Understanding the 'Arab Spring': Justice, Dignity, Religion and International Politics

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Abstract

The so-called 'Arab Spring' (or the Arab Awakening) has caught the world –Middle Eastern rulers and analysts of the region alike– off guard. The region's notoriously 'docile' people, who have long been oppressed under authoritarian rulers, have revolted against and overturned a number of the long-standing regimes in the region and threatened to do the same to others. This article attempts to make sense of how this historic event came into being, arguing that the Arab Spring is the result of an interplay between external and internal factors, i.e. between the changing structure of the international politico-military order and domestic economic and cultural influences. It offers an explanation of these phenomena by focusing on three sets of factors: the 'immediate factors' that include the people's search for social and economic justice, their demand for social and political liberties, and their desire for dignity and respect based on their frustration with the existing oppressive regimes. The 'background factors' are two, which are broad in scope: the international politico-military context and the impact of religion. Finally, the article focuses on four distinguishing features of the Arab Awakening: the role of the military, the significance of cities and the urban youth as the principal actors of uprisings and/or revolutions, as well as their use of ICT's for organizational and ideological purposes which may have significant implications for the study of social movements and revolutions.

Keywords: *Arab Awakening, Arab Spring, Globalization, International Politics, Islam, Middle East, Urban Youth.*

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Introduction

Once again, the Middle East has been going through troubling times. In such tumultous periods, small groups and their seemingly unimportant activities may create unexpected effects. In the present era of globalization, moreover, the political butterfly effect may have become a reality, as indicated by the widespread demonstrations and uprisings occuring in a domino fashion on a global scale, from the Middle Eastern "Arab Awakening" to the Trans-atlantic "Occupy Wall Street."

The series of chaotic events called the "Arab Spring" -a label that its own actors do not like due to its implication of foreign intervention and backing[1]- is both a product of the tumultuous times that the region has been going through, and a case of large-scale recasting and reconstruction of social relationships, albeit in a chaotic manner in the Arab world. For the 'wick' ignited by a young, unemployed college graduate who set himself on fire on December, 17th 2010 (and the subsequent release by Wikileaks of classified American documents on the Tunisian regime), eventually turned into a huge conflagration (and a kind of spring-cleaning) that incorporated massive events, including the killing of thousands of citizens, the wounding and dislocation of tens of thousands of them, and the toppling of dictatorships of over thirty years in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen (and perhaps Syria in the near future) by the ordinary people. Moreover, the heat of this fire has been felt in East and West, from Israel to China and USA.

Although the process is still unfolding, and is thus difficult to explain completely at present, it is imperative to understand the Arab Spring in order to make sense of the recent (and future) transformations of the region. This article is an attempt to explain some of the major sociological factors that have influenced the process of the emergence and unfolding of the Arab Spring. Subscribing to an essentially Weberian methodology that favors multi-causal explanation in understanding complex human phenomena, the discussion in the paper tries to avoid reducing the causes of the Arab Spring to a single, all-embracing and all-determing factor, such as class conflict or religious fervor. Given the multiplicity of the backgrounds, social and ideological compositions, as well as grievances and demands of the actual actors who have taken part in the uprisings in different countries, ranging from Tunisia to Syria and Yemen, a multi-causal approach accompanied by a macro-sociological perspective is useful in explaining this highly complex issue.

Thus, the factors shaping the Arab Spring to be discussed in the article entail three sets of causes. First, the "immediate factors" essentially include the people's , and in particular the youth's, reactions to persistent poverty and their demand for economic justice on the one hand, and their more general (and long-oppressed) aspirations toward social and political liberties and justice, on the other. As reflected in one of the common slogans chanted across the region, "Bread, freedom and social justice," these two motives were complemented and were encouraged to be put into action by the people's search for dignity in the face of frustration with social and economic policies. A second set of factors include the main actors and components that fundamentally shaped the entire process, including the role of the militry, the significance of cities and urban youth, as well as their use of ICT's for organizing their protests and spreading their message. Third, the background, or second-order causes include two major factors: Islam's influence on political culture and the international politico-military context. While Islam (though not the only ideological factor) seems to have played the most important part as a unifying ideological background influence during this process, the international political context basically refers to the end of the Cold War and the polarization of the superpowers, which led to a crisis of legitimacy as well as an absence of economic, political and military support for the (former) dictatorial regimes in the Middle East. The recent US-led "war on terror" campaign further weakened the power and sovereignty of regimes in the region. International politics have also played a significant role in the configurations of the actions and reactions of major actors, such as the Muslim Brotherhood(s) and national armies.

At this point, it might be useful to raise the question of whether it is possible to examine the "Arab Spring" as one single entity covering a large territorial and social space, given the diversity of national contexts and country-specific conditions that underlie the events that have been unfolding since the early 2010. The answer to this question must be a cautious 'yes', for two main reasons. First, the Arab world obviously shares, in addition to certain economic and political commonalities, the same language, history and, to a lesser extent, ethnicity and religion. Second, it is possible to analyze a large set of events from a macro-sociological perspective without jeopardizing the historical specificity of each case, if one is cautious enough not to make all-encompassing generalizations about these cases. In this regard, the long tradition of comparative-historical

sociology helps us avoid the traps of making across-the-board general-
izations while investigating macro-social phenomena. John Stuart Mill's
famous formula, the "method of similarity," applied as part of the "logic
of scientific experiment" for comparative studies is particularly helpful.
This method entails finding key similarities among similar events taking
place in different contexts (in terms of both time and space) without mak-
ing bold claims about the context-bound specificities of these events. A
well-known example of the application of this method is Skocpol's (1979)
comparative study of the three revolutions that took place in radically
different times and places: France (1789), Russia (1917-21), and China
(1911-49). Supporting the famous motto, "revolutions are not made, they
come," Skocpol argues that all three revolutions were essentially an *unin-
tended* consequence of the actions of revolutionary movements due to the
breakdown of state structures under intense competition with other states,
which created a power vacuum and a loss of legitimacy, enabling the revo-
lutionary groups to take over the regime. In the case of the Arab Spring,
too, we might be able to discover a number of key similarities, such as the
ones mentioned above, which are applicable to different national contexts.

In making sense of the Arab Spring through these macro factors, the
analysis presented here is supported by a historical perspective, incorporat-
ing an examination of the historical processes that culminated in the cur-
rent state of affairs in the region; it also emphasizes the somewhat distinc-
tive aspects of this phenomenon –the role of the military, the significance
of cities and the urban youth as the principal actors of the uprisings and/
or revolutions, and their effective use of ICT's, including the use of 'social
media' and satellites in particular, in organizing and spreading their mes-
sage: "The people demand the fall of the regime." Our examination of this
process begins with the very question of whether the (at times violent)
conflicts and transformations that make up the Arab Spring should be
called a rebellion, or a revolution.

The Arab Spring: A Rebellion, or a Revolution?

Scholars studying political revolutions do not agree on what consti-
tutes a revolution or when a rebellion (or revolt) turns into a revolution.
Goodwin (2001: 9) defines a revolution broadly as "any and all instances in
which a state or a political regime is overthrown and thereby transformed
by a popular movement in an irregular, extra-constitutional and/or violent

fashion." There are also a variety of approaches in explaining the causes of revolutionary uprisings. While early, "first-generation" scholars such as Gustave Le Bon ([1913] 2004) and Pitirim Sorokin (1925) focused on crowd psychology to explain revolutions, the second generation focused either on psychological states (discrimination, frustration and aggression) (e.g. Schwartz, [1971] 1997 and Morrison, 1978), or on the disequilibrium within the "social system" from a functionalist perspective (e.g. Johnson 1966, Smelser 1962), or on power struggle and resource mobilization among different socio-economic groups (e.g. Huntington, [1968] 2006; Tilly, 1978, 1995; Stinchcombe 1995). Both generations, moreover, primarily focused on the revolutions that took place in Europe and America. A third generation of scholars (e.g. Paige, 1975, Moore, 1978; Skocpol, 1979), however, both expanded the scope of the study of revolutions by focusing on non-Western cases, and paid attention to 'external factors' (e.g. competition among states) as well as domestic ones (e.g. class conflict and elite struggles). Finally, starting from the mid-1980s, a fourth generation of scholars (e.g. Sewell, 1985; Halliday, 1999) both criticized and refined the earlier literature by paying attention to the role of ideologies and human agency, emphasizing the significance of the international context, integrating knowledge accumulation in the study of revolutions with that of social movements, and by further expanding the scope of the literature beyond Western conflicts (see Goldstone, 1980, 2001, 2003; Foran, 1993).

Furthermore, we see that the literature on revolutions usually stipulates three essential conditions for a movement to be considered as a revolution (or for a rebellion to turn into a revolution): (a) The revolt movement must become a mass social movement; (b) the process of revolution must lead to radical and systemic or structural changes and reforms, such as regime change; and (c) the revolutionary movement must use, or threaten to use, violence in the revolutionary process –though this latter condition is a contested one (Huntington, [1968] 2006). Clearly, the scope of all three of these conditions is based on essentially context-bound and *subjective*, rather than universal and objective, criteria. That is to say, it is almost impossible to *objectively* determine the point or moment at which a protest group has turned into a mass movement, or the extent to which the changes that have been (or might be) brought about as a result of the uprising are 'structural', and finally, the intensity of the use or threat of violence by the revolting group(s): all these are based on essentially subjective considerations, i.e. the methodologically, politically and ideologically informed point of view of the investigator. Furthermore, the above model

of revolution is based on the examination of the extremely violent revolutions of the 20th century, particularly with regard to the final condition concerning the (potential) use of violence, which may not necessarily be applied to all cases in the 21st century. Moreover, the notion of "peaceful" or "non-violent" revolution has already been recognized in the relevant literature (see Sharpe, 1973; Lakey, 1976).

