The Arab Spring Two Years On: Reflections on Dignity, Democracy, and Devotion

Nader Hashemi

The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life, Roger Owen (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 272 pp., $22.45 cloth.

Islam and the Arab Awakening, Tariq Ramadan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 256 pp., $27.95 cloth.

The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism, Hamid Dabashi (London: Zed Books, 2012), 150 pp., $134.95 cloth, $19.99 paper.

The Arab Spring of 2011 is widely viewed today as one of the great historical moments of political transformation. Comparisons have been made to the European revolutions of 1848 and the post–cold war democratic transitions in Eastern Europe, while some have spoken of a possible "fourth wave" of democratization.[1] These analogies make sense given that longstanding dictators who seemed impervious to political change, in a region known for persistent authoritarianism, were suddenly toppled by largely nonviolent protesters invoking the universal themes of political freedom, dignity, and social justice. From the outset, however, the Arab Spring was met by a small chorus of criticism and contempt from prominent intellectuals, writers, and politicians.

Reflecting on the uprisings soon after they began, the Princeton historian Bernard Lewis argued that they had little to do with democracy; what he found striking in the Arab Spring was what he called "the sexual aspect of it." Focusing on the critical role that young people were playing, he explained that "in the Muslim world, casual sex, Western-style, doesn't exist. If a young man wants sex, there are only two possibilities—marriage and the brothel. You have

Ethics & International Affairs, 27, no. 2 (2013), pp. 207–221.
© 2013 Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs
doi:10.1017/S0892679413000099

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

these vast numbers of young men growing up without the money, either for the brothel or the bride price, with raging sexual desire. On the one hand, it can lead to the suicide bomber, who is attracted by the virgins of paradise—the only ones available to him. On the other hand, sheer frustration."[2]

In a similar vein, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu famously described the Arab Spring as an "Islamic, anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-Israeli, and anti-democratic wave."[3] Veteran Middle East analyst Aaron David Miller, who was an adviser to six U.S. secretaries of state, has argued that, as far as the Arab Spring is concerned, "one inconvenient and politically incorrect truth stands out: the Arabs are much better at acquiring and fighting over power than they are at sharing it."[4] More recently, Nobel Laureate V. S. Naipaul recalled his initial reaction to the Arab Spring: "I thought it was nothing, really. It would come and go, and we'll be back where we started. . . . Chaos, one-man rule, which is how these things usually end in the Muslim world."[5]

This cynicism and pessimism about the future of the Arab-Islamic world seems to be shared by an increasing number of Americans. An October 2012 Pew Research Poll revealed that nearly 60 percent of Americans do not believe that recent changes in the Middle East will lead to lasting improvements for the people of the region, and a majority of Americans (54 percent) believe that it is more important to have stability (read: pro-Western dictatorship) in the Arab World, even if there is less democracy.[6]

What these sentiments fail to appreciate, however, is that the Arab Spring is not a single event but rather a long-term *process* of political change. Its precipitating factors were both political and economic; and while history has yet to render its ultimate judgment, fundamental questions remain about how best to understand the nature, character, and trajectory of the Arab revolts. What are the key historical reference points, the optimal analytical framework, and the most salient political themes that can help us make sense of the Arab Spring? These questions are extremely pertinent today given the perception that the Arab Spring seems to be coming apart at the seams —from Tunisia, where the government has resigned following the assassination of a prominent opposition figure; to Egypt, a country plagued by a constitutional crisis; and on to Libya, which is awash in renegade militias and regional rivalries and which possesses a weak central government. How can we best approach this subject?

Three recent books on the Arab Spring offer different points of entry. Roger Owen's *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life* provides an accessible historical account of the rise, persistence, and eventual demise of Arab authoritarianism

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

during the twentieth century; Hamid Dabashi, in *The Arab Spring*, deals with the themes of interpretation, bias, and knowledge production in the study of non-Western societies; while Tariq Ramadan, in *Islam and the Arab Awakening*, provides a thoughtful meditation on how Islam, reinterpreted, can contribute to the political development of the Arab-Islamic world. Writing during the early days of the Arab Spring, all three authors are optimistic about the political transformations that have taken place and about the future democratic prospects and political trajectory of the region.

Dignity and the Arab Awakening

The concept of *karama* (dignity) is useful in understanding the recent events in the Middle East.[7] We do not typically associate the theme of dignity with struggles for democracy. In previous uprisings against dictatorial rule in other parts of the world, this issue hardly surfaced in the way it has recently. It was a core theme, however, of the Arab uprisings, which united Arabs from Morocco to Oman. This subject remains poorly understood in the West.

The theme of dignity, or its converse, indignity, and its relationship to modern Arab politics is a multidimensional phenomenon. It exists both at the level of the individual and the collective. Recall the story of Mohammed Bouazizi. This 26-year-old street vendor from a small town in central Tunisia struggled to feed his family, for which he was the primary breadwinner. One day his weighing scales were confiscated by a member of the police force because he failed to pay a bribe. When he tried to resist he was slapped and spat upon. He complained to the local authorities, but his protests went unheard and he was reportedly further mocked. With nowhere left to turn, no means of making a living, and full of frustration, desperation, and fury, he stood in the middle of traffic outside the governor's office and killed himself in an act of self-immolation. This event triggered the Tunisian Revolution and the wider Arab Spring, rendering Bouazizi's life and martyrdom the stuff of legend.[8]

Arabs across North Africa and the Middle East immediately identified with Bouazizi's story on a personal level. His economic plight was theirs. His frustration, humiliation, and anger resonated and touched a deep personal chord. Copycat self-immolations soon followed, and the region quickly erupted in revolution. Around the same time a similar event involving the death of a young man, Khaled Sa'id, close in age to Bouazizi, galvanized Egyptians and led to the toppling of Hosni Mubarak. But the theme of "Arab indignity" also exists on a collective

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

level, and it is associated with a set of common historical experiences, which partly explains why it is such a potent force in the politics of the region. For the Arab-Islamic world the twentieth century was an extremely bitter one. European colonialism and imperialism thwarted the aspirations of millions of Arabs for self-determination. The desire to create one pan-Arab state from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire's Arabic-speaking provinces was dashed at the altar of British and French ambition. The state system that emerged after World War I reflected the economic and geostrategic interests of London and Paris more than it did popular preference on the streets of Cairo or Damascus. The birth of the modern Arab world thus left behind bitter memories and poisoned relations between Muslim societies and Western ones. This was compounded by Western support for the national rights of Jewish settlers in Palestine over those of the indigenous Palestinian population—the legacy of which continues to afflict the region and our world.

The aftermath of World War II saw the gradual loosening of European control of the Arab world and the emergence of a brief moment of optimism. Many thought that an opportunity had finally arrived for the realization of meaningful self-determination. But this opening did not last long. The region soon found itself awash in nationalist military coups, single-party states, and authoritarian monarchies, the latter of which were supported by the West. Within the span of a couple of decades a new postcolonial elite came to power and a familiar political landscape took shape. Yes, the new rulers were native to the soil and had Muslim names, but they started to behave in ways that were eerily familiar. A new chasm between state and society developed that replicated the old colonial one, only this time the ruling elites were Arabs instead of Europeans. The term neocolonialism is an apt description for this state of affairs.

In this context the Syrian writer Rana Kabbani has used the phrase "internal colonialism" to describe the authoritarian rule of postcolonial elites in the Arab world. With respect to Syrians, she explains that forty-two years of one-family rule was "much like the external colonialism of the past, [it] has robbed them and bombed them and impeded them from joining the free peoples of the world."[9] The Syrian human rights activist and opposition leader Radwan Ziadeh has similarly argued that we "need a second independence in Syria. The first was from the French and the second will be from the Assad dynasty."[10] These sentiments are widely felt and apply to Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and beyond.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Commenting on this core feature of Arab political life, the historian Ilan Pappé has referred to the Arab Spring as the "second phase of decolonization." What recent events have demonstrated, he notes, is the collective "assertion of self-dignity in the Arab world" after decades of humiliation, despotism, and despair.[11]

In *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life*, the distinguished Middle East historian Roger Owen picks up on the link between the colonial and postcolonial Arab state. The structures and processes of political rule retained a particular authoritarian continuity that over time generated deep resentment, he observes. "Domestically, the response of the new independent regimes was to try to augment their hold over their own populations using institutions and techniques, notably an increasing emphasis on policing, security, and the management of elections, borrowed directly from the practices of their former colonial masters" (p. 15). In highly accessible prose, Owen chronicles the origins and mechanisms of control that the Arab "presidential monarchies" used to maintain political power. The two key regime imperatives were survival and legitimation. Modern Arab politics "became a matter of personality, of personal character, and of family relationships in which questions of temperament, age, physical and mental health, and individual political skills stood . . . at the center [of] political life" until the Arab Spring shook the foundations of the Arab world's authoritarian order (p. 6).

The strength of this book lies in the connections that Owen makes between the political, economic, and historic contexts of the modern Arab world on the one hand, and the behavior of individual leaders on the other. This is best demonstrated in his discussion of the question of "Arab exceptionalism"—referring to a widespread and longstanding view in Western intellectual circles that maintains that somehow the Arab-Islamic world is civilizationally and culturally different (and not in a good way) from the rest of the world (especially the West), and that this explains why democracy has been absent, turmoil persists, and authoritarianism has prevailed.

This perspective has been popular in the West partly because it reinforces widespread stereotypes about Muslims, but also because prominent Western scholars such as Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, and Ernest Gellner have given this perspective an academic stamp of legitimacy. Owen engages with this thesis by acknowledging that a "case can be made for a type of Arab exceptionalism between 1970 and 2010 . . . [but] this is best explained by what I call an 'Arab demonstration effect' stemming from developments in the specially close ties that have united the Arab world since at least the end of World War II"

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(p. 153). Jettisoning an Orientalist explanation about an alleged enduring Arab or Muslim cultural essence, Owen unpackages, historically and comparatively, the debate on Arab exceptionalism. He focuses his attention on the unique regional history of the Arab world during the twentieth century by identifying a set of internal and external influences that shaped the political landscape of the region. In his reading, the demonstration effect of the Nasser and later Sadat models of government and management in Egypt were of paramount influence to other states in the region, as were the geostrategic policies of Western states toward the Middle East. Owen concedes that nothing in his argument is really new, but that there has been a lack of emphasis on, "the way in which both internalist and externalist influences helped to shape the emergence of strong presidential monarchies sustained by a common set of structures and practices concerned with security and postrevolutionary legitimation" (p. 160).

The Arab Spring and Interpretation

The foregoing narrative is easy for most Western readers to digest. The travesties and tragedies of authoritarian rule in the Middle East are well known, even if the extent of Western support for this regional order may not be. At a much deeper intellectual level, however, beyond basic questions of dictatorship and democracy, the Arab Spring has generated new debates over interpretation. How best can we understand these revolts and which analytical framework is most helpful? This is where Hamid Dabashi's *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* makes a contribution.

Dabashi, who holds a chair in Iranian studies and comparative literature at Columbia University, is fundamentally concerned with upending what he calls the "regime of knowledge production" that has distorted our understanding of the world. As he sees it, the famous slogan from the Arab Spring, "*ash-shaʿb yurīd isqāṭ an-niẓām*" (the people want to topple the regime), is a metaphor for overthrowing both dictators and conceptual categories, as well as the political terminology and intellectual frames of reference that are fundamentally Eurocentric in nature and the byproduct of a colonial mindset.

In many ways Dabashi's book is not about the Arab Spring at all. He simply uses this event as a foil for a radical critique of existing intellectual paradigms and concepts. Instead, he calls for a more inclusive universalism that incorporates the historical and political experiences of the non-Western world, and that is not

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

based on Western history and terms of reference. This is where the Arab Spring fits into his narrative. He sees it as an "open-ended" revolution with transnational potential that can lead to greater human understanding, including an appreciation for the "cosmopolitan worldliness" of Muslim societies (p. 39).

Dabashi is a postcolonial critical theorist, which means that his book is filled with academic verbiage that is almost unintelligible. For example:

> Imperialism has always been an Empire, and Empire imperialist, if we simply recognize that capitalism never had a center, and the civilizational manufacturing of boundaries was a heuristic mechanism to sustain the autonormativity of instrumental reason as the heteronormativity of benevolent progress (p. 37).

Passages such as this one abound in the text. But if one can get beyond his jargon (and anger) the book provides food for thought on how to see and think about the world and its problems in global terms, especially from a non-Western perspective. In calling for a more inclusive universalism, Dabashi echoes the writings of the Indian writer Pankaj Mishra. In his latest book, Mishra argues that it is misleading to think that the most important events of the twentieth century were the two World Wars and the cold war. This was certainly the case for the Western world, but "the central event of the last century for the majority of the world's population," Mishra argues, "was the intellectual and political awakening of Asia and its emergence from the ruins of both Asian and European empires."[12] It is for this reason that the Arab Spring is such an important and monumental event. The Arab Spring is the continuation of a longer struggle and quest by the Arab-Islamic world for self-determination from both external and internal authoritarian forces. To fully understand and appreciate the moral and political significance of the Arab Spring we must see things from the perspective of the people in the region and from their own historical experience, not from the perspective we in the West frequently use to relate to the Middle East (oil, Israel, "fundamentalism," "stability," "security," "war on terror," and so on).

Islam and the Arab Spring

For a Western audience, one of the most bewildering and alarming developments of the Arab Spring has been the rise to power of Islamist-based parties. This was not how it was supposed to be. One reason why the Arab Spring was initially widely celebrated in the West was because the demands of the protesters were decidedly secular. Moreover, we were repeatedly reassured that this was not

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

about Israel or the West but rather about internal Arab despotism; Islamist parties and actors played no role in instigating the revolts and they only joined the protests at a much later stage. But the fear of another 1979 Iranian Revolution and religious takeover loomed in the background; and these fears have been heightened with the electoral victories of Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt and their rise to prominence in Syria.

Such concerns are certainly legitimate, but two years after the start of the Arab Spring, a discernible set of political trends involving religion-based actors confirm an argument I made four years ago. While developing a new political theory for Muslim societies, I argued that the road to democracy, whatever twists and turns it might make along the way, "cannot avoid passing through the gates of religious politics."[13] What I meant by this was twofold. First, the role of religion in politics needed to be democratically negotiated in emerging Muslim democracies, and political secularism had to be earned and not assumed (as it often is in much of the media and intellectual debate about Muslim politics in the West). In other words, it was a fallacy to presuppose that Muslim societies had long grappled with the deeply emotional and divisive issue of the normative role of religion in politics and that a broad democratic consensus exists on the topic. Stated differently, Western history is not universal history, and it is analytically flawed to assume that the Muslim world has had the same historical experience as the West with respect to negotiating the proper role of religion in government. This process is just beginning as a result of the Arab Spring.

Second, I argued that religion-based parties and religious intellectuals could play a critically important role in the democratization of their countries, provided they reconciled their political theologies with universal standards of human rights and the modern demands of democracy. This latter development is taking place—gradually, to be sure, but its manifestation is undeniable. For example, the prominent role played by the Ennahda party in leading Tunisia's democratic transition clearly demonstrates that forms of religious politics and democratic development are indeed compatible. While the case of Egypt and religion-based parties is far more complex, a similar trend is visible there as well.

In *Islam and the Arab Awakening*, Tariq Ramadan explores these themes with considerable insight, optimism, and clarity. While cautiously optimistic about the future, he acknowledges that "the outcome is unclear . . . more time will be needed before the past can be forgotten and open, pluralistic, democratic societies can emerge." The key challenges and political battles that lie ahead will include debates

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on "the nature of the state, the role of religion, the basic principle of equal rights for all citizens, [and the] equality of women and men" (p. 3).

The early parts of the book are problematic. Ramadan comes dangerously close to suggesting that the Arab Spring is a Western conspiracy to dominate the Islamic world. The evidence and arguments he advances are unconvincing and, frankly, disappointing, coming as they do from a leading Muslim intellectual who was born and raised in the West, and from whom one would expect more nuance and depth of understanding in deciphering Western policy toward the region. His quasi-conspiratorial claims are especially disturbing given the prevalence of conspiracy theories in Muslim societies, to which, sadly, Ramadan contributes.

Ramadan is on stronger ground when he warns about the pitfalls and dangers of unregulated neoliberal economics dominating the region after the fall of dictators. "There can be no true democratization," he writes, "unless it is accompanied by the striving for greater social equality and economic justice." He laments that "critical, creative economic thinking appears to have deserted the Arab political debate" and notes how "sad it would be if ultimately the 'Arab Awakening' amounted to nothing more than the uprising of a leisure class of young people who enjoy access to the Internet and to social networks, who demand political freedom, but who have forgotten the poor and the downtrodden in their own societies who also claim one basic freedom: that of living (and not just surviving) over that of speech" (p. 115).

The most insightful chapters in *Islam and the Arab Awakening* explore the role of Islam and its potential in promoting democratic transitions in the Arab world. Ramadan's primary concern is with Islamic ethics, and he lays out a progressive vision for the future while also identifying a set of political trends that provide a hopeful prognosis. For example, he notes that the future of democracy in the Middle East and North Africa will be deeply intertwined with the ability of Islamic-oriented political actors to develop and indigenize a form of political secularism that is compatible with their cultural traditions. This is already happening, according to Ramadan, with the development of a new concept, championed today by mainstream Islamists, of a "civil state" as opposed to an "Islamic state." This is a form of Islamic secularism, he argues, because its proponents endorse "the existence of two distinct authorities: one political, the other religious" (p. 105).

Ramadan's description of the trajectory of Muslim politics bodes well for the future of democracy in the Arab-Islamic world. This can be better appreciated

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

if we lower our expectations and take the long view of history. In reading him one is reminded of Alfred Stepan's groundbreaking thesis on religion and democracy.[14] According to Stepan, in order for democracy to co-exist with the forces of religion, "twin tolerations" need to be cultivated: both state institutions/actors and religious institutions/actors need to respect certain minimum boundaries of freedom of action that do not violate the autonomy and integrity of the other. Stated differently, in order for democracy to survive in a religious milieu there must be a clear distinction and mutual respect between political authorities and religious bodies, and this needs to be negotiated democratically, over time, based on an evolving consensus. In the Arab context, achieving this consensus will be difficult, partly because this process is inherently conflict-ridden but also due to the brutal legacy of the postcolonial secular state in the Arab-Islamic world, which has left societies polarized and deeply distrustful of one another, as we are seeing today in Tunisia and Egypt.

Today in Syria, for example, the Assad regime justifies its rule partly in the name of secularism. At the same time it has responded to pro-democracy protests with such extreme brutality that Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria have all charged the Syrian regime with pursuing a policy of state-sanctioned war crimes and crimes against humanity. As a consequence, the challenges facing Syrian democrats in the aftermath of the demise of the secular dictatorship in Damascus will be formidable, especially in terms of reconstituting an authentic form of Islamic secularism on the ruins of a rapacious regime that has killed, according to the United Nations, over 70,000 people.

Ramadan recalls an intriguing event that highlights the challenges facing the Arab-Islamic world with respect to the development of political secularism. In September 2011, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose country is viewed by mainstream Arab Islamists as something of a political model, travelled to Egypt, where he was hailed as a hero, in part due to his defense of Palestinian rights. Thousands of people, mostly supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, came out to catch a glimpse of the Turkish leader. When they saw him they cheered: "Erdoğan! Erdoğan! A real Muslim and not a coward," and "Turkey and Egypt, a single fist. The blockade [of Gaza] will be broken."[15]

As part of his media blitz, Erdoğan was interviewed on the popular Egyptian talk show *10 O'Clock*, where he confidently defended the concept of secularism. "Don't be wary of secularism. I hope there will be a secular state in Egypt," he stated. He went on to clarify that to "Egyptians who view secularism as removing

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

religion from the state, or as an infidel state, I say you are mistaken. It means respect to all religions. . . . If this is implemented, the entire society will live in safety."[16]

The reaction to these comments from the Muslim Brotherhood was revealing. Their passion and enthusiasm for the Turkish Prime Minister quickly soured. He was suddenly accused of interfering in Egypt's internal affairs and seeking to dominate the region. New questions were raised about Erdoğan's status as a hero and to what extent Turkey could be a role model for the Arab world.

Muslim unease with secularism is partially rooted in the different legacies of modernization that Muslim societies have experienced during the twentieth century. The Turkish experience with secularism and democracy has been qualitatively distinct from that of the Arab world. In the Arab context the concept of secularism today is a conversation stopper, in part because it is understood as a synonym for atheism and associated with the failed policies of the secular postcolonial state. In Turkey, by contrast, secularism has coexisted with multiparty politics and has facilitated the gradual democratization and economic development of the country (albeit with setbacks and conflict over the years).

Today in the Arab world there is no consensus on the meaning of secularism or how it might relate to such key issues as minority rights, gender, the nature of the legal system, and the separation of powers. All these issues are currently "under political construction" and are being vigorously debated in society for the first time in the modern history of the region. This is a very healthy development. The opening of political space, the development of a new public sphere, and the flourishing of multiparty politics will inevitably provide clarity on these issues.

To the extent that Tunisia is a harbinger of what an Islamist-led "civil state" might look like, there are grounds for optimism. In many ways Tunisia represents a bright spot in the Arab Spring, particularly in terms of reconciling the tensions between Islam, secularism, and democracy. Rashid Ghannouchi, the intellectual leader and founder of Ennahda, has been leading the way; and through a series of interviews and lectures he has begun the process of reconciling the tensions between secularism and Islamic political thought.

In a visit to Turkey in December 2011, Ghannouchi gave an interview in which he stated: "We need democracy and development in Tunisia, and we strongly believe in the compatibility between Islam and democracy, between Islam and modernity. So we do not need secularism in Tunisia."[17] He has repeatedly rejected and condemned the application of secularism to Tunisia, but in the same breath he has also stated that "we provide guarantees for all

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Tunisians, whether secular or Islamic. We believe the state is based on the principle of citizenship. People, despite their differences and attitudes, men and women, should enjoy equal rights in Tunisia. All are equal before the law regardless of their beliefs."[18]

What Ghannouchi seems to be saying is that he accepts the important values that flow from political secularism (as understood in the Western tradition) and which modern democracies require (popular sovereignty and equality of citizenship), yet he rejects the word "secularism" because of its negative association with the ravages of the postcolonial state in the Islamic world. In other words, political secularism is fine as long as we call it by another name.

Looking Forward

Reflecting on the Arab Spring, the Hoover Institution scholar Fouad Ajami observed that the year 2011 "is to the Arabs what 1989 was to the Communist world. The Arabs are now coming into ownership of their own history and we have to celebrate."[19] Ajami is correct in terms of the historical and moral significance of the Arab uprisings for the people of the region, but his comparison with Eastern Europe is misleading. The problem with his analogy is that it establishes a false expectation for measuring political development. It suggests that Europe is the gold standard, with the implication being that transitions to democracy in the Arab world should be smooth, peaceful, and uneventful—and if they are not, then something is wrong with the fundamental character of the Arab-Islamic world. Are Bernard Lewis and V. S. Naipaul right after all?

The obvious needs to be stated: The Middle East is not Eastern Europe. The historical experiences of the two regions have been qualitatively different, both in the pre-modern and modern eras. The indices that social scientists typically use to measure the prospects for stable democratic transitions and consolidations vary by a significant degree when judged by levels of socioeconomic modernization (for example, industrialization, literacy, or mass communications), class structure (the existence of a sizeable middle class), and a suitable political culture (democracy-enhancing cultural norms, habits, and values). In other words, the social conditions that provided for relatively smooth transitions to democracy in Eastern Europe do not exist in the case of the Arab-Islamic world. Stormy waters and different democratic pathways lie ahead for the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Middle East. We need a new analytical framework, and the long view of history is our best guide.

Looking forward, a comparative study of modernization processes across the Islam-West divide is instructive in terms of understanding the future trajectory of the Arab Spring. In this context, the Princeton historian L. Carl Brown has observed that the vertiginous convulsions and social upheavals that accompany the process of modernization—when traditional societies are transformed and reshaped by modern socioeconomic and political forces—seem more pronounced and qualitatively different in the case of Muslim societies than in the West.

> Underlying the changes in Reformation Europe were increased literacy, the rise of printing, and the early stirring of exploration and entrepreneurship that would lead to capitalism. A case can be made that the Muslim world today is seized with the equivalent of all such factors plus more. Not only are the increases in literacy, publications, rural to urban migration, and economic interdependence greater for today's Muslims than for Europeans of the Reformation period . . . [but]*the time involved* [is] squeezed down for today's Muslims to a few decades as opposed to at least a century and a half, if not more, for Reformation Europe.[20]

While Brown was referring to the general process of modernization and its concomitant destabilizing effects, the Arab-Islamic world is simultaneously experiencing—within a short span of time—three simultaneous destabilizing processes. The first is democratization. The struggle to transfer power from old ruling elites to the people and their representatives is inherently disruptive, as we are seeing in Tunisia and Egypt. The old guard of the *ancien régime* is still present and serves as a complicating factor in these democratic transitions. Removing a dictator is one thing; overhauling a corrupt political system replete with nepotism, cronyism, and patron-clientelism is a far greater challenge. It will take years before new rules of the political game are established and before all the key players and stakeholders accept that popular sovereignty—and not elite sovereignty—is the only game in town.

The second inherently destabilizing process facing the Arab-Islamic world today is the struggle for political secularization. By this I mean the difficult process of democratically negotiating the normative role of religion in politics. This process is always conflict-ridden, first because religion is an emotionally-charged subject connected to issues of personal and group identity, but also because different political constituencies have vastly different ideas on the role religion should play in political life. Generating a democratic consensus on this topic will take time and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

will inevitably produce conflict and tension, as we have already seen in the constitutional debates in Tunisia and Egypt.

Finally, the Arab-Islamic world is being destabilized by globalization. Social scientists have long recognized a deep connection in the late twentieth century between the rise of particularist ideas, doctrines, and groups and the increasing globality of our planet. Based on fundamental changes in technology from the media age to the information age, globalization has greatly heightened awareness among previously segmented and isolated populations. The concept of "identity" is, after all, relational, in that individuals and groups define themselves in relation to other individuals and groups in society. The more we are aware of the plurality of groups and societies in our world, the more this forces the question: What is distinct about me and my community in a globalized world? Benjamin Barber, in his popular *Jihad vs. McWorld*, argued precisely this point, noting that the rise of ethno-religious nationalism in the late twentieