamad in 632, the notion of sectarianism supersedes these differences. By definition, sectarian instrumentalisation is when a “certain class could utilise these inherited beliefs to advance its own interests, without necessarily believing in them [...] a class’s defence of its own privileges and existence against other classes”.¹ Many will correctly argue that the notion itself is a colonial construct that, especially since 2011, is *thriving* in the political and popular discourse. While in many Muslim countries a Muslim is simply a Muslim, in countries like Lebanon and Bahrain, amongst others, the Muslims tend to identify with a certain “sect”.² By extension, this raises concerns about sectarian tension.

According to a survey conducted in early 2016 by Pew Forum, a Washington-based research institute, concerns were raised about sectarian tensions and religious extremism, even in countries where people are free to practice their religion such as Lebanon. The way that the Sunni and Shia view one another has become a concern. By the same token, not only do the Sunni communities of the Arab world disregard Shia followers as Muslim believers, they also view them as an extension of



a foreign power, particularly Iran. The study found that approximately 40% of the Sunni population in the region do not consider the Shia as Muslims; this was particularly noted in countries where Shia represent the minority.³ This perception of foreign intervention finds its roots in the colonial era and it has come to be part of the rationale of the local actors. Even though the sectarian discourse has always been associated with power, resources and territory, in the aftermath of the Arab uprising, this notion evolved. In the past, the sectarian rivalry and proxy wars may have been generated by foreign or regional actors for their own purposes, today the region is witnessing its own domestic actors using religious symbolism and sectarian identification to maintain and advance their own interests or even protect themselves. The maximum manifestation of this notion is taking place in Syria, where peaceful protest turned quickly into sectarian conflict and into a civil war. Other parts of the region are fueling the fire of sectarianism and spreading tensions; namely, this is taking place in countries such as Bahrain and Lebanon, which is gradually leading them towards the lion's den.



Interestingly, both countries are considered *sui generis* among experts on the Middle East. Viewing them through this lens of exceptionalism usually hinders a better understanding of the developments on the ground. The religious heterogeneity of the two countries differs by large, yet in both cases the sectarian card is being used as a tool to divide and conquer rather than being an inherited trait of the society. The religious composition in the two countries differs: in Lebanon, the Shia constitute almost 47% of the population, as opposed to 24% of the Sunni ruled by a confessional system—in which, based on the constitution, the President is Christian, the Prime Minister is Sunni and the Speaker

of the Parliament is Shia; while in Bahrain, the Shia are the vast majority constituting 73% of the population, ruled by a Sunni Monarchy, denying the former of significant political participation in the system.⁴ Both Beirut and Manama accuse Tehran of interfering in the domestic affairs and the people see the Shia community as Iranian proxies. Yet, the protests in early 2011 were secular and cross-cutting the religious diversity, and demanding dignity, just like in Syria, Egypt, and Tunisia.

During the “Day of Rage”, the Bahrainis were demanding for the end of inequality and segregation that exist against the



Shia community, along with the release of the political prisoners, the demand for more jobs and housing, the creation of a more representative and empowered parliament, a new constitution written by the people, and a new cabinet.⁵ The ruling regime, which is the Sunni Al-Khalifa family and its Sunni tribal allies, was able to seize power with the cooperation of foreign powers that had their own benefit in the oil-rich country,⁶ accused Iran of being behind the protests, disregarding the fact that it was not only the Shia community that took the streets, but also many Sunnis, who share the same grievances, as they share “non-tribal pedigree”. Some Sunnis are facing the same issues with the Shias; namely, a lack of public housing and affordable land, and wasteful corruption. The infamous story of Mohamed al-Buflasa—of a Sunni background—who stood in front of the protesters and decried sectarianism and was imprisoned, demonstrates that the protests did not have a sectarian character.⁷ The regime systematically engineered sectarianism to maintain power. A government adviser, Salah al-Bandar, published a Report in 2006 documenting how the Bahraini regime fueled sectarianism, either by “encouraging conversions to Sunni Islam, rigging elections in favour of Sunni candidates, or creating a secret intelligence apparatus to spy on Shia citizens”.⁸ Thus, the notion of sectarianism is a domestic political instrument rather than a religious and dogmatic way of seeing the “other”.

By the same token, the mobilisations in Lebanon called for the fall of the sectarian regime. Lebanon’s sectarian experience was also developed during the 18th–19th century by the Ottoman rulers and European powers. Each power at the time, aligned with the warlords of each sect, and, until very recently, the different religious groups, have been used for proxy warfare, leading to devastating conflicts, such as the Lebanese Civil War during 1965–1990.⁹ What makes the notion of sectarianism even more sensitive in Lebanon today is the fear of a spill-over of the Syrian crisis, which for many in Lebanon is a proxy war itself. Notwithstanding, but probably because of the strong sectarian background and fear of conflict, the mobilisations in 2011 attempted to confront the sectarian politics. Nevertheless, the cross-cutting appeal was co-opted by sectarian discourse, leading to the disengagement of the crowds.¹⁰ The Syrian crisis escalation, along with the gradual spread of violence in northern Lebanon, paralyzed any efforts that could later be de-codified as sectarian. Even the #Youstick campaign—garbage disposal issue in Lebanon—that gained momentum in 2015 was also hindered by sectarian politics. The solution that was proposed was based on the regional distribution of waste, but it initiated talks among top figures about Sunni, Shia Christian landfills.¹¹ Similarly to Bahrain, Lebanon’s intense sectarian character is a result of top-bottom policy, rather than the other way around.

Despite the differences in political structure and religious composition in Bahrain and Lebanon, when the domino effect reached their doorstep, the cross-cutting appeal demonstrated that the notion of sectarianism is not an inherited trait. Yet, the notion is engraved in the long-standing post-colonial systems. In turn, this notion has evolved into an instrument of domestic actors that are not only turning religion into identity, but also diversity into conflict. Unfortunately, given the regression of these countries as the chaos in the region upsurges, the notion of sectarianism as it manifests nowadays, may not thaw soon.



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Explaining the call for Dignity during the Arab Revolts

Charitini Petrodaskalaki

During the Arab Revolts of 2011, the call for dignity was an overwhelming demand, even prior to the call for democracy. The lack of dignity was widely felt in the Arab world on the eve of the uprisings, both at individual and collective levels; people's sufferings were widely ignored by their rulers, who treated the common people with contempt. The lack of dignity was also felt internationally, as their countries were considered submissive to Western interests.

The first uprising was sparked in Tunisia, with the self-immolation of street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, as a reaction to the confiscation of his wares and his degrading treatment by the authorities, and soon spread around the Arab world. Tunisians emphasized that the image of his self-immolation symbolized the society's struggle for dignity and justice, not a cry of self-pity.¹ As diverse as these uprisings have been, their common denominator was their demand for dignity and self-determination. The concept of dignity (*karama*), as employed during the uprisings, had a more inclusive sense than just the absence of humiliation; rather, it was addressing a number of collective dignity deficits, such as lack of reason, lack of security, human right abuses, lack of opportunity, and lack of inclusiveness among others.² The magnitude of its impact seems to be a distinctive feature of the Arab Uprisings.



The call for dignity was not a new notion in the Middle East; in fact it was already being used by the middle of the 20th century. The dignity of a nation emerged as a very important issue in the Third World in the post-colonial era, during its



struggle against Western colonialism and imperialism; for example, the Suez Crisis of 1956 was interpreted as a test on Egyptian dignity.³ During the same period, Islamist groups also advocated the defense of Muslim dignity in the face of the West, and as the governing elites failed to deliver their promises of economic progress, political participation and personal dignity, the attraction of the Islamists' call for dignity increased. This resonated with Muslims of all social and economic strata because of the injustices that they continue to suffer at the hands of the West or its surrogates.⁴ What was witnessed during the Arab spring was non-Islamists and secularists using the call for dignity that was previously confined mainly in Islamist circles, and propagating it because they experienced it and understood it socially.

The theme of dignity, or its converse, indignity, and its relationship with modern Arab politics, unfolds on both individual and collective levels. People across North Africa and the Middle East could immediately be identified with Bouazizi's story on a personal level. A 26 year old college graduate was unable to find formal employment and was then humiliated by the police when they took away his means of survival because he couldn't bribe them. Most Arabs were in the same hopeless position, on an educational and economic level; for decades, populations in the Middle East called for more jobs, better housing conditions, more rights and other issues. Yet, the Arab regimes paid little attention to the needs of the public. The neo-liberal economic system that they served failed to offer university graduates an economic status that could match their skills and expectations, thus, creating a destitute middle-class with higher education that was facing unemployment and poverty.⁵

In addition, the demand for personal dignity was easily understandable, in the face of frightful police states that crushed the individual.⁶ Tunisian police treated Bouazizi as a non-person, someone not worthy of a basic courtesy or an explanation. The humiliation he experienced was similar to what most people on the Arab world faced; Egypt under Mubarak was characterized as a "Police State", where the police had become the chief administrative arm of the state, responsible for resolving conflicts, fixing elections, monitoring shops, maintaining network of local informants etc. In Syria as well, intimidation, imprisonment and exile were used as tools to crush opposition. Therefore, these regimes were not respecting the basic dignity of their citizens, treating ordinary people with indifference or even with contempt. It is noteworthy that in Syria, the first call against the regime was named "Day of Dignity"; respectively in Egypt protesters made symbolic takeovers of houses of rule, such as the parliament, police stations or NDP headquarters, that excluded and mistreated them for decades, in addition to organizing another demonstration in December 23, 2011, in response to a woman's attack by the security forces.

Moreover, an important social issue of Middle Eastern societies was the chasm between the state and the society. Common people were treated with contempt by the native, post-colonial elite, which considered them as immature, dangerous and unready for democracy. The constant expansion of power and wealth of the ruling class was coupled with the rise of corruption, excessive military spending and growing perception of neglect of the needs of the population. In addition, the authoritarian Arab regimes denigrated the rights of Muslims to have their religious identity recognized by the political system, while the elites were looking down on them as uneducated and superstitious; in Syria, a strong sense of discrimination was cultivated by the government towards some ethnic or religious groups, most notably the Kurds. Therefore, the people de-



manded recognition from the ruling class, not just to overthrow their dictators.⁷ On that note, in Tunisia, Syria, Bahrain, and elsewhere, the uprisings started on the periphery, by marginalized groups.

Moreover, the lack of collective dignity in the Arab world was also considered a result of submission of their governments to external actors. In those countries, the ruling elites have always shared the vast majority of their countries' resources with Western capitalists in return for protection and personal wealth, leaving their own population under dire economic conditions. Western support for stability was translated by the people as support for repression, corruption and subversion of democracy, as well as subordination of the Arab countries to U.S. and Israeli directives. The demands for dignity was a call to end this situation; the chant "Raise your head high; you are Egyptian" in the Egyptian streets suggested the end of the erosion of the Egyptian prestige internationally with Mubarak's subservience to western interests, thus intermingling slogans about domestic and foreign policy issues.⁸

But has the call for dignity from the Arab people been answered since then? In most Arab countries, the answer is no. Economic opportunities in the Arab world are few and the lack of jobs persists—with the exception of the Gulf States. Only in Tunisia there is a thriving civil society sector, where the most job opportunities for young Tunisians can be found.⁹ But in the rest of the Arab world, poverty rates have been increased in the last years, mainly because of the conflicts, making it more difficult for common people to live a dignified life. As for the relationship between the state and the people, corruption persists or even worsens.¹⁰ With the exception of Tunisia, where the transition to a democratic system has been successful so far, in Egypt the situation has returned more or less to the state it was before 2011, with armed forces being even more directly involved into politics than before. In the war-torn societies of Libya, Yemen, Iraq and, most notably, Syria, issues such as dignity are hard to be addressed. Middle East is amidst turmoil, and the call for dignity has fallen behind at the expense of other pressing issues, such as survival.

To sum up, dignity was among the most important issues raised during the Arab Revolts of 2011. People throughout the Arab World called for economic opportunities in order to live a life of dignity, but also the right to be treated with respect by their governments and officials, and not with contempt. They also raised the issue of national dignity and self-determination calling for a state that is standing its ground internationally and not being submissive to Western interests. Today, the demands for dignity may have been quieted, but the issue is far from resolved. Nevertheless, dignity and the process that started with the Arab Revolts, calling for the transformation of the relationship between the government and the citizen, still has the potential to shape the Arab world in the future.



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The regression of political rights in the post-Arab Spring Middle East

Costas Faropoulos

Civil rights have played a key role in the Arab Spring, in the sense that they were one of the main claims of the revolutionary movements across the Middle East. Five years later, it is evident that the demand for political liberties has failed to materialize. In all countries that experienced the Arab uprisings, except for Tunisia, there has been a regression in terms of political rights of the people.

When Mohammed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor in the streets of Tunisia, set himself on fire in protest of the confiscation of his wares, he could not have imagined the avalanche his action would create. His desperate act echoed a deep frustration and anger that resonated not just with Tunisians, but with thousands of people across the Middle East. Bouazizi's self-immolation set the entire region on fire, and serves as a prime example of how the actions of one person can have an effect that truly transcends him/her.

The Arab Spring began with fierce protests in Tunisia and quickly spread to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria and other countries. Fundamental human and political rights, such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of association, have been largely suppressed in the autocracies of the Middle East. Hence, if there was one common element in all these uprisings, which otherwise had their own unique characteristics that would be the nature of the demands of the people in the streets: abolition of the autocratic regimes that had been reigning for decades, social justice, and ending government corruption. In Egypt, the main slogan of the uprising "freedom, bread, social justice"¹ echoed the need and desire for the creation of a free, civil society.

Despite the dynamics that appeared to prevail during the Arab Spring, even if only momentarily, five years later the results of the people's struggle are disheartening. Out of the six countries where the protests mainly took place, only one



managed to actually proceed with radical reforms. Tunisia is the sole country, where the people's movement has set in motion a democratic transformation of the country and the state. In Egypt the autocratic regime of Hosni Mubarak was replaced, in the end, by the totalitarian regime of Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. In Bahrain, the Sunni monarchy crushed the Shia majority uprising; while in Syria, Libya and Yemen civil wars rage for years now, wreaking havoc to the countries, with no signs of ending.² As a result, the aspirations for political rights remained unrealised and the pursuit of democratic reforms regressed.

Egypt

Egypt, along with Tunisia, was the epicenter of the Arab Spring. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets demanding change. The overthrow of Mubarak was the top priority of the protests, along with demands for social justice and an end to oppression. The uprising achieved its short term goals, as it managed to oust Mubarak after thirty years of rule. What followed, however, showed clearly the limitations of the Arab Spring. In the elections of 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) came to power with Mohamed Morsi as president. Its electoral victory indicated that the revolutionary movement had lost its momentum, despite its appeal to a large part of the constituency and its attempts to forge political alliances. In 2013, Morsi was overthrown by the army and replaced by Al-Sisi, who created another police state. With every branch of government controlled by the regime, there has been a regression of political rights, which are now in a worse condition than ever before. The press is heavily bridled in the name of national security,³ while the Internet and social media are heavily monitored.

Freedom of assembly is essentially banned in Egypt. The "Protest Law" that was passed in November 2013, makes demonstrations impossible without authorization from the Interior Ministry. There has been a massive crackdown on any protest, and as a result more than 40.000 people have been detained and accused of incitement, as they pose a threat to the country's "stability and security".⁴ Thousands have been convicted to prison terms or even death sentences. The Muslim Brotherhood, after the fall of Morsi, was designated as a terrorist organisation and was practically dissolved, and anyone arrested at a MB demonstration, was susceptible to be accused of terrorism.⁵ Nevertheless, the Al-Sisi regime has passed a new constitution in 2014, which clearly protects all the rights (expression, religion, assembly, press etc.) that it has been working so relentlessly to suppress. Worker's rights and trade unions have been particularly targeted, as after the Arab Spring they expanded significantly their influence in society, with hundreds of new unions forming. The regime has been cracking down on this emerging worker's movement, stifling any thought of dissidence.⁶

Bahrain

In Bahrain's case, the government dealt with the uprising swiftly and violently, with the help of Saudi troops. The revolution there never actually happened. The protesters, mainly Shiites that demanded proportional representation and an end to the sectarian discrimination by the Sunni King and government against them, never managed to achieve even a minimum set of goals, and the status quo in the country between Shias and Sunnis has remained unchanged. While the demands of the Shia



minority reflected their own genuine grievances, they also echoed the more universal fight for fundamental rights of the Arab Spring, i.e. freedom and social justice.

In the following years, supposed reconciliation talks were held for some time, but ended abruptly after the arrest of several leading members of the opposition. In reality though, the situation on the ground has remained the same. The oppression of the Shia majority in the country continues unabated. Prominent Shia political figures are routinely arrested and harassed. Protests in the country are essentially prohibited and their violent break up by the police is a norm. The press is controlled by the government, and the freedom of movement and worship for the Shia minority is heavily restricted.⁷ In essence, the Arab Spring in Bahrain only achieved to make the regime stronger. It neutralized any dissident voices and has now an even firmer grip on the country.

Tunisia

Unlike the other Arab countries that experienced uprisings in 2011, Tunisia is the only one where the revolutionary movement produced actual results. After the collapse of the regime of Zin El Abidine Ben Ali, the country entered a process of democratization that continues to this day. In the first elections after the revolution in 2011, the moderate Islamist movement Ennahda won, and formed the first government. In 2014, new elections were held and this time Ennahda lost. In an unprecedented for Middle Eastern standards move, the Islamist party conceded its defeat and allowed for the democratic transition of power to the winner Nidaa Tounes party.

With its democratic institutions in place, albeit the many difficulties and obstacles it has to face, the Tunisian state resembles nothing to the Ben Ali regime, which had all the attributes of a police state, with the press and the internet controlled by the government, and mosques monitored for extremist activities.⁸ In contrast, the 2014 elections were described as “free and fair” by international observers. Since 2011, more than 100 political parties have been formed in the country. The new constitution that was implemented by the parliament in 2014 explicitly enshrines freedom of thought, opinion, press and publication, as well as gender equality, pluralism and the rule of law as the foundational principles of the country.⁹ Nevertheless, while the reform process is evolving, there



have been voices critical of the government and its conduct. Recent terrorist attacks in the country have pushed the administration to implement a new anti-terrorist law, which according to critics could lead to abuse of power. A recent Human Rights report cites accounts of people, who claim that they have suffered abuse by security forces.¹⁰

Notwithstanding the criticism, Tunisia's experiment in democratic procedures has been indeed a rare occurrence in the Middle East. Several factors have contributed to the transition to democracy. Tunisia has had a strong tradition of secularism which was reflected in the revolutionary process. The people of the country could relate to demands for political rights, and were willing to pursue them. Also, it had an active civil society with political organisations that were able to influence the political establishment and promote the democratic process, when the chance appeared. Moreover, the Tunisian army continued to demonstrate its traditional apolitical ethos, by not intervening. Perhaps the most crucial role in the transition process, though, was played by the Ennahda Islamist movement. The party, after winning the 2011 elections, has steadily abandoned its most religious aspects of its platform, as they were not concomitant with the views of a large part of the constituency.¹¹ Consequently, its refusal to cater to extreme elements in the country has helped significantly to push the democratization process forward.

Conversely, Egypt and Bahrain did not possess the necessary combination of factors that brought about the success of the Tunisian revolution, i.e. active political organizations, a secular tradition and an apolitical military establishment. Thus, there were no revolutionary institutions capable of assuming power, once opportunity arose. In Egypt, the army continuing to play a crucial role in the political affairs of the country, and seized the opportunity to retake control of power, and successfully did so. Furthermore, the tradition of republicanism of Tunisia does not exist in Egypt or Bahrain. In this sense, the construction of democratic institutions that can resist regressive forces in society was far more difficult in these countries and the resistance of the reform bloc to these powers far weaker.¹²

The fight for civil rights was essential to the Arab Spring. It was a demand that resonated with people across the Middle East, as they struggled under oppressive regimes. It could be said though, given the complexities of each country that experienced the Arab Spring and the great differences between them that it was impossible for the universal demands for political rights to be achieved everywhere. However, the revolutionary process, even if it largely failed, has planted the seeds for the incubation of future political movements in the region.



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Post-Arab Spring Perceptions of the West

Evangelos Diamantopoulos

The Arab Spring reprioritized the main objectives of the general public in MENA, from fighting foreign interference to confronting internal challenges. Most people set democracy, freedom and economic prosperity as the core objectives of the Arab Spring, but, at the same time, they do not seem to believe that the West is effective or altruistic when promoting those values to their countries. Stereotypes and xenophobia against Westerners persist and, sometimes, they are exaggerated by popular conspiracy theories.

Some very interesting polls and researches give us an insight on how the people of the Middle East perceive the notion of the West. On the one hand, the Arab Spring, instead of washing out suspiciousness against the motives and the intentions of the West, it exacerbated them. On the other hand, the admiration of Western technological and economic development boost the will of local people to maintain economic relations with it. These contradictions foster colliding perceptions of the West and the “Other” among the people of the Middle East. While the support for violent actions against Western civilians appears to have decreased in most countries, many people see its cultural invasion to their countries as a problem. In turn, the spread of conspiracy theories also promotes unfavorable views of the “Other.” Irrational scenarios are very popular in the Middle East and cast their shadow on the public opinion, increasing negative stereotypes against foreigners.

According to the Arab Barometer’s pre and post-Arab Spring waves of research, there have been important changes in the evolution of public opinion’s perceptions and expectations towards Western influence in the Middle East and the North Africa (MENA) region.¹ In most countries, with the exception of Libya and Yemen where people appear to accept Western calls for reforms (57% and 47% respectively), citizens increasingly view Western meddling in their affairs as suspicious, undesirable and, most importantly, unable to promote democratic developments in their states. An interesting case is Tunisia where the 2013 poll shows that people have made a significant negative shift to their opinion on both the EU and the US contribution to their democratic development (26% and 21% positive vs 38% and 43% negative) compared to their answers in



2011 (36% and 30% positive vs 15% and 20% negative). However, another research in 2013 showed that nearly half of Tunisians (46%) would favor to have Americans as neighbors, a percentage close to the one of the Turkish (52%) and Lebanese (50%) publics and much higher than those of Egypt (10%) and Iraq (14%).² At the same research, respondents of most countries appear to reject in vast majorities any attacks against US civilians working for US companies in Islamic countries, but approve the attacks against US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan (58% of Tunisians, 57% of Lebanese, 49% of Egyptians, 41% of Saudis, 10% of Turks, 38% of Iraqis and even less among Iraqi Kurds). Western cultural invasion is viewed as a problem by more than 80% of Iraqis, Saudis, Egyptians and Turks.

Foreign interference appears to be of some importance on the people's top concern-list only in states where military interventions have recently taken place, such as Libya, Yemen and especially Iraq, according to the Arab Barometer. The economy, governance, and stability matter much more to the overwhelming majority of respondents, regardless of their nationality, than the ability of the West to impact their states. Furthermore, the absence of any large Western military campaign in the region, after the war in Libya, seems to decrease the number of people who would opt for a violent response against the West (about 42% and above castigate such actions), even though the negative responses on whether "the Americans are good people despite negative US policy" have increased. The majority of Arabs appear to wish for closer economic relations with the USA, but the general picture is not that clear on security or foreign policy issues.

Two other surveys, conducted in 2006 and 2011, by the Pew Research Center, focused on perceptions and stereotypes between Westerners and Muslims (not only Middle Easterners), providing us with some interesting data.³ According to them, Muslims tend to accuse primarily the West as the main reason behind their economic depression (53% avg.). In the post-Arab Spring survey, the lack of democracy (42% avg.) became also one of the top three explanations. Moreover, the vast majority of Lebanese (96%), the majority of Jordanian (57%) and about half of the Egyptian Muslims (47%) express a positive view of Christians. However, the public opinion of Muslims in Turkey and Pakistan appears hostile towards Christians (only 6% and 16% positive views respectively). There is an increasing tendency to assign negative stereotypes to Westerners (over 60% describe them as selfish, violent, greedy and immoral) in most of the Muslim majority countries (with the exception of Lebanon). The survey participants describe the relations between the Muslim world and the West as generally bad (over 60% in Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt) and put the blame on Westerners for that, without significant changes between 2006 and 2011. In 2011, they saw Americans and Europeans as almost equally hostile to Muslims but the EU profile has



worsened compared to 2006 (in Palestine, Turkey and Lebanon Americans are considered slightly more hostile while in Egypt and Jordan they put Europeans on top).

Conspiracy theories play a key role in the Middle East, as in other parts of the world, in shaping the public opinion's views on major events, such as the recent eruption of the region: 85% of Egyptians, 95% of Pakistanis, 84% of Tunisians and Saudis, 79% of Iraqis, 72% of Turks, and 70% of Lebanese poll respondents believe that there are some kind of conspiracies against Muslims.⁴ The USA, secret services, the Jewish lobby, or the EU have been blamed for all kinds of machinations in order to explain the dire state of MENA. Of course, the continuous lies by the local governments, the lack of transparent institutions and the regular Western meddling in regional affairs through inconsistent and failed policies⁵ are part of the collective memory, or trauma, and give good reason for this general mistrust. Even though, this skepticism may be considered a healthy trait, the conspiracy theories that fuel anti-Western sentiments and shadow the need for self-criticism⁶ often generate radical or violent ideologies. Thus, it should be no surprise that xenophobic conspiracy theories are used as a propaganda tool in an era when misinformation is everywhere online and spreads faster than ever before in one of the most turbulent regions of the world.

The Arab Spring itself is viewed by many influential Arab figures, as well as a significant part of the masses, as a foreign conspiracy, which aims to further divide the region. In the eyes of the people of the Middle East, the "greater Western plan" changes according to each one's political affiliation and/or sectarian background. Egypt is a good example, since the West was viewed by some to be behind the fall of Hosni Mubarak and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, and by others as the reason for Mohammed Morsi's removal by the army.⁷ Unfortunately, these ideas of dark secrets and invisible forces influence and sometimes even shape high politics in the Middle East.⁸ The Muslim public in Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, and Turkey overwhelmingly reject the fact that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by Arabs with an increased percentage in Egypt, Turkey, and Jordan in 2011 than in 2006.⁹ This conspiracy theory-driven political culture of the region gave also birth to another popular plot, which involves the Islamic State (IS) and the West. The terrorist group which has targeted Westerners numerous times is frequently analyzed by local media as the child of a larger Western-backed conspiracy to defame Islam or destabilize Arab regimes and control the oil fields as well as maritime lines of the region.¹⁰

The people of the Middle East fought for democracy, freedom and prosperity during the Arab Spring, but they increasingly reject Western interventions to impose these values. They prioritize democracy and wealth as their main goals, but, at the same time, they consider the West unable to promote freedom and responsible for their economic state, while a strong majority fears an alien cultural invasion; a fact that might lead many to overstate their "otherness" and reject Western values. Apparently, the more the West is getting involved in MENA region the way it does, the less popular it becomes to the local population. A heavy past and a rocky present fuel all kinds of conspiracy theories, which poison the relations of the two regions. Regardless of whether Western intrusions actually have a selfish or altruistic explanation and a strong propaganda mechanism behind them, they still harm their image in the Middle East. However, some positive answers concerning Western civilians in the aforementioned polls offer a chink of optimism for a better future free of hostility and stereotypes. The



West should be more concerned with its profile in MENA, while there should be a serious effort to combat popular stereotypes and misinformation in the region.

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Religion, the Arab Spring and its birthplace: Tunisia

Elisavet Paraskeva-Gkizi

Five years ago, when the turmoil in the Middle East started, the majority of people involved in the Arab Spring aimed for democracy, social justice and dignity. Today, after the overthrow of four Arab regimes, in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, after Syria's ongoing bloody conflict and after the appearance of the Islamic State, democracy remains the main issue, while the role of religion in politics is widely questioned.

Usually, in the West, the idea of democracy is integral to the idea of secularism. Nevertheless, this was not exactly the case regarding the Arab Spring, where the shift of Arab politics towards democracy was not a move away from religion, as evidenced by the rise of Islamist parties, both in Egypt (Freedom and Justice Party) and Tunisia (Ennahda Party).

Nevertheless, while the Islamists were the biggest winners both in Egypt and in Tunisia following the Arab Spring, they soon lost popular support. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, which rose to power after decades of political repression, has been accused of undemocratic practices, polarization and violence. The military took advantage of the growing popular discontent and organized a coup that toppled the Muslim Brotherhood. Many Muslim Brothers, including President Morsi, were arrested, and the Muslim Brotherhood was once again designated as a terrorist organization, on December 25, 2013.

In this context, after Egypt's turmoil and the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, Tunisia's Islamist party faced instability and drew lessons from Egypt. Thus, amid strong criticism and demands for resignation, the Islamist party agreed to cooperate with a new technocratic and secular government. People in Tunisia, as in Egypt, feared that the Islamists' rise would transform their societies, or even their identities, rendering them more Islamocentric. This fear started to become more intense when austere, apolitical and once marginalized groups, such as the Salafists, emerged on the political scene, and secular Tunisians realized that a potential Islamisation of their society might be imminent.¹

During the past thirty years, a new generation of young Muslims appeared, with more access to education, knowledge, and communication, via the use of cell phones, satellite TV, and the Internet. This information diffusion through online so-



cial networks had a significant influence on religion, leading to traditional religious authorities—such as Ulemas—and religious leaders losing their appeal. Gradually, young Muslims, by joining internet religious groups and by attending internet religious platforms, formed a new religiosity based on the individualization of religion and on the de-politicization of Islam, which some scholars describe as post-Islamist.²

According to Middle East expert Asef Bayat, this can also be seen in the Arab Spring demonstrations, which were reflecting a new interpretation of Islamic activism, one based on moral values, personal piety and ethics rather than political ideologies defined by religion, and particularly, Islam.³

Actually, some observers have argued that the role of religion in Arab demonstrations was an important source of motivation for protest, primarily due to psychological reasons, such as personal piety and behavior, rather than communal or mosque service. In fact, both in Egypt and Tunisia, those who studied the Koran were three times more likely to participate in the protests when compared to those who didn't. On the contrary, mosque attenders were no more likely to participate in anti-regime protests than the non-attenders were.⁴

In this context we could say that religion and, mainly, a personal interpretation of religion from within, was an important factor for mobilization in the Arab Spring, mainly due to the fact that “religious individuals are more likely to care about the plight of others and, consequently, the behavior of their regimes.”⁵ At the same time, the more the individuals became pious, the less evident was the support for political Islam and for a religious state, as supported by the decline of the Muslim Brotherhood parties in both Egypt and Tunisia. Actually, according to an Arab Barometer survey, following the Arab Spring, there was a significant decline in support for political Islam in the Middle East.

Particularly in the case of Tunisia—the birthplace of the Arab Spring—there was almost a steady preference for Islamist parties: 25% in 2011 favored a role for religion in government, compared to 27% in 2013. Nevertheless, while the moderate Islamist party Ennahda, which was outlawed during the regime of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, won in 2011 the first free election in Tunisia's history, it was defeated 3 years later, when the Nidaa Tounes secularist party won the 2014 elections.⁶

Ennahda's fall is indicative of the decline of Political Islam in Tunisia. Although religion remains a significant factor in politics, political Islam has lost its public support, as a result of the privatization of religion and of the strong desire for tolerance and pluralism.⁷ For this reason, Ennahda banded with secular political forces, such as the Nidaa Tounes party, and opted to become part of a coalition government rather than remaining in the opposition.

On the other hand, this choice provoked disappointment among Ennahda's more conservative elements; given that enough



of them had espoused a more conservative interpretation of Islam, calling for the implementation of Islamic law in the Tunisian State. Internally, as well as externally party-wise, there were enough who believed that Ennahda's reconciliation with members of the old regime constituted a betrayal of the Islamic sharia in the constitution and turned to a Salafi interpretation of Islam, and even to Salafi Jihadism, one which many young people chose to join. In particular, the Salafi interpretation of Islam among young Tunisians coincided with the rejection of politics, something which was evidenced by the marginalization of Salafi parties within the Salafi movement itself in Tunisia, in contrast with Egypt, where the Salafi parties had broader support from the Egyptian Salafi movement.⁸

When Ennahda took power there were serious allegations that the party had embraced Tunisian Salafi elements and that Ennahda might be using democracy as a strategy in order to impose the Islamic code. In fact, the party's leadership supported the participation of Salafi movement in politics, by maintaining an open dialogue with some Salafi leaders, in order to include them in the political arena. Nevertheless, after the assassination of a Nidaa Tounes politician, Lotfi Nagdh in October 18, 2012, and the assassinations of secular left-wing politicians Chokri Belaid (on February 6th, 2013) and Mohamed Brahmi (on July 25th, 2013), Ennahda changed its attitude towards Salafism.⁹

Amid strong accusations from thousands of protesters across the country that Ennahda was unable to ensure security and that it was collaborating with extremist elements in order to target its enemies, the party condemned the assassination as a "cowardly" act", effectively obstructing the democratic transition process."¹⁰ Moreover, following the terrorist attacks on the Bardo National Museum, in March 2015, and in Sousse, in June 2015, it changed its position towards Ansar al-Sharia, Tunisia's largest and most popular Salafi jihadist group, designated it as a terrorist organization.

After the 2011 revolution and the increased civil liberties that it brought, jihadi Salafi groups such as Ansar al-Sharia took advantage of the situation and grew free from state interference. Furthermore, the lack of attention to socioeconomic issues, since priority was given more to political and constitutional concerns and less to socioeconomic fractures, led to the disenchantment among young people, encouraging radicalization, further enabling the country to constitute a significant source of recruitment of jihadi fighters trying to reach Syria. It is indicative that in 2014 the Islamic State foreign fighters originating from Tunisia were estimated to be around 3.000 people.¹¹

In fact, many young people felt abandoned by the politicians and were disappointed with the revolution, given that nowadays in Tunisia 33% of the youth is unemployed. Ansar al-Sharia realized this government's social, political and religious gap, and appealed primarily to young people feeling alienated by the post-revolutionary government. Indeed, the dissatisfied youth, feeling their "low status" underserved and their place in society missing, are more vulnerable to violence and to Salafi Jihadism, as it offers them a sense of belonging.

This sense of belonging to a broader Muslim community is also indicative of the privatization of religion, considering that the personal interpretation of Islam has a significant impact on the radicalization of the marginalized Tunisian youth. Starting in 2011, the Salafi movement gained popularity through broad social engagement and through media propaganda, with Ansar al-Sharia obtaining a more visible status in the media than other groups.



At this juncture, one could point out that there was a notable rise, during the past 5 years, of Salafi Jihadism in Tunisia. Nevertheless, the country's public opinion, steadily supports a separation of religion from politics and Political Islam, which is evidenced by the considerable decline of the Ennahda party. Furthermore, according to a 2015 survey by the University of Maryland, 71% of Tunisians perceived negatively the prospect of an Islamic government as compared to 63% in 2013. In addition, nearly 75% said that the country "would be better off if Islam did not mix with politics", further stipulating a clear shift by Tunisians towards more openness and respect of other religions and cultures. Regarding the trust in the Salafis, almost 80% of the interviewees stated that they don't trust them at all.¹²

Overall, it may be said that Tunisia's Islamic democrats realized the Salafi Jihadist danger. In addition, they understood that in order to escape civil war, as was the case in Syria and Libya, or to avoid authoritarianism as in Egypt, they had to compromise and to maintain its democratic process without implementing a Sharia-focused political agenda. Ennahda recognized that the pursuit of a faster modernization of Tunisian society, with a true separation of religion from politics, should distance itself from Political Islam. Furthermore, after being considered a moderate Islamist for 30 years, Ennahda's leader Rached Ghannouchi, during the opening of the party's first congress on the 20th of May 2016, announced that the party is keen to keep religion far from political struggles, calling for complete neutrality.¹³

Perhaps this is "the Tunisian success story" and the fact that a new sense of Islamism emerged, one implementing a religious policy of a pious society and a religious-free state. Nevertheless, alongside this new socio-political situation, the fear of the rise of Islamic extremism in the country is still omnipresent. This is the reason why today, in Tunisia, more than ever, a broader debate about religion and politics is essential, in conjunction with a coordinated, both from the religious and the political sphere, de-radicalization strategy.

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Arab Spring: The evolution of the revolution in the Middle East

Maria Kourpa

The Middle East during the last two centuries faced great popular revolutions against oppressive regimes. The Algerian revolution in the middle of the 20th century, the Iranian revolution in 1979, as well as the Algerian civil war in 1990 are some examples of popular uprisings that marked permanently the history of the Middle East. It is without doubt that the revolts that are now taking place in the Arab world since 2010 have also been historically crucial, changing the perception of revolution. While all these revolutions brought out the issue of political Islam, the nuance of the Arab Spring was the revolutionary use of social media and the lack of anti-colonial demands.

The Iranian revolution has been a genuine mass revolt that set the example for modern revolutions. Even if it established the first Islamic state, it began as a popular democratic movement. Iran has undergone a harsh transition from a rural, conservative, religious society to a modern, urban one. The Shah's regime has been oppressive, while the Iranian people suffered from unemployment and poverty. What spread the flame though was the belief that the Shah was a western puppet. The revolutionaries consisted of both secular leftists and Islam conservatives under Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Shia opposition. Iranians ran to the streets to demonstrate and fought against state troops with arms seized from governmental facilities. Meanwhile, they organized strikes by workers, employees, government officials, universities and high school students. The revolution defined anti-American, anti-imperial and anti-Israeli sentiment as genuinely Islamic.¹ The Islamists aspired to influence other countries to create an Islamic state, liberation of oppressed people, and called for jihad against the regime, and the west.² Under the charismatic leader Khomeini, Islam and the Sharia law was established. The liberal, secular and left wing groups were suppressed as they were considered counter-revolutionaries. Iran has exchanged a pro-Western semi-authoritarian monarchy for an authoritarian theocracy.



The Algerian Civil War on the other hand started when the government—run by the ruling elite of the Independence War party—declared a state of siege against the Islamist party that won the first round of elections, banned campaigning in mosques and imprisoned Islamists. The latter had found a fertile ground in Algerian youth, who were suffering from unemployment and poverty. The Islamic Salvation Front embraced the dissatisfaction of the Algerian people and called for general strikes. The upheaval turned violent quickly; Islamists proceeded to assassinations and bombings in the country, as well as guerilla fights against the army. On its side, the government replied with spying, killings and terrorism, whilst it was heavily supported by western governments. The bloody civil war came to end nine years later, when government took officially the power and gave a blanket pardon to Islamists.

The Arab Spring was very different than any other previous upheaval in the Middle East, yet it had similarities with revolts in European countries like the Indignados movement in Spain, the Square Movement in Greece, and the Color Revolutions in Eastern Europe. People were organizing demonstrations through social media and protested without any political backing or leadership. The activists were using online media like facebook, twitter and blogs to share pictures, news and demonstrations live time. Of course, despite the similarity in the methods of resistance, every Arab country faced a different revolutionary fate. Countries with active civil society seem to have achieved more promising changes. Tunisia, the cradle of

the uprisings, set the example.³ Through a far from calm and stable period, Tunisia succeeded in changing the constitution, proceeded with elections and formed a coalition government. Egypt had also a successful uprising that led to the first democratic elections. That didn't last long; the Muslim Brotherhood, which won the elections, was soon toppled down by the army and now Fatah Al-Sisi—former military officer—is the new leader. Nowadays, things appear to get better—at least when it comes to political stability—although the regime is not less suppressive than its predecessors.⁴ The Gulf states managed to confront the minor incidents of the revolts with inducements and strong security forces; even though in Bahrain there is still tension between the Shia majority and the Sunni rulers. Yemen and Libya are now failed states and nests for jihadist groups, while Syria faces the fifth year of a cruel civil war and ISIS' onslaught.



The regimes of the Middle East and Northern Africa that faced their Arab Spring were authoritative, inefficient, corrupted and lacked legitimacy, while leaving a small space for social representation. In a political system of exclusion and discrimination, the only way of political expression has been mass protests and civil disobedience.⁵ When it comes to the time factor, the violent event that set the fire was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi that spread around through social media. Yet, the circumstances that led to the uprisings were around the corner for years.

The Arab Spring pointed out the issues of legitimacy and citizenship in Arab politics. The Arab population faced inveterate violation of human rights, inequality, injustice, unemployment and poverty.⁶ Subsequently, the demands of the angry Arabic youth were political freedom and economic opportunity. The legitimacy of the Arabic regimes was fragile, for the only consent holding the regimes in power was fear and suspicion towards the despots. The uprisings denounced the lack of political rights and popular sovereignty, as well as the disrespect for the decisions of the majority and the protection of minorities. The regimes had failed to form a coherent ethnic identity and a tolerance for religious and political diversity, which could develop a tight sense of citizenship.⁷

Big The big revolutions of the 20th century share the same demands with the Arab Spring uprisings, such as political freedom and economic opportunity. They also share the same media of revolt such as riots, strikes and demonstrations by urban youth. Nevertheless, in comparison with the 20th century revolutions that had tight organization and leadership, the Arab Spring lacked organizational structure and charismatic leadership, which could pursue the goals of the protests and form an effective strategy. The revolutions expressed indeed a demand for democracy and freedom. On the other hand, there was one demand that seemed to enclose and embody the others: the overthrow of the autocracies. Thus, the revolutionaries had greater concord upon what they were against than what they were for. Protesters were organized genuinely, but it appeared that there was no guidance that could lead to popular democracy. In this way, revolts were taken by institutions like the army or by Islamist groups. The “sectarianization” of politics also, inherited by former regimes, soon renewed the conflicts between the Islamic branches in many countries, but also between pro-democracy secularists and well-prepared and established Islamic movements and parties, which were already major political forces. Soon, and despite the fact that the Arab uprisings started as secular, the topic of dispute was once again political Islam.⁸

Remembering the Iranian revolution, we can see that history is being repeated in Egypt.⁹ In Egypt, liberal and Marxist groups were unable to suggest something new against political Islam and form social coalitions. The Muslim Brotherhood, which came in to power after the first elections, failed to establish a moderate Islamic state and further divided the revolutionaries. Unlike the Iranian Ayatollahs, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had no clear plan and Morsi was not the charismatic leader that Khomeini was. At the same time, a Salafist movement backed by Saudi Arabia appeared to be a strong opposition. This is when the powerful army in Egypt benefited from the entropy to take hold of political power in the country. As a result, the revolution was betrayed.

Also, unlike previous upheavals, the Arab Spring was an open call for democratic institutions. At least, revolts did not express anti-Western or anti-colonial demands like the Iranians did. On the contrary, the West west embraced the Arab Spring's demands



and collaborated with the revolutionaries, especially through social media. That brings us to the most profound, yet the most important difference of the Arab Spring revolutions. Technology has changed collective action, as information spreads quickly and unmediated between actors. Thus, the Arab Spring was democratic, bottom-up and leaderless because young Arabs coordinated and expressed without oppression through social platforms. That being the case, youth used online demonstration coverage or recorded personal acts like self-immolations to spread the revolution. When it comes to Egypt and Tunisia, opposition and revolutionaries abandoned the common act of urban insurgence and preferred—usually violent—kind of protests.

The Arab Spring is following some well-known steps that previous revolutions have indicated. For example, we can see that Egypt followed an Islamic turn-out like the Iranian revolution, as well as Syria, following the steps of the Algerian civil war. On the other hand, the uprisings inaugurated new forms of civil disobedience and expressed new demands that avoided religious conflicts and anti-western sentiments especially in Tunisia.

If we have to find a modern movement that resembles the uprisings of 2010, then the Arab Spring upheavals bear more similarities to the Green Revolution in Iran after the 2009 elections, which was also one of the first revolts to use social media in the Middle East. The Green Revolution was by no means a demand for a serious regime change. The protesters, backed by the opposition, were protesting against state repression defending their civil rights and proper democratic institutions.¹⁰ The Green movement, as well as the Arab Spring, created a new momentum for the social movements in the Arab world. There is no doubt that these last seven years, the Middle East and Northern Africa entered a new period for modern uprisings.

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Democracy after the Arab Spring: The people want but what do they truly want?

Iris Pappa

It was more than five years ago, when the Tunisian street vendor Tare al-Tayeb Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire inspiring that way thousands of people across the Arab world to fight for democracy and rise up against oppression. This unexpected phenomenon, however, that brought so much enthusiasm in the West and optimism to the Arab world, seems now to fade and this struggle for democracy is starting to mutate into a cry for safety and stability.

The famous slogan “The people want the fall of the regime” (*Ash-sha ‘b yurīd isqāt an-nizām*) chanted by thousands of Arab protesters since the end of 2010, revealed a long repressed craving for better governance and, at the same time, the strong dissatisfaction with the rule of the regimes. Aging dictatorship and absolute monarchy, political corruption, human rights violations, poverty and unemployment brought thousands of people to the streets aiming to overthrow the authoritarian leaders and their regimes in an effort to open the way to democratically accountable systems to emerge. However, five years after the “Arab Spring” started, this hope for peace and democracy has been replaced by disappointment and realism.

But was there ever truly an Arab Spring aiming to make democracy flourish or was it just a series of uprisings, triggered by all these years of suppression, without any specific ideological content?

The Arab uprisings succeeded to only some extent in toppling the authoritarian regimes, but failed to establish democracy. Even in those countries that there was a change in governance, the new governments that emerged are not stable and face several political and economic problems. Democracy failed to flourish. Toppling authoritarian regimes and holding elections is undoubtedly a crucial step in the democratic direction, but democratization is a complex process in which no single variable can prove imperative. It is not a bureaucratic process but the result of the interaction of various social elements with all their peculiarities.

It remains unclear, however, what constitutes better governance for the Arab people. Despite the fact that there is not a



common vision about the type of political system as well as the type of democracy that would be most appropriate, the majority of the Arab people are in favor of democratic rule (by 71%).¹ According to a survey conducted by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, the “Arab public opinion tends to define democracy in the context of political significance; assurance of rights and political freedom, the possession of democratic characteristics, and a regime that provides justice and freedom to its citizens. In contradistinction, security, stability and economic improvement received only 9% with regard to the definition of democracy.”² And while the majority of the Arab people are in favor of democratic rule, the way they perceive democracy differs. Surveys revealed that the greatest variation seems to exist with regard to the involvement of religious leaders in political affairs. The development of democracy and Political Islam, as Professor Olivier Roy mentions, “now appear to go hand in hand, albeit not at the same pace. The new political scene is transforming the Islamists as much as the Islamists are transforming the political scene.”³

Following the uprisings, elections were held in several countries, in which Islamic parties and candidates won the largest share. In Egypt for instance, Mubarak’s fall brought the Muslim Brotherhood to the forefront, whose victory, although short-lived, was an initial reaction against corruption, suppression, and bad governance. The Arab Spring was hailed by Muslims as a religious victory that turned political governance into religious governance. Yet, how compatible can religion be with the democratic rule that Arab people are in favor of? Mohamed Morsi, President of the Muslim Brotherhood, proposed some constitutional changes after winning the elections that would institute the power of the Muslim Brotherhood, and by a presidential decree upgraded the executive power at the expense of justice. The new institution was dismissed as undemocratic

and too Islamic, thus causing new mass demonstrations resulting in the Muslim Brotherhood’s final overthrow by the armed forces in 3 July, 2013. In Tunisia, on the other hand, the Islamic party that won the elections, decided to form a government composed by Islamists and non-Islamists in an effort to maintain peace and tranquility in the country. The gap created in the countries that succeeded to overthrow the authoritarian regimes was filled eventually by Islamic parties, despite the fact that religion was not the cause of the uprisings. Several factors accounted for their electoral success, ranging from the absence of credible alternatives to the fact that they were unscathed by accusations of corruption or crimes that were attributed to the authoritarian governments. Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco’s experience with Islamists in government gave the opportunity to see what the election of an Islamist party could bring. The po-



litical success of Islamic parties to rise to power—especially for the Muslim Brotherhood that was under persecution for many years—subverts many of the ordinary thoughts regarding not only Egypt but all the Arab states that seek to promote religion by the use of political power.

It is hard to determine, however, whether this transition can fulfill the wishes and demands of the Arab people for a more democratic governance. Some thinkers tend to describe Islam as incompatible with democracy since some interpretations conflict with democratic ideals; extremist Islamists, for example, claim that only God's laws (al-sharia) should be implemented. Although many Arab citizens share such views, they also saw negatively the rise of Islamist parties in power since they perceived this development as a setback for their demands for major changes regarding state and governance. Islam, however, is deep-rooted in the minds of the people, and therefore plays a significant role in the developments in the region. Islam in its historical course has entailed all kind of citizens groups, ranging from political parties to armed organizations and has constituted a system of faith with multiple manifestations ranging from the pragmatism of the Muslim Brotherhood to the dogmatism of the Salafists.

As already mentioned, the majority of the Arab people are in favor of a democratic rule and believe that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. However, surveys have also shown that economic growth is equal and sometimes more important than consolidating democracy. Given the diversity of the region, Arab countries weigh differently the trade-off between these two elements. Most Tunisians and Jordanians, for instance, prioritize the growth of the economy over democracy, while Egyptians are evenly divided.⁴ In addition, according to the annual Arab Youth Survey, Arabs were represented as valuing and preferring stability more than democracy by 53%.⁵ These results however, shall not be seen as if the Arab people turn their backs to democracy or as if the uprisings back in 2011 were not aiming to the emergence of democratically systems. It is a fact that in the countries that went through the Arab Spring, the democratic process was not just interrupted but also resulted in instability or war. Even in the case of Tunisia, 2015 was a difficult year with a broken economy and several terrorist attacks affecting its stability.

Concluding, the Arab uprisings, despite the global belief that they could lead to the spread of democracy, did not manage to provide a fertile ground for democratic systems to emerge. Low levels of consensus about the form that democracy should take, the absence of political parties and political visions, Islam's role in political affairs as well as the use of violence by the authoritarian regimes to throw off any democratic tendency, reduce the likelihood of a successful democratic political system to emerge. In the end, the fact that five years since the outset of the Arab uprisings most Arab countries are in worse position than before, heavily influence the opinion of the Arab people, who naturally feel that stability in the region should be for now prioritized over democracy.



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“Omnibalancing” for profit: Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia dealing with the Arab Spring

Spyros Katsoulas

In 1991, in the wake of the Cold War, Professor Steven David put forward the theory of omni-balancing with the aim of bringing state leadership and regime survival back in. Twenty years later, a series of uprisings across the Arab world brought down long-standing regimes and caused trepidation to others. Yet, it also brought in an opportunity for regime consolidation. Because states are not omnibalancing just for survival; they are also doing it for profit.

Although the theory of omnibalancing comes with many specifics, its core assumption is highly useful in that, besides threats to national interests and regional stability, it also draws attention on threats to a regime’s survival. The crux of David’s theory is that leaders of relatively weak states make alignment choices in order for them to stay in power and ensure survival of the regime. In David’s words: “the most powerful determinant of Third World alignment behaviour is the rational calculation of Third World leaders as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power.”¹ Since the so-called Arab Spring, to quote leading foreign policy thinker Robert Kaplan, “has not been about the birth of freedom but about the collapse of central authority,” it is interesting to see how the strong landlords in the neighbourhood reacted to the uprisings.²

What Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia have in common, besides being the strongest countries still standing in the Middle East, is that they are all ruled by strong autocratic regimes: Turkey is certainly a secular state with a secular constitution, but it has been lately moving down the spiral of authoritarianism; Iran has a theocratic political establishment since 1979; and Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with a devout Islamic leadership. The question, then, is how their leaders reacted when their neighbours’ houses caught fire and how regime survival considerations shaped their alignment behaviour.



In May 2011, early on in the Arab uprisings, Middle Eastern expert Steven Cook was speculating about an unholy alliance that was in the making “in the rather strange new world of the Middle East: Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey.”³ This “previously unthinkable coalition” was joining up, Cook argued, not just under the belief that the devil you know is better than the devil you don’t know, but also in defence of the status quo. For nothing creates stranger bedfellows, as Cook put it, than the common enemy: in that case, the common enemy was change. Indeed, autocratic regimes get “goosebumps” in the face of change, but was the fear of it enough to line them all up? Could it have rather been an opportunity for competition and profit? After all, as an Arab proverb goes, two swords—let alone three or four—cannot share one sheath.

In the pre-Arab Spring period, the region’s dominant Muslim powers used to challenge each other by standing for different models of statecraft as well as for different values. The tumult of the Arab Spring, as regional experts Khanna and Cagaptay argued, did not put an end to the rivalries, but rather expanded the scale, scope and way they were playing out: the meltdown of Libya, Syria, and Iraq and the weakening of Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt has effectively led to a “tri-axial Middle East in which Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia oppose each other in shifting alliances, vying to set a new regional order.”⁴ To bid for regional primacy, though, each ruler had first to consolidate his hold on power. So, how each of them fared in the ideological arena?

Having already abandoned its Kemalist worldview under the AKP government, Turkey perceived the Arab Spring as a unique opportunity to portray itself as a model for Islamic governance, engaging regional Muslim Brotherhood (MB) parties to this end. Yet, Turkey’s neo-Ottoman dream of a region ruled by MB parties floundered and rather than projecting influence, Ankara is now more isolated than ever, having long lost also its strategic relationship with Israel. Ankara’s prioritisation of domestic politics over foreign policy is partly to blame. As Professor Ahmet Kuru argued, “Erdogan’s foreign policy toward Arab uprisings has been weakened by his populist rhetoric. Rather than pursuing a well-crafted strategy toward MENA, Erdogan has merely used foreign policy issues to energise and expand his domestic constituency.”⁵ Five years since the Arab Spring started, Turkey appeared to realise that its Sunni-oriented approach and its overt MB sympathies did nothing but “ruffling the feathers of both Sunni and Shiite powers,” as Turkish columnist Semih Idiz put it, leading Ankara to a long shot: try simultaneously courting bitter rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran; yet Turkey’s foreign policy orientation, including its relations with the West, has turned into a real mystery, especially after the ouster of Premier Ahmet Davutoglu which brought “an increasingly confrontational Turkish President...closer than ever to total authority.”⁶

It comes as no surprise that the House of Saud would be among the most worried about the maelstrom of unrest in the Arab world. Yet, the Saudi Kingdom also saw an opportunity in them, developing diverse responses to the uprisings, in some cases supporting incumbent regimes against public demands of change—mainly in Bahrain and Egypt, but also in Tunisia, Oman, Jordan and Morocco—whilst supporting the opposition in the cases of Libya and Syria. As Dr. Youssef Bastaoros argued, Saudi’s ostensibly contradictory and risk-prone foreign policy aimed, first, at ensuring the stability of friendly regimes in order to preserve the existing advantageous regional balance and hence the legitimacy of the House of Saud; second, at balancing the power of contending states, mainly Iran and Qatar; and third, at increasing its influence in countries with which



it has had poor relations, such as Syria and Libya.⁷ This is “Riyadhpolitik” at full blast. However, it may come at a high price. As Saudi-expert Professor Toby Craig Jones observes, “stoking sectarianism will only empower extremists and further destabilise an already explosive region,” a worrying development considering that sectarian hostility may take on a life beyond what the kingdom’s architects are able to manage.⁸

In Iran, the revolutionary wave was self-righteously seen as a “natural continuation” of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. For the Ayatollah wanted to capitalise on the protests not just to regain the legitimacy lost in the 2009 presidential crisis, but mainly to create an understanding that the Iranian regime is firm, strong, and attractive enough to serve as a role model. Yet, Tehran’s early enthusiasm for the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain came in sharp contrast with its condemnation



of the Syrian uprising and its intervention in defence of the Assad regime. Eventually, by remaking the Syrian security sector in its own image and by spending millions in cash and oil, Tehran has laid the foundation for long-term influence transforming essentially Syria into a client state and consolidating its leading position in the so-called “Axis of Resistance.”⁹ Hence, in contrast to Saudi Arabia and notwithstanding its self-sustained reputation as a “revolution exporter,” Tehran is truly in favour of the maintenance of the status quo. Indeed, it is against the dissolution of either Iraq, or Syria, or Lebanon, wishing, instead, to see each of them thriving under friendly regimes: an Iraq under a Shia majority, a Syria under Assad, and a Lebanon under the heavy influence of Hezbollah. If they are strong, Iran will be stronger, the rationale goes. Alas, this policy may as well come at the cost of intensifying sectarian polarisation and triggering a Sunni axis. As a group of pro-reform Iranian academics told *Al-Monitor*, at the outbreak of the Arab Spring they held hopes that Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey could become the Sunni partners of Shiite Iran, but then became clear that the conflicts would sooner or later take on a religious and ideological nature. The reaction they fear the events of the Arab Spring would conjure is Iran turning into a pure Islamic state abandoning altogether its Persian identity. In spite of Iran’s recent openness to the West—following the 2015 nuclear deal—the academics also fear that the Sunni fundamentalism surrounding Iran will give further ground for popular mobilisation within Iran to the benefit of radicals.¹⁰

To the Turkish, Iranian, and Saudi leaders the Arab Spring represented a geopolitical as well as an ideological challenge, as they were now the ones representing the dominant governance models in the region. For the past five years, all three states have been struggling either to contain the uprisings or model them in their own image, not least for gaining credentials for their own authoritarian regimes. Hitherto, the results are mixed: Ankara’s hopes have come to naught, whereas Tehran and Riyadh have fared much better. Hence, the theory of omnibalancing, with its emphasis on regime considerations, is useful in reminding us that leaders’ perceptions, obsessions and even delusions matter in alliance formation. But if weak states are om-



nibalancing for regime survival, strong states are omnibalancing for profit, albeit, of course, not always successfully and not without collateral risks. As it is, the leaders of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia will keep omnibalancing on a tight rope, trying to satisfy both their national and personal goals.

NOTES

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