Jack Goldstone (2011) posits more objective and more nuanced criteria:

> For a revolution to succeed, a number of factors have to come together. The government must appear so irremediably unjust or inept that it is widely viewed as a threat to the country's future; elites (especially in the military) must be alienated from the state and no longer willing to defend it; a broad-based section of the population, spanning ethnic and religious groups and socioeconomic classes, must mobilize; and international powers must either refuse to step in to defend the government or constrain it from using maximum force to defend itself.

Thus, by looking at the general picture in the countries presently and potentially affected by the Arab Spring in light of the above criteria, we can roughly make the following observations. All four of Goldstone's conditions were present in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, but not in Syria, the Gulf states and monarchies (Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia). On the other hand, "revolutionary violence" has been sufficiently intense in Libya, where many (former) governmental forces and officers were killed (with NATO's crucial help) and the regime leader Qaddafi was even lynched, and in Syria, where a portion of the army has defected and joined the opposition, as well as to some extent in Egypt; however, it has not reached comparable levels in Yemen, Bahrain and Tunisia. The main reason for the lack of high levels of violence in the latter countries, especially the first two, is that the regimes that have confronted the revolts in them have applied excessive violence (as was the case in Libya and Syria), and yet the opposition forces have not been successful in accumulating enough power to respond with similar violence. (In Tunisia and Egypt, however, the revolutionaries carefully avoided using violence, which has eventually proven to be a successful strategy.) Nevertheless, in terms of the first condition, the opposition forces in all these countries could be said to have created mass movements that have been more or less unified (against the oppressive regimes) as actors of the uprisings.

In terms of the second condition, which concerns the revolt's success in bringing about radical and structural changes, the situation is relatively clear only in Tunisia and Libya: Free elections were held in the former, resulting in the success of *al-Nahda* Party, an organization with Islamic roots, which could be considered a radical change given the former regime's famous (or infamous) enmity toward, and suppression of, any expression of Islam in the public sphere. In Libya, the former regime created and maintained by Qaddafi has been violently and completely wiped out, just like the man himself, with the crucial help of NATO forces, which put 'special emphasis' on this oil-rich country. However, real systemic changes have yet to come in Libya, a country that struggles with vital issues including the still-powerful influence of tribalism on politics and organizational problems in the maintenance of economy and everyday life.

As for Egypt, where the army and the remnants of the *ancien regime* are still dominant in post-conflict politics, though structural changes have not yet been enacted in political and economic institutions, there have been indications of change (such as the election results marking the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood) and 'hope' regarding such a systemic change. For this reason, Egypt can be considered to be a country where the 'revolutionary process' is still continuing. In Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, on the other hand, the possibility of a radical political change is not very high in the short run; for the Gulf countries and the US seem to have made a deal with the rulers of the first two (which involved the resignation of Ali Abdullah Saleh in the former), and two major powers, Russia and China, continue backing Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime in the latter. Therefore, we can only speak of a rebellion, rather than a revolution, in these countries. The determinant factor here will remain the fluctuations in the balance of power in international politics, and particularly the intensity of the pressures by the "international community." However, due to all these revolts, some armed and others more peaceful, the possibility (and hope) of the survival of a revolutionary change in the Arab world have become widespread.

Revolt and Revolution: Why Here, Why Now?

Since the American (1776) and French (1789) revolutions, which have come to be regarded as the 'classic' versions of this phenomenon, all political and military revolutions, including the Bolshevik revolution of

1917, have taken place in 'developing' countries, rather than in the economically advanced, Western-capitalist countries as was expected by Marx. This implies that, historically speaking, revolutions usually take place in less developed countries and in periods when the modernity's 'discontents' are experienced most sharply. In other words, the last three centuries of revolutionary history show us that radical changes/revolutions occur in the earlier, rather than later, phases of economic development (Halliday, 1999).

In this context, it is not much of a surprise that a number of revolutions have taken, and possibly will take place in a number of Arab countries that are economically relatively backward but which are simultaneously experiencing many of the negative consequences of political and cultural modernization. In other words, the Arab Spring has shown that a non-Western society that has been marginalized by the global capitalist system and suffers -due to this position- severe economic inequalities and political and social problems under authoritarian regimes backed up by the international order can (and does) develop a revolutionary dynamic (and consciousness) that may change the fate of its people.

Beneath the Commotion: Justice, Equality and Dignity

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, there are three main "immediate factors" that have contributed to the emergence of the Arab Awakening, including the people's search for social and economic justice, their demand for social and political liberties, and their desire for dignity and respect based on their frustration toward the oppressive regimes in the region. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, which sparked the protests, is a semiotic microcosm of the entire process and its carriers: A 26-year-old college graduate, who would have been expected to have become either an educated, urban professional or government employee, was willing to pay the ultimate price in protest because he was unable to find formal work and not even allowed to work in the informal sector as a vegetable vendor due to lack of economic freedoms, as well as facing humiliation by a female police officer (as a representative of the oppressive, patrimonial, corrupt security state) as well as a likely future of persistent poverty.

It is no secret that most Middle Eastern (including North African) societies have for a long time been ruled by autocratic dictators who have

oppressed their own people with an iron rule, particularly through military and police violence and an accompanying security apparatus, and have been supported by major powers in the "international community," particularly by the two superpowers, in return for the protection of the latter's economic, political, and ideological interests in the region. Saudi Arabia and the Mubarak Egypt backed by the US on the one hand, and Syria and Saddam-era Iraq supported by the Soviet Union (and then Russia) on the other, are prime examples in this context. These *mukhabarat* (secret service) regimes, as has been well known, have long denied their own people some of the basic human rights and liberties, including those of political participation, freedom of expression, association and travel etc., in the name of security and stability (see below).

Furthermore, people living under these dictatorial regimes in the Middle East have also suffered from perpetual poverty and economic inequalities since the very beginning of these regimes. Though not constituting the only cause of the current chain of explosions, economic factors cannot be mistaken. As Perry Anderson (2011: 9) puts it:

> Beneath the commotion now shaking the Arab world have been volcanic social pressures: polarization of incomes, rising food prices, lack of dwellings, massive unemployment of educated—and uneducated—youth, amid a demographic pyramid without parallel in the world. In few other regions is the underlying crisis of society so acute, nor the lack of any credible model of development, capable of integrating new generations, so plain.

These regimes established a corporatist system that concentrated economic activities and resources in the regimes and their loyalists, which was beneficial for the small group of autocratic rulers and their cronies but destructive for the masses -their wealth, life styles and economic freedoms- leading to economic stagnation and dire poverty. Moreover, the ruling elites have always shared the vast majority of their countries' resources, notably the oil, with Western capitalists and the Soviet bloc in return for protection from public upheavals as well as monetary reward, leaving their own populations under dire economic conditions. The failure of neo-liberal policies across the Arab world has created high rates of inflation (rapidly rising food prices, in particular) and unemployment, and a huge income gap between the elites and the masses, leaving the middle class as quite small in size –and creating "middle-class poverty" particularly in Egypt (Ibrahim, 2002a; Zubaida, 2011). A similar situation exists

at the country level, creating stark differences between a small of group of oil-rich countries and poor ones. For example, Saudi Arabia's per capita income was more than ten times that of the neighboring Yemen --$24,020 vs. $2,330 in 2009, respectively (Roudi, 2011: 3). In addition to low wages, people had to face a region-wide 32% rise in food prices in 2010, and a soaring youth unemployment rate of 23% across the Middle East, which doubles the global average, in 2009 (Goldstone, 2011). Although there have recently been high rates of economic growth particularly in Egypt and Tunisia, these have not been translated into reduction of inequality: ordinary people still face persistent poverty amid extravagant wealth concentrated in the hands of a few.[2] Such economic inequalities have been accompanied by widespread corruption and patrimonial mechanisms that have favored a small segment of the society, thus leading to an even greater 'gap' in terms of social and economic justice in many Arab countries (see Radwan, 2002; El-Laithy et al. 2003; Ayadi et al. 2007; Assaad, 2009; Bibi and El-Lahga, 2010; Alexander, 2012).

Coupled with the lack of basic social and political liberties, these economic hardships might be said to have created a great potential for revolt. For continuous violence and humiliation, as well as widespread corruption, patrimonial-clientalistic relations and favoritism, have worsened the effects of perpetual inequality and poverty, perhaps leading to the emergence of back-to-back revolts by (young) people as initiated by Mohamed Bouazizi. The psychological derive underlying all these factors was the search for dignity and respect by the long-oppressed and humiliated people of the Arab world based on their anger and frustration resulting from a long history of discrimination and violence, which shows -to both the rulers and analysts- that a non-material factor, something as 'elusive' as dignity or honor may well play a significant role in the initiation of a series of large-scale rebellions and revolutions, helping actors transcend the psychological barrier (the threshold of fear) necessary to embark on such a risky endeavor.[3] Though most rebellions and revolutions probably entail an element of a search for dignity, the magnitude of its impact seems to be a distinctive feature of the Arab Awakening, as in the case of the Palestinian *Intifada*.

There are several other distinctive aspects of the "Arab Spring" as well. For one thing, it has been more effective in one-party, presidential systems than in monarchies. For the rulers in the former are widely per-

ceived as despots due to their direct rule whereas the royal rulers often successfully act as trusted mediators of competing interests with their status above politics, as recently exemplified by Morocco's King Muhammad VI and Jordan's King Abdullah (Brumberg, 2011). Furthermore, monarchies are inherently more flexible: in the face of popular challenge, kings can still retain power while conceding a degree of legislative authority to elected parliaments, thereby absorbing some of the anti-regime energy and avoiding a systemic change or revolution:

> In times of unrest, crowds are more likely to protest for legislative change than for abandonment of the monarchy. This gives monarchs more room to maneuver to pacify the people. Facing protests in 1848, the monarchies in Germany and Italy, for example, extended their constitutions, reduced the absolute power of the king, and accepted elected legislatures as the price of avoiding further efforts at revolution (Goldstone, 2011).

The Rebellious City

Moreover, perhaps for the first time in history, cities played a major role in the series of revolts and revolutions. The 'Arab city' has functioned as the basic physical and social space of resistance and struggle: it has been the major site of organizing protests and mobilizing masses on the one hand, and the repression of these protesting masses (which consisted mostly of the urban youth) by the regimes, on the other. Thus, the uprisings in the 'Arab street' have not been organized in the countryside thus turning into a guerilla war (Libya being a partial exception), but rather occurred in the streets and squares (the most famous ones being Cairo's Tahrir and Tripoli's Green/Martyrs' squares), in conference halls and campuses, and on the virtual space that has been an integral part of the urban life style. (Even in the Libyan case, a number of cities have been recognized as major sites of massacre, bombing, resistance and revolution, such as Benghazi, Tripoli, Sirte, and Misrata.) A significant consequence of the urban character of the uprisings has been that the level of violence enacted by the protesters, who have usually adopted the strategy of occupying and camping on squares and streets, has generally remained very low – Libya being a notable exception again. On the other hand, the regimes challenged by activists have committed intensive violence (particularly via the army and police); however, this kind of violence often backfired, thus sig-

nificantly undermining their own legitimacy and strengthening that of demonstrators in the national and international arena.

Moreover, the city and its squares also emerged as the "democratic space of revolutionary occupation" (Döşemeci, 2011) during the Arab Awakening. This is true particularly for the Tahrir Square, the symbolic and actual site of the Egyptian revolution. The main strategy of the activists during the first phase of the rebellion was to physically occupy the square: hundreds of thousands of them poured into Tahrir and stayed there day and night for three weeks. The security forces gradually withdrew, and protestors grew in number, at times up to a million people (especially on Fridays), which left them paradoxically with both an opportunity and a challenge: they owned the square with which they showed their force and determination, but they had to provide their own security, food, cleaning and health services. Thus, different groups with different ideological backgrounds shared both the responsibility and joy of their collective action in Tahrir. In other words, they both challenged the oppressive regime and learned how to live together as an actual functioning community; and Tahrir became the site of these two (political and communal) forms of collective action. In this sense, the urban space functioned, albeit temporarily, as the stage of the presentation of a communal self and of the construction of a new, cosmopolitan identity. This double function, together with the basic strategy of occupying a physical (and social) space, has been an inspiration for social movements in other contexts (e.g. the OWS movement in the US) –and a challenge to the study of new social movements in social sciences.

The ICT's as "Weapons of Mass Communication"

Though occupying the urban space was a major strategy of revolution, there was a lot of collective action organized in the 'virtual space' as well. Thus, the distinctive role played by information and communication technologies (ICT's) constitutes another urban characteristic of the Arab Spring: large-scale protests and demonstrations were mostly organized through the use of previously unavailable ICT's, including so-called 'social media' (particularly *facebook* and *twitter*), cell phones and satellites (particularly *Al-Jazeera*). In making this argument, however, one needs to be careful about technological determinism: Although technology is not just an instrument that actors use however they wish, as it can and does influ-

ence social relations depending on the socio-historical context,[4] it does not have an agency of its own, either (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999). Treating modern technology as an independent, even omnipotent, force on its own misses the fact that no technological tool exists in a void but instead is created in and through social relations, including economic interests, military and political power relations, normative meaning systems and even ideological derives. Thus, the actors' use of new technologies during the Arab Awakening is only meaningful in (and dependent on) the social circumstances that conditioned the events. For instance, it was the youth, rather than the regimes generally ruled by old people, who made most effective use of *facebook* and *twitter* for organizational purposes –the 'old' regimes did not even appreciate the significance of 'social media' in terms of their potential to pose a danger for themselves until it was too late.[5]

Within these limits, then, one may argue that these products of globalization and technological revolution have functioned as "weapons of mass communication" (Mann, 2003) against the regimes and for opposition groups.[6] Three kinds of ICTs have played an important role in this respect: the satellite TV, the cell phone, and the internet, including *Wikileaks*, which helped to some extent to the sparking of protests by revealing some of the dirty secrets of regimes, as in the case of the Ben Ali family's corruption and wealth in Tunisia (see *Wikileaks* 2009). While some remain skeptical of the social media's impact (e.g. Gladwell, 2011; Heaven, 2011; Kravets, 2011; Penny, 2011), a recent study based on an analysis of over three million tweets, gigabytes of YouTube content and thousands of blog posts suggests that they actually "played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring" by spreading, among others, inspiring stories of protest and "democratic ideas across international borders" (Howard et al. 2011: 2).

Moreover, different forms of the ICT have been used in different ways and degrees: While text-messaging probably played a limited part due to its geographical limits (though it was important in organizing protests –see Kravets, 2011), various youth groups participating in the protests have created many facebook pages, and used them together with twitter and text-messaging in organizing their specific activities, in communicating with fellow demonstrators in their own country and abroad, and in spreading their messages across the globe from the early weeks of the Arab Spring (Ackerman, 2011; Beckett, 2011; J. Rosen, 2011; R. Rosen, 2011; Vargas, 2011). In Tunisia, for example, internet censorship was al-

ways common; already ranked below China and Iran in the rankings on internet liberty by Freedom House in 2009, Ben Ali's regime also regularly checked email content, prevented attachments and blocked some websites, such as *Dailymotion* and *YouTube* in 2007 and then *facebook* before general elections in 2009. However, while there were over 800,000 facebook users in the country by October 2009; this number had reached 1.97 million, approximately a fifth of the total population and over half of the Tunisians online, by the time Ben Ali fled the country in January 2011 (Pollock 2011).[7]

The use of ICT's provided the activists not only with effective communication and organization, but also with the opportunity to gain worldwide recognition, legitimization and solidarity with the people inside and outside the region. Such recognition and justification have probably affected the dictatorial regimes' and other governments' attitudes and plans regarding the opposition groups in the Arab Spring.[8] By the same token, these electronic networks (and the non-state media in the Arab world) have also played a role in undermining the legitimacy of oppressive regimes across the region, and perhaps speeded up the fall of some of them. Finally, 'social media' has also rendered the news coverage of the events more pluralistic, partly breaking the monopoly (and manipulation) of media conglomerates, particularly in the West (Schillinger, 2011).

In addition to 'social media', and often in conjunction with them, another venue that not only helped shatter the monopoly of the Western media but also contributed to the revolts and revolutions by spreading the activists' messages and undermining the credibility of the regimes has been satellite TV networks. The total number of TV networks broadcasting in Arabic is estimated to be 700 (Fandy, 2007). While the regimes used their state TV's as their mouthpiece to control the flow of information (and people), a plethora of private regional TV channels broadcasting in Arabic and other languages, especially 24-hour news channels such as *Al Jazeera, Al-Arabiyya,* and *TRT al-Turkiyya*, the majority of which took a pro-opposition stance, functioned as alternative sources of news and opinion from different points of view. These TV networks were both popular across the region and often integrated the 'social media', particularly twitter, facebook and Skype, as well as their own websites, into their broadcasting. While western media outlets such as CNN and BBC that have their own Arabic versions as well, generally adopted a more 'balanced' perspective, the alternative media based in the region were more influential in spread-

ing activist messages and fuelling anti-regime feelings around the region through their live coverage and by broadcasting often dramatic images.

Al Jazeera is a case in point, which deserves special attention. For though owned by the Qatari royal family, it has long been an important news source for the people of the region, building a reputation for professionalism and independence from political power centers in the eyes of the people in the 'Arab street', who had lost confidence in their national media. The latter were mostly controlled by a "Ministry of Information" in every country, which became a euphemism for censorship and propaganda (Allen, 2011; Hasan, 2011; Souaiaia, 2011). Moreover, *Al Jazeera*'s coverage of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan increased its audience worldwide, particularly through its English-language satellite TV and website; the killing, arrest and imprisonment of its reporters by the US army also added to its popularity. But it was during the Arab Awakening that its popularity and influence skyrocketed:

> Al Jazeera has consistently been able to influence public opinion. Many Arab rulers had accused it of inciting protest and dissent. Undoubtedly, the role Al Jazeera played in the Arab Spring was unprecedented, especially during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. Many Tunisians credited the channel with speeding the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime. In general, Al Jazeera was loved by the Arab peoples and loathed by the Arab authoritarians. … The role of Al Jazeera in inspiring the Libyan and Yemeni protesters is also undeniable (Souaiaia, 2011).[9]

In addition to Al Jazeera and other ICT's, what is called the "demonstration effect," probably played a role particularly in the initial phases of the process: the activists in Tunisia and Egypt showed the others that toppling the region's dictators was achievable. They also showed them what kinds of tactics and tools to use for successful protests.[10] The new media technologies may have also been instrumental in sustaining this demonstration effect.

The Youth as the Principal Actor

These ICT's have been effective only to the extent that there was a group of actors capable of making an effective use of them: the urban youth. Composing more than half of the population in the region,[11] the

young had already been taking part in 'everyday politics' under authoritarian regimes, though in a much less active manner (Bayat, 2009). This time they constituted the bulk of the protesting groups everywhere -from Tunisia to Yemen- and have played a crucial role in initiating and sustaining the uprisings. Thus, in Egypt, it was students and unemployed youth who first occupied Tahrir; it was also members of the April 6 Movement, young workers of the *Mahalla Kubra*, and the youth branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were most actively involved in the protests. Armed with different kinds of media and know-how (see below), these youth took advantage of the old regime elites' inability to appreciate the potential political impact of this advanced technology –for these elites were mostly interested in a different ('hard') kind of technology, such as fighter jets, arms and ammunition. In addition to this 'generation gap', a second probable factor in the emergence of the educated, urban youth as a principal actor of the Arab Spring is the fact that they were the ones who most strongly felt the effects of the increasingly widening distance between their expectations regarding social justice, economic opportunities and liberties on the one hand, and the reality of their own life, on the other. Coupled with constant humiliation by security forces, this realization probably constituted the most critical psychological threshold factor in the formation of a 'revolutionary consciousness' among them. They probably also observed different lifestyles entailing relative freedom and a level of affluence people enjoyed not just in the West but in some Muslim countries, such as Turkey, through the internet, TV serials and tourism (Salem, 2011). It is clear that the persistence of poverty and lack of freedom in the Arab world directly contradicts with their economic potential given the abundance of their natural resources. Moreover, there is another significant generational difference here: unlike their parents, these educated urban youth were not accustomed to living in closed societies under oppressive regimes and dire poverty as they had the opportunity to connect to the urban youth elsewhere in an increasingly connected world. Thus, it should not have been difficult to realize the enormous gap between their expectations --that like their peers they could also benefit from the fruits of globalization and/or economic growth-- and the realities of their societies.

Cooperation among youth groups was not limited to squares and campuses; it also involved shared plans and know-how. Moreover, it sometimes went beyond national borders. For instance, the "April 6 movement," aimed to be the core of the "secular youth movement of the Egyptian

uprising—a counterpart to the youth movement of the Muslim Brother-hood" (Pollock, 2011), collaborated with the Academy of Change, an Arabic online group promoting civil disobedience, to train its own members:

> [The Academy's] inspiration was Optor, a youth movement cofounded by a Serbian revolutionary, Ivan Marovic, which helped overthrow Yugoslavia's Slobodan Miloševic in 2000 by means of a "Bulldozer Revolution" that was remarkably peaceful: only two people died. Marovic later cofounded the Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies (Canvas), which has since trained activists from more than 50 countries. In the summer of 2009, April 6 sent an activist named Mohammed Adel to train with Canvas in Serbia. He returned with a book about peaceful tactics and a computer game called A Force More Powerful, which lets people play with scenarios for regime change. Taking advantage of the game's Creative Commons license, April 6 members wrote an Egyptian version (Pollock, 2011).

Thus, the educated urban youth and the 'rebellious' Arab city that were at the center of revolt and revolution in 2011 in a sense represent the "global political subject" influencing many other cities and their young residents around the world, thereby turning themselves into active 'makers' of globalization rather than simply its objects. These young people, from Mohammad Bouazizi of Sidi Bouzid to Wail Ghonim of Cairo and many others, have inspired many of their peers, joining the protests centered on social justice and economic issues in different cities across the globe, from Israel to Britain and the US. Of course, capitalism's capacity to absorb oppositional movements is notorious, and many of these movements have rapidly been fading away in the central cities of the capitalist world. (Though the "Occupy Wall Street" movement may seem to be an exception, it does not seem to have a potential for sustaining a radical reform process in the US.)

This inspirational moment symbolically invokes the 'pre-modern' period when the direction of social change (and of emulating and reproducing this change) followed mostly an East to West trajectory. At the same time, it demonstrates that the changes and transformations experienced in, and by, cities during the globalization processes can transcend their own localities and help create global connections across different regions. In fact, as demonstrations in the Tahrir Square, which genuinely inspired the OWS movement, show, the protest movements emerged within the Arab

Awakening, and various instruments and principles (ranging from their organizational aspects to their slogans) that they have employed have been transferred to political contexts radically different from the Arab street. In this way, these methods and principles have been circulated around the world. Therefore, it is safe to say that the inspirational character of the Arab Spring for the rest of the world also poses a conceptual challenge to social sciences that usually prefer to explain social movements and revolutionary process with reference to local factors.

The Military as the "Switchman"

A final significant element that has shaped the unfolding of the Arab Spring has been the military's behavior. Military establishments behaved differently in different countries; their positions vis-à-vis protestors and regimes have also shifted over time in some cases. In Yemen, security forces opened fire at students protesting against the regime on a university campus wounding over 90 of them on March 9, 2011 (*BBC*, 3. 9. 2011). The Yemeni army also violently suppressed demonstrations until the recent elections in late February 2012. Despite this, however, Ali Abdullah Saleh had to abandon power eventually for three reasons: first, the army largely controlled by his family was divided when his brother and a high-ranking general defected; second, the Yemeni opposition has remained largely unified; and third, the regime's foreign support (by the US and Saudi Arabia) has steadily declined over time. In Syria, where the dictatorial oligarchy is still intact, military violence began around the same time: on March 23, 2011, security forces killed 15 demonstrators; since then, according to UN statistics, the death toll has exceeded 7,500 (*CNN*, 23. 3. 2011, *CNN*, 28. 2. 2012). Forces that have defected from the Syrian military have recently formed a rebel army, the "Free Syrian Army," which has been carrying out armed opposition to the regime. A larger-scale defection from the Libyan army had quickly led to the loss of territory by Qaddafi, and eventually to that of his own life and regime. However, both Qaddafi's ruthlessness and determination to stay in power *and* NATO's air strikes made Libya the most violent of all cases. In Tunisia, where the army and police have traditionally been weak (Brumberg, 2011), the revolutionary process was relatively peaceful, and the dictator toppled relatively easily and fairly quickly –he left the country on 14 January 2011. It was ironically Ben Ali's own policy of keeping the military at a distance (though he himself came from the military), which eclipsed its role in politics, and left him defenseless.

His family's notorious corruption and wealth may also have led to resentment by the military (Goldstone, 2011).

It was in Egypt that the military's behavior was most ambiguous: Traditionally the army was popular among the people of Egypt, as the police and the *Mukhabarat* (secret service) were the main perpetrators of regime violence in the country. That is partly the reason why the army did not crack down on mass protests, particularly during the early phase of the revolution. A second important reason was the military elite's resentment of Gamal Mubarak, the heir-apparent to the regime, whose power was built, unlike his father who was originally a professional military officer, on business establishment and connections to political cronies, who had made large fortunes through government monopolies and privileged credits. Thus, as in the case of Tunisia, increasing corruption and concentration of wealth have alienated the military (Goldstone, 2011). Despite this, however, the Egyptian military has never wanted to abandon power, and still blocks smooth transition to democracy (Martini and Taylor, 2011). In the early days of the revolution (February 13, 2011), they refused the protestors' demand for transition to democracy, though not violently repressing them (El Deeb, 2011); more recently, the Supreme Military Council declared their plans to remain in power until 2013 (Shenker, 2011a). However, they did not hesitate to use violence if necessary: when the protestors re-occupied the Tahrir Square, the security forces violently took the square back on August 1, 2011 (Shenker, 2011b); more recently, on November 19, 2011, the security forces opened fire on the demonstrators in Tahrir, killing 2 of them and wounding over 600 (Shenker, 2011c). Therefore, the military's behavior (its activity and passivity) functioned as a 'switchman', to use Weber's famous metaphor for the role of ideas in history, that affected the *direction* of the events unfolded in various ways in different contexts.

We have thus observed that a number of military, socio-economic, political, technological and psychological factors have contributed to the emergence and spread of the revolts in the Arab world, some of which have taken the form of revolution. Thus, these material and non-material factors might be considered among the significant specific causes of the Arab Spring. In addition to these "immediate factors," we can distinguish two broader and long-term factors that form the background of these specific causes, and help them succeed and produce significant results in the Arab Spring movement. These macro-social factors include, as mentioned,

the international politico-military context and the impact of religion (Islam) on political culture. Let us start with the analysis of the impact of international politics.

International Politics: End of Cold War, Foreign Intervention, and the "Post-Spring" Situation

It is best to attribute the emergence and unfolding of the Arab Spring to a combination of domestic dynamics of the Middle East and 'external' factors. As Fred Halliday (1999) points out, revolutions usually occur in countries in transitional periods as a result of the pressures exerted by certain international developments as well as the internal contradictions of these societies.

Foreign Intervention

From this perspective, the effects of current international politics on the unfolding of the Arab Spring could be detected in at least three forms: military and political interventions by the "international community" into the countries in which conflicts had taken place, the consequences of the end of the Cold War for the region, and the possible positions that the principal actors of the Arab Awakening will take in the post-conflict period. The first of these, international intervention, which is the most concrete dimension and the easiest one to detect, has taken two forms: direct and indirect intervention. It is of course the case of Libya that represents the prime (and so far the only) example of direct military intervention by the "international community." Shortly after the armed battle between the opposition forces and Qaddafi's military and paramilitary forces turned into a civil war, the NATO countries, led by France and Britain, decided to provide humanitarian aid and military assistance to the 'revolutionaries'. They quickly started bombing Qaddafi's forces and compounds badly hurting them so that the opposition forces could relatively easily win an otherwise near-impossible victory over the central army. Some NATO countries, notably Turkey, were not involved in military campaigns but provided humanitarian aid only, in the form of money, medication, food, health services and shelter. Turkey and Germany as well as Russia, China and Brazil were initially opposed to the military campaign, but France and Britain, supported by the US, were determined to topple the old regime

in return for oil deals with Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) in the post-Qaddafi period (Roberts, 2011). Thus, the direct foreign intervention proved crucial for the success of the 'revolution' in Libya.

As for indirect intervention, we have observed plenty of occasions where international powers and regional countries have tried to influence the direction of events in different countries for their own interests. Some of these occasions include the efforts by P5 and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (particularly the US and Saudi Arabia) to impose peace in Yemen,[12] those of Iran and -again- Saudi Arabia in Bahrain, and the ongoing rivalry between Russia and Iran on the one hand, and Turkey, the EU and the US on the other, over Syria, where the former countries supported the Assad regime in order to protect their strategic interests and the current privileges they enjoy, and the latter powers supported the rebellious Free Syrian Army and opposition groups . Russia and China's vetoes on a recent UN bill that called for sanctions against the Assad regime and the former's symbolic military gesture as well as the subsequent efforts done by Turkey and the Arab League and supported by the West to apply further pressure on the regime demonstrate the intensity of competition between the two blocks in the process of indirect intervention in Syria.

End of the Cold War, End of Sovereignty

Secondly, the end of the Cold War created a context in which the two super-powers did not much require the presence of dictatorships in the Arab world, which in turn led to a crisis of legitimacy on the part of these oppressive regimes –or rather, revealed the *absence* of legitimacy of these regimes among their citizens. Furthermore, as Sayyid (2012: 3) argues, the post-9/11 'War on Terror' campaign launched by the US has fundamentally threatened the national sovereignty of many Muslim states, including the Arab regimes that had previously relied on external, super-power support for sovereignty as well as on an internal security establishment (consisting of the army, the police and intelligence services). Thus, the *mukhabarat* states' lack of popular legitimacy, combined with the withdrawal of strong external support, have together led to a crisis of legitimacy and sovereignty, and prepared the ground for popular uprisings and fall of oppressive regimes in the Arab world.

Therefore, the 'Arab Spring' is in a sense a product (perhaps an unintended one) of a fundamental change in the international order: the

end of the bi-polar politico-military order as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of a "new imperialism" (Mann, 2003) in the form of US interventionism following the September 11 attacks, which together undermined the already limited legitimacy and sovereignty of dictatorships in the Arab world. For these regimes were in the first place products of the bi-polar international order: they came into being as a result of a series of nationalist 'revolutions' (read military *coup d'état*s) that took place during the 1950s and 1960s, following the formal decolonization of the Middle East and North Africa. As military juntas, many of these regimes (of Nasser in Egypt, Syria and Iraq's *Ba'ath* parties, Algeria's FLN, Libya's Qaddafi and similar groups in Yemen) did not rely on popular legitimacy (though some of them, like Nasser, temporarily enjoyed popular support during episodes of conflict with Israel and 'Western imperialists') but were instead supported by the Soviet Union and the Cold War atmosphere, adopting the Soviet state system and an ideology of "Arab socialism" (Zubaida, 2011). Others (e.g. Saudi Arabia and pre-1979 Iran) relied on the support of the capitalist bloc and the US in particular. Following the *coup d'état*s, the former regimes eliminated all potentially rival political and economic power centers by destroying the previously-instituted parliaments and political competition, nationalizing the economy and strangling civil society. They used their political branches (the Jamahiriya in Libya, the Arab Socialist Party in Egypt and the Ba'ath in Iraq and Syria) as tools of domination and control in politics, thereby leaving no space for opposition and civil initiatives (Ibrahim, 2002b; Hamzawy, 2003; Pratt, 2007; Lust-Okar and Zerhouni, 2008).[13] However, this was not entirely successful, as the Islamic opposition in particular has successfully used informal networks for their primarily underground political activities (see below). In order to survive, all of these regimes relied on external politico-military and economic support (receiving substantial amounts of money, arms, information and know-how from the US and the Soviet Union as well enjoying their protection in the international arena) and on patrimonial mechanisms in economy and politics (creating a small of group beneficiaries loyal to the regime) as well as violent security measures and an espionage system in managing domestic affairs during the Cold War.

However, all this has recently been changed: as mentioned above, most of them have lost the external support systems following the collapse

of the Soviet Union (and thus of the bi-polar international order) and accelerated American expansionism during the last decade. This has led to a situation where the axis of threat to these regimes has shifted from internal (domestic opposition) to external (undermining of their national sovereignty) and they did/do not have much power to alleviate it. For this was a context where their fundamental problem of a lack of legitimacy had been revealed. Consequently, they were no longer able to enjoy the previously available political, economic and ideological privileges –they were left simply with dominant military power, and, as discussed above, the armies' behavior (itself a function of the generals' cost-benefit calculations in terms of legitimacy and power, rather than a completely 'free choice') has so far been important for the direction of the events during the uprisings, proving different consequences in different countries (e.g. Egypt as opposed to Syria).

At this point, it is important to emphasize that the 'Arab Spring' is not a conspiracy planned and put into action by international forces (e.g. USA or capitalism). For since the beginning of the process, two particular conspiratorial narratives, which have found adherents from both liberal and leftist circles, have been put forward particularly in the popular media. The first narrative holds that the capitalist system's need for new markets is the driving force behind the Arab Spring, for multi-national corporations, assumed to be controlling the major political centers and decision-making processes in the West, wish to expand geographically to sell their products to new markets either in order to recover from the existing financial crisis, or as an intrinsic drive to increase their profits. According to these accounts, "transnational capital" is often portrayed ambiguously as both an omnipotent actor in itself and a helpless creature in an unrecoverable existential crisis (e.g. Robinson, 2011; Jones, 2011).[14] The second narrative, on the other hand, has two variants: The 'leftist' one holds that though these 'revolutions' started out as pro-democratic, anti-imperialist uprisings, they may soon be 'stolen' by Western imperialism –as has happened in Libya. The adherents of this position also often argue that the participants of the revolutions other than socialist, 'progressive' ones, are prone to be easily co-opted by imperialism and to fall prey to the imperialist ambitions of Western governments, Washington in particular, which operate behind the curtains financially and militarily helping the 'reactionary' opposition forces (e.g. Mackler 2011, Badio 2011, Achcar 2012).[15] The second, 'liberal' version is more sympathetic toward this process, seeing it as part of a

long march toward democracy in the non-Western world and as a sign of the failure of Islamism in Muslim society. This view holds that the 1989 Revolutions that occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union followed by various "color(ed) revolutions" in post-communist countries (Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, respectively) and others (the failed Cedar Revolution in Lebanon [2005], and fall of governments in Philippines [2001] and in Ecuador [2005]) were part of the same singular process that had begun with Huntington's "third wave" of revolutions in 1974, and that the Arab Spring is part of the fourth, and final, episode of these glorious "waves of democratization" putting an end to a century-old "Arab exceptionalism" (Huntington, 1991; Dobson, 2011; Ergil, 2011; Gershman, 2011; Grand, 2011; Mason, 2011; Taşpınar, 2011; *WMD* 2012).

All these arguments, whether sympathetic or not, not only suffer from one-sidedness and a myopic view of the events, but they also deny the participants of the revolts and revolutions in the Arab Awakening any agency: they imply that the Arab-Muslim people of the Middle East cannot be a true actor in history and that, as Sayyid (2011: 1) puts it, "history and the political are the patrimony of the West and societies that are considered to be non-western can import history but cannot make it." For some of them assume -with no evidence- that the Arab Awakening has been inspired (if not created) by a US strategy (or conspiracy) to mobilize the masses of people toward democratic transformation, and that the US (or the West) thus undermines hostile and/or useless regimes in order to reaffirm its hegemony in the region. Another flaw of this conspiratorial approach is that even the anti-American or anti-imperialist versions of it help perpetuate the existing US hegemony (that is, both its economic, political and military dominance *and* its ideological preponderance) by preventing any imagination of agency and power without an American/Western agitation. In this sense, it is incorrect to call this process the "Arab Spring" –though I use the term for the sake of simplicity here.

Therefore, in understanding the Arab Spring, neither "Arab exceptionalism" nor "democratic universalism" holds true, for the "assumption that the Arab world was stuck in the deep muck of an authoritarian past is as misleading as the assertion that it suddenly rose up to join the teleology of global democratization" (Brumberg, 2011). I do not deny, of course, that there is a movement toward democratization in some parts of the world and that the color revolutions in the post-socialist regions are to

some extent connected with each other. (For instance, in the aftermath of the 2005 parliamentary elections in Moldova, the Christian Democratic People's Party adopted orange for its color in reference to the 'revolution' in Ukraine.) Moreover, international powers (particularly the US, the EU and Russia), have probably tried to develop (multiple and shifting) strategies to influence the direction of events in both Eastern Europe and the Middle East. However, such reductionist views that see the various unfoldings of the Arab Awakening (or 'color revolutions' for that matter) as a function of the capitalistic need for new markets, or of a long global march toward democracy led by a metaphysical 'invisible hand' (implying the imagined end of history), or of an outright American conspiracy, not only miss the incredible complexity of the events that are presently taking place by attempting to explain them with reference to an over-arching single factor, but they also reproduce the age-old *Orientalist* prejudices against non-Western peoples, and Arabs in particular. A proper method instead takes both international forces (without resort to any conspiracy) and domestic ones, trying to see this complex issue within the plurality of different (economic, political, military and cultural) sorts of power relations.

Thus, I argue that the Arab Spring is a result of an interplay between external and internal factors, between, in other words, the changing structure of the international politico-military order on the one hand, and domestic disturbances (in the form of economic inequalities and poverty, lack of justice and freedom, and denial of dignity for the ordinary people) as well as the actors' use of technology and the effects of Islamic political culture, on the other (see below). Such an interaction between domestic and international developments is also likely to influence the configurations of the preferences of different actors, groups and countries during and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, which constitutes the final dimension of the role of international politics to be discussed here.

The "Post–Spring" Politics

The 'post-Spring' elections held in Tunisia and Egypt have shown two significant tendencies: the emergence of divisions within the opposition forces, and the ascendance of Islamism. Transitional periods are already difficult in themselves, and post-revolutionary divisions among the diverse groups that came together against the regime as their com-

mon enemy are only natural. On the other hand, these elections have also revealed an already known fact: the strength of Islamic groups in Arab politics (see also below). Long oppressed by autocratic regimes, Islamic political groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*) in Egypt and *al-Nahda* in Tunisia, have finally found a relatively free atmosphere –and a chance to capture state power. The future of these two revolutions could thus be said to depend upon the configuration of relations (conflictual or consensual) that these groups will form with other revolutionary groups, the armies, and the "international community." It will be their main challenge to strike a balance between their own programs and bases on the one hand, and the demands and pressures of the latter three groups, on the other. The Western powers, the USA in particular, are already aware of this fact and try to find ways of making favorable deals with the prospective ruling blocks, as they have already done in Libya.[16] According to *Al-Ahram*, the US attitude toward the Egyptian *Ikhwan* has recently taken a positive turn:

> In the early days of the revolution US officials hinted that aid could be cut if the Brotherhood came to power. In recent meetings, however, US officials have adopted a conciliatory tone. In a 4 November address to the Atlantic Council William Taylor, the State Department's special coordinator for Middle East transition, said Washington did not view an Islamic-led Egypt as a threat as long as it was the result of free and fair elections (Abdel-Razek, 2011).

In turn, the Brotherhood has made similar friendly gestures, particularly regarding their positive view toward a free-market economy and willingness to allow foreign capital into the country (Taşkın, 2012: 86). *Al-Ahram* further reports that many foreign investors who met with Khairat El Shater, the *Ikhwan*'s deputy supreme guide, "were positively surprised to find ... the Brotherhood to be mostly capitalist in nature" (Abdel-Razek, 2011). In Libya, on the other hand, the victorious National Transitional Council has already made deals with Western governments as well as Muslim ones such as Turkey and Qatar that had helped the opposition topple Qaddafi. Needless to say, Libya's rich oil resources have attracted many capitalists, and despite local conflicts, a relatively peaceful transition to the new order (not necessarily a full democracy) is likely to occur, also most likely with the help of foreign governments. Other countries of the

Arab Spring where revolution has not occurred (or been completed) have yet to face the challenge of establishing a post-conflict order, which will necessarily entail negotiations and/or deals with foreign powers.

A second dimension of the post-Spring effects of international politics concerns the relations with regional powers. There are three major regional actors that are likely to have an impact on the new order: Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. These countries have the potential to influence both the people 'on the street' and the prospective elites of the Arab Spring, which is the reason why they are often mentioned in the public debates over the possible 'model countries' for the Arab world (e.g. *Euronews* 2011; Choksy, 2011; Kinzer, 2011; Slackman, 2011; *NPR* 2012; Yezdani, 2012). Turkey stands out as a possible 'model' due to her several advantages: She has demonstrated the compatibility of Islam and democracy, largely tamed her once-unruly military, has made (is still making) a peaceful transition to a full democracy, and has achieved a high level of economic growth even in a period of global financial crisis. Her rising profile as a regional and increasingly global actor and her 'soft' power (consisting of her active, independent and trustworthy diplomacy, her principled criticism of Israel, her democracy, and her lifestyle –as exhibited to the Arab world particularly through highly popular TV serials) also support her status as a possible model, as indicated by the popularity of her charismatic prime minister on the 'Arab Street' (Duran and Yılmaz, 2011; Salem, 2011: 1-3). However, her domestic problems, particularly the chronic Kurdish question, has hurt her image and status as well.

Iran, on the other hand, has a considerable influence over the Shia populations of the Arab world. A quasi-theocratic regime, she nevertheless places a version of Islam at the center of domestic and international politics, and frequently attempts to translate her status as the most powerful Shia state into a regional influence, which will very likely to increase if Iran is able to transform into a nuclear power. The difficult international conflicts with the West and her domestic disturbances constitute her weak aspects, however. Finally, Saudi Arabia, which represents the authoritarian model, also has her own weaknesses, including being a patrimonial state organized around a royal family (much like the toppled dictatorships of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya), and relative lack of social and economic liberties. However, her close ties with the West, which secures her from foreign attacks (the only effective threat to her security is Al-Qaida), and the religious ideology of Wahhabism constitute her strengths. She active-

ly supports the spread of the Wahhabi ideology and lifestyle around the world, and has already influenced some Arab countries, including Egypt in particular where the salafi-oriented *al-Nur* Party won the second highest number (about 20%) of votes in recent elections.

The intensity of the activities by, and the attractiveness of the above-mentioned advantages of, these regional powers will be effective in shaping the preferences of the new elites of the post-Arab Spring countries. The former's economic and soft (ideological) power influences will be particularly important in this regard. Although it is not possible to make keen predictions for the future at this point, we can observe that Tunisia's *al-Nahda* and Egypt's *Ikhwan* (and perhaps Syria's Brotherhood as well) seem more sympathetic toward the Turkish model; Yemen and Bahrain can, like Iraq, be more open to Iran's influence with their large Shia populations –unless, of course, Saudi Arabia and the West prevent this from happening. Other Gulf kingdoms do not seem likely to escape from the spheres of influence of Saudi Arabia and the West in the near future (Duran, 2011). Having discussed various aspects of the impact of international politics on the Arab Spring, we can now turn to that of ideology.

The Ideological Background of the Awakening

There is of course a variety of groups that have been involved in the Arab Awakening with their differing demands, expectations, motivations and ideologies,[17] ranging from liberals and socialists, to Islamists and the 'ordinary' religious people. They all brought their own views and beliefs to the struggle, though most of them seemed to have withdrawn from a radical expression of their ideologies –except perhaps for the socialists who have been a very vocal minority. In some cases, moreover, they have formed coalitions to fight against the common enemy -the regimes- such as the Egyptian *Kifaya* movement led by Islamic and secular activists putting their particular ideological motivations aside, but also keeping them intact (see below). I argue that among these different ideological orientations, Islam has been the strongest and most popular in the sense of appealing to more people during the uprisings.[18] Though global media outlets and some analysts often shy away from acknowledging the impact of Islam (e.g. Bamyeh, 2011; Grand, 2011; Rock, 2011; Zubaida, 2011; Brumberg, 2011), its influence on the political culture in Arab societies and on the psychological motivations of the people has been an important background fac-

tor in making the Arab Spring possible. This can easily be detected with a glance at the slogans and discourses of the activists taking part in the uprisings and revolutions, from the '*mujahids*' fighting against Qaddafi in Libya and the insurgents in Syria to the revolutionaries in Tunisia and Egypt and still to the protesters in Bahrain and Yemen, most of whom chanted "God is Great," referred to different Qur'anic verses and Islamic idioms, called the victims of revolutions "martyrs," and prayed collectively during demonstrations.[19]

Moreover, the effects of religious (and nationalist) ideologies on the 'Arab Spring' could also be detected when one puts the latter into its proper historical context. For the recent roots of the current 'awakening' go back to the early 2000s, when people across the Muslim world took to the streets in solidarity with the Second Palestinian *Intifada* (2000) and later to protest against the American invasion of Iraq (2003):

> In Egypt as elsewhere, the upsurge in democratic activism was not born in a vacuum. For many young activists in Egypt, the second *intifada* was the initial galvanising event that bonded their hitherto isolated voices. The anti-Iraq war movement (known in Arabic as *20th March* in reference to the first day of the US-led invasion) marked its coalescence (Azimi, 2005; cf. Nez à Nez, 2011).

The activism born as a reaction to these two developments eventually culminated in more organized movements (sometimes coalitions of groups with different ideological orientations) targeting more specific issues, such as the *Kifaya* movement, a coalition of Islamic and secular activists that was formed in Egypt in 2004-2005 to prevent the re-election of Hosni Mubarak. However, the *Kifaya* could not achieve its goal then, partly because of its leadership's reluctance to cooperate with the (illegal but highly active) *Ikhwan*, which prevented it from becoming a mass movement (Azimi 2005; cf. Rosefsky Wickham, 2011; Hirschkind, 2012).

During the current Spring, too, many Islamic groups have actively participated in the protests since the very beginning. Even in Egypt, where Islamic political activism had for a long time been suppressed and thus remained relatively invisible, the Muslim Brotherhood that initially preferred to keep low profile has played a leading role in both organizing the demonstrations and providing logistical and political support for the activists (Rosefsky Wickham, 2011; Hessler, 2011; Abu Toameh 2011).[20] Unlike many analysts, Western politicians knew this: In fact, during the

first days of the Egyptian revolution (2 February 2011) when Mubarak's supporters -armed and on camels- attacked the protestors in the Tahrir Square, Tony Blair congratulated Mubarak and warned him "against a rush to elections that could bring the Muslim Brotherhood to power" (*The Guardian*, 2 February 2011). As the results of the first round of elections have shown, Blair was right in this respect: the Brotherhood's FJP received about 40% of votes and won 49% of seats in the parliament whereas the salafi-oriented *al-Nur* Party got over 20% of votes. On the other hand, it has also been the Syrian *Ikhwan* that organizes most of the protests against the Assad regime; in Tunisia, too, it was the Islamic opposition represented by *al-Nahda* that played a leading role in anti-governmental demonstrations and eventually won the recent elections. The Tunisian *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, a more 'radical' and less popular Islamic group, was also at the forefront of protests in Tunisia (Grira, 2011).

Furthermore, in some cases, the attitude of Islamic groups has played a decisive role in the extent to which a regime has been influenced by the Arab Spring. Morocco is a case in point: When King Muhammad VI supported constitutional amendments enacted in June 2011, which somewhat enhanced the authority of the parliament and opened up more space for political participation, the Islamist opposition led by the Justice and Development Party accepted this compromise once the King promised that Islam would still be kept as the basis of national identity and law in the revised constitution. Advantageous for both the King (who reaffirmed his position as the "Commander of the Believers" above politics) and Islamists (who gained more power and recognition), this bargain was crucial for the *absence* of a potentially revolutionary upheaval in Morocco. Though it may have appalled secular groups and elites, who have no revolutionary potential in or by themselves, the deal has so far both saved the regime and satisfied the Islamic opposition that preferred to settle with reforms and peaceful transition (Brumberg, 2011).

Moreover, the way many (though not all) of these activists often voice their demands and grievances also attests to Islam's influence. Protesters have frequently drawn on the rich repertoire of anti-oppressive material emphasizing justice, which could easily be found in the cultural 'toolbox' provided by Islamic sources (e.g. *The Qur'an* 2:193, 16:90, 42:39). In this connection, Friday prayers and sermons, already an important venue for spreading Islamic messages, have become increasingly politicized during the peak times of protests; and many mosques (particularly those con-

trolled by the *Ikhwan*) functioned as a locus of anti-government agitation and logistical centers of preparation for demonstrations (Abu Toameh, 2011; *The Telegraph*, 2011; Hessler, 2011).[21] Furthermore, prominent religious leaders' calls (through not only sermons but also the internet and *Al Jazeera*) for the people to stand against oppression and join anti-regime protests across the region have been influential in some circles of society who were less likely to be moved by secular groups and motives.[22] Finally, the fact that activists in both Tunisia and Egypt have expressed solidarity with Palestinian resistance against Israel from the very beginning generating a positive response by the latter (in fact, having left Syria, Hamas has also recently announced its full support for the Syrian opposition), undermines the argument that the 'Jasmine' and 'Nile' revolutions "seemed to eschew religion and nationalism in favour of classic political demands of liberty, democracy and economic justice" (Zubaida, 2011), an argument that also ignores the fact that justice and overthrow of tyranny are core elements of the Islamic opposition's discourse in the region.

    In fact, it is no surprise that much of the ideological ground for the Arab Awakening has been nurtured by Islamic concepts and motives, given the fact that the political culture of these countries has been deeply influenced by religion and that Islam has historically been one of the most important social forces in them.[23] Furthermore, Islamic opposition movements have almost always constituted the biggest challenge to the secular regimes in the region (Ibrahim, 2002c; Rosefsky Wickham, 2002; Hirschkind, 2006). As mentioned above, these regimes emerged in the Cold-War atmosphere, adopting socialist or nationalist policies –and often a mixture of both. Various Islamic groups, particularly the *Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*, an international organization active especially in Egypt and Syria, were not only armed with a spirit of resistance derived from a modern(ist) and highly politicized re-interpretation of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, but they also had the "advantage of being able to work through mosques and charities, and the ability to dispense goods, services and jobs [which] became ever more important after the withdrawal of state services and subsidies" (Zubaida, 2011). Working independently of the state, Islamic welfare and charity organizations have played a significant role in alleviating poverty and reducing inequality; they were also effective in strengthening social networks that connected middle-class people, particularly professionals, with lower class citizens through volunteers and activists. Solidarity and trust were fostered "along these horizontal lines, indirectly leading to the

development of new social networks and, potentially, the diffusion of new ideas" (Clark, 2004: 4). Islamic opposition has also capitalized on the neo-liberal policies that have "led to the transfer of state assets to a narrow circle of cronies around the dynasties of ruling figures, opening the way for much gain through contracts, licenses and rampant corruption" since the 1980s (Zubaida, 2011).

Meanwhile, the autocratic regimes in the Arab world often worked as "protection rackets" which provided different "groups -ethnic or religious minorities, the business sector, and secular activists- with a haven from the uncertainties of an open democratic process" (Brumberg, 2011; cf. Shehata, 2009). They were crystallized either as "total autocracies" that did not allow any civil political activity as in the cases of Ba'athist Syria and Iraq or Bahrain, or as "liberalized autocracies" (Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen) that needed some measure of open, but state-controlled, participation in electoral politics, civil society and the media (Brumberg, 2002). Though it made them dependent on the regime, secular groups (and big business) were generally happy with this system because they had bought into the idea of an Islamist threat successfully marketed by the dictators "via the state-controlled press, state-owned think tanks and universities" (Brumberg, 2011). More recently, however, this protection system began to malfunction due to above-mentioned 'immediate' and 'background' factors (increasing inequality and perpetual poverty, worsened repression and corruption, lack of liberties, and international pressures etc.). Consequently, there has been a rapprochement between Islamic and secular groups during the Arab Awakening, resulting in the emergence of alliances (e.g. the *Kifaya* movement in Egypt). 'Post-Spring' competition and elections show, however, that it is the Islamic groups that have taken advantage of the erosion of the old system through their deeper penetration into the society.

Conclusion

Revolutionary transformations in the modern world are an *unintended* consequence of the interplay between internal contradictions and the dynamics of the societies in transition on the one hand, and the pressing impact of international structures and institutions upon those regimes that try resist to changing circumstances, on the other. Also, the desire for a speeded-up economic development plays a part in such transformations

as well. All three factors have been present in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt; and they are relevant (in different degrees) to others that have not experienced revolution (yet), such as Syria, Yemen, Iran, and many of the former Soviet republics.

The series of revolts and revolutions that have occurred in a domino fashion in the Middle East during the so-called 'Arab Spring' exemplifies a near-inevitable end of the authoritarian regimes that fail to meet the needs and expectations of their citizens, particularly the educated urban youth, in a context in which political openness is a norm and a certain level of economic growth has been achieved (or seems achievable) in an increasingly integrated world due to the globalization of goods, services, ideas and images. However, these events are not to be understood teleologically as the last episode or "wave" of the global democratization process that has been ongoing for the last two decades, an idea that assumes the centrality of the Western institutions and thought, and denies agency to the actors of the Arab Awakening. Rather, this event refers to a reconstruction of the Middle East within the framework of the aspirations and demands of the new generations, who have grown up in cities and are educated, for justice, dignity, affluence and freedom that have brought the end of the Western-backed oppressive regimes. Finally, although it is ultimately the organizational power that matters, the Arab Spring also means, considering Mohamed Bouazizi (and others) who defied the overwhelming authority of regimes by setting their bodies aflame, that ordinary 'butterflies' with fire in their wings can actually turn into larger-than-life figures by helping to tear seemingly invincible structures to shreds and topple the seemingly indestructible dictators who are attracted like moths to the glittering flames of power.

Endnotes

1. Personal conversation with Nadia Mostafa, a professor of International Relations at Cairo University and a leader of the "Egyptian Revolution" (July 2011).

2. On May 3, 2011, the Swiss government declared that it would freeze $1 billion worth of assets that belonged to Qaddafi, Mubarak and Ben Ali (BBC, May 3, 2011). The Mubarak family is reported to have accumulated a wealth of between $40 billion and $70 billion, and 39 officials and businessmen close to Gamal Mubarak to have made fortunes averaging more than $1 billion each (Goldstone, 2011). According to an official Egyptian survey done in 2005, 92% of all those unemployed were below the age of 30. About half of all the unemployed were in the 20-25 age group; and the unemployment rate for this group was between 30-40% during 1995-2005. Moreover, the unemployment rate was much higher among the better educated, and the rate among women was three times higher than among men. The rates were also slightly higher in urban areas (Hassan and Sassanpour, 2008: 4-7). Furthermore, 25% of self-employed households in non-agricultural activities were poor (El-Laithy et al. 2003). According to another survey by the Egyptian Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) done in 2007, 70% of jobs were secured through favoritism (Hassan and Sassanpour, 2008: 11).

3. In fact, the Palestinians had already proven (and still continue to do so) that 'dignity' can very well form the föoundation of a strong and relatively successful resistance against the occupation and brutal oppression of a major military power constantly backed up (politically, militarily and financially) by a superpower.

4. The impact of technology on social relations has been more visible during the last decades, as in the examples of nuclear weapons, computer technology, the TV, the internet, and the cell phone, which have revolutionized all spheres of social life from military relations to economy and everyday life.

5. The Ba'ath regime in Syria, which is still holding, is an exception to this: not only are there many pro-Assad facebook sites but a number of online activists, who call themselves the "Syrian Electronic Army," have also been waging a cyber war against Western and oppositional targets (see Syrian Electronic Army, 2012; Amos, 2011; Noman, 2012).

6. In fact, the use of information technologies by political opposition groups is not new in the Middle East. Hirschkind (2006) has shown how a popular Islamic media form, the cassette sermon, produces an "ethical soundscape" and different forms of Islamic "counterpublics" thereby transforming the political geography of the region. The quick adoption of new ICT's by protestors in all countries affected by the 'Arab Spring' can thus be read as a reproduction of an already familiar strategy in religious-political struggle –though it is by no means only the religious opposition that has made use of ICT's.

7. Pollock (2011) further shows that a Tunisian online activist group called the "Takriz," who helped incite and organize mass protests against the regime, had actually started their online (illegal) activities back in 1998 against the regime despite heavy censorship on the internet.

8. That is why the Mubarak regime shut down nearly entire internet activity on 28 January 2011, which involved the "withdrawal of more than 3,500 Border Gateway Protocol (BGP) routes by Egyptian ISP's." Also aimed to block the communication among the activists, this ban resulted in the shutting down of the 88% of the Egyptian internet access on that day (Williams 2011). Likewise, Qaddafi ordered the turning off of the internet service in Libya as of February 18, 2011 (Reuters, Feb 19, 2011).

9. Recently, influential Islamic scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi praised Al Jazeera at a Friday sermon in Qatar, saying that it was "doing a great job siding with the repressed masses in Syria" (The Peninsula, 11 February 2012). But Souaiaia (2011) also notes that when the waves of protest reached the Gulf States, Al Jazeera's coverage became "inexplicably tame" and plagued with "double standards." Soon its managing director Wadah Khanfar resigned (or was forced to do so) and replaced by a "member of the Qatari ruling clan."

10. In fact, journalist William Dobson reports that Mohamed Adel, a youth leader he interviewed in Cairo, emphasized the impact of Tunisian protesters on embarking on their own Egyptian revolution in early 2011 (Dobson, 2011). Similarly, Carl Gershman reports that Sam Rainsy, a Cambodian exile, told him that "They [the Middle Eastern revolutionaries] showed that it can be done. Now people have the idea that change is possible, and that's the most important thing of all" (Gershman, 2011).

11. According to UN statistics, half of population in the MENA region is under the age of 25; the number of young people aged 15 to 24 has doubled in the last 30 years, increasing from 44.6 million in 1980 to 88.1 million in 2010. Also, median age for MENA countries, except for Qatar, UAE and Bahrain, was below the world average (which is 29) in 2010: it was 24 for Egypt, 21 for Syria and Jordan, and 17 for Yemen. Moreover, it has been the young people who have been hurt the most by worsening economic conditions: over 80 percent of the unemployed were below the age of 30 in Egypt in 2006, and 82% of the unemployed had never worked before; likewise, about 75% of the unemployed were below the age of 30 in Jordan in 2007 (Roudi, 2011; 2-5, cf. Assaad and Barsoum, 2007).

12. During this process, Hillary Clinton herself had a secret meeting with opposition forces in late 2011 (Personal conversation with a Turkish reporter who was in Yemen at the time; Istanbul, January 2012).

13. Pratt (2007: Ch. 2) also argues that the activities of some NGO's actually helped consolidate the authoritarian regimes in the Arab Middle East, rather than undermining them: these regimes manipulated civil society by frequently resorting to nationalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric and the discourse of modernization that helped shape the civil society and justify authoritarianism in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria. Lust-Okar and Zerhouni (2008: Ch. 1) agree, but also emphasize that this manipulation did not completely undermine civil society and political participation.

14. Others (e.g. Amin, 2010) argue that the Arab Spring represents the last big crisis of capitalism that started in 2008, which will necessarily lead to its collapse and the rise of socialism worldwide. The socialist participants of the Arab Awakening themselves often characterize their action as a "fight against global, transnational capital(ism)" (see e.g. *Comrades from Cairo,* 2011). The Western (particularly American) corporations' quick response and greedy attitudes in terms of investing in the region (e.g. in Libya after the fall of Qaddafi) feed this image (see e.g. Shane, 2011).

15. Another version of this narrative simply claims that the Arab Spring is an imperialist conspiracy, as "Americans are directly behind the turbulence or are helping the trouble makers [in order to] install new puppets" throughout the region (*Communist Party of India,* 2012). These narratives based on a charge of capitalist-imperialist conspiracy are sometimes 'synthesized'; a good example of this is a succinct comment (left on a webpage featuring Arab Spring photos taken by Zoran Bozicevic) by an anonymous reader who goes by the nickname "WolfyW": "There is no Arab Spring. Just agitation by Soros-funded interest groups to unseat dictators and replace them with foreign bodies" (Bozicevic, 2011).

16. A case in point is a recent visit by John Kerry, an influential member of the US Senate, to Egypt where he only visited three places: the Supreme Military Council, the Prime Ministry, and the Ikhwan's Freedom and Justice Party (Ikhwanweb, 2011; Taşkın, 2012).

17. Here I use the term "ideology" in a broad sense to refer to a more or less coherent body of beliefs, images, ideas and ideals shared by a certain group of people. Islam, of course, is more than an ideology, entailing also a set of moral principles, practices, and main tenants of a specific life style, but it also provides its adherents with a distinctive set of political ideas and ideals.

18. Islam's influence on political values is not necessarily confined to highly politicized, truly 'Islamist' ones. I use the term 'political culture' in a broader sense to refer to a large set of values and symbols that carry political (also in a broad sense) underpinnings that go beyond narrower ideological doctrines and party politics. Islam, I argue, has influenced the Arab Spring in both narrower (Islamist political groups) and broader senses. For example, leaders of Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) announced Qaddafi's death at a press conference, "even secular Muslim journalists started chanting 'Allahu Akbar!' [God is Great!]." The NTC also announced that Islamic sharia would be adopted as the main source of law in post-Spring Libya (Abu Toameh, 2011).

19. A well known symbolic turning point in the Libyan 'revolution' was the re-naming of Tripoli's Qaddafi-era "Green Square" as "Martyrs' Square" by the rebels who captured it on August 22, 2011. On April 5, 2011, journalist Sarra Grira observed for France 24 that "Islamists are at the forefront of anti-government protests" in the more secular Tunisian society. A video posted on YouTube about the March 1 protests in Tunis shows some people chanting "God is Great" and "There is no God but Allah" and carrying Islamic banners (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxN-ZgzvXl8). A month later, the protests resumed "but this time with a new twist: the emergence of a strong Islamist movement. During the last protest on Friday, April 1, in an unprecedented move, they even organised a mass prayer in the street" attended by thousands of people. A protester, Mohamed Amine Jelassi, 17, a student, complained that "women who wear the headscarf have less rights than those who don't: headscarves are still banned in schools and universities, for example. We're denouncing this kind of injustice and calling for the veiled woman to be set free." Badiaa Boulila, 24, a 'secular' student, said: "The religious slogans chanted by protesters on March 31 paved the way for the public prayer on April 1. Some people were saying that they were ready to 'die as martyrs', and claimed they were ready to face the police. Their positions are already quite extreme" (Grira, 2011). In Egypt more recently,

Sheikh Mazhar Shaheen, who is a popular figure in the Tahrir Square, chanted "God protect the revolution," in response, thousands of protesters shouted "God is great" (Egypt Independent January 27, 2012).

20. The Brookings Institute's Stephen Grand (2011) claims that "what has been most striking about the protests in Tunisia and Egypt is their non-ideological character," and to the extent they were ideological, "it is greater freedom and democracy, and not Islam, that they have been calling for…" He further claims that the Brotherhood in Egypt "was late to the party, joining the demonstrations in large numbers only on the fifth day of the protests." This is a typical long-distance Western 'analysis' that reflects more the analyst's wishful thinking and prejudices than the reality on the ground. He turns a blind eye to the hundreds of thousands of people chanting Islamic slogans and praying collectively in the Tahrir Square and elsewhere. Although there certainly were secular (liberal and socialist) groups among the activists in both countries (and they got plenty of attention by the Western media), Grand cites no evidence showing that they constituted the majority. Moreover, a 5-day delay in joining the protests should not be considered significant given the long history of tyranny and persecution of the Ikhwan in Egypt, unlike the secular groups that had not been subject to regime violence (Ibrahim, 2002c; Rosefsky Wickham, 2002; Brumberg, 2011).

21. Khaled Abu Toameh, a journalist who does not hide his dislike of the Islamists, acknowledges that: What many Western observers have failed to notice is that most of the antigovernment demonstrations that have been sweeping the Arab world over the past ten months were often launched from mosques following Friday prayers. This is especially true regarding Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Jordan (Abu Toameh 2011).

22. For example, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, arguably the best known and one of the most influential Islamic scholars in the world, has not only called repeatedly on the people to support the uprisings, but has also publicly condemned the leaders of the oppressive regimes to this day. On February 21, 2011, a few days into the Libyan uprising, he gave a sermon at the Friday prayer attended by tens of thousands of people in the Tahrir Square congratulating the Egyptian revolutionaries and calling on the Libyan people to join the insurgency. In a later interview with Al Jazeera, he also condemned Qaddafi's violent response to protests and pronounced a fatwa calling for his assassination by the insurgents (Michot, 2011). He further urged Muslim governments to recognize the NTC, and to send arms and ammunition to Libyan rebels (*Gulf Times,* 2011). More recently, Sheikh al-Qaradawi has issued several fatwas and declarations encouraging the Syrian people to fight against Assad and condemned the latter for his oppression (see e.g. al-Qaradawi, 2012). Recognized as a leading religious authority, not only are his fatwas and speeches very popular and widely circulated in the Muslim World, but his popular TV program, "Sharia and Life" broadcast on Al Jazeera, also "reaches an audience of tens of millions worldwide" (Kirkpatrick, 2011; see also Rock, 2011).

23. For an examination of the historical roots of the role of Islam in shaping political culture among both Islamists and secularists in the Middle East, see Ardıç (2012).

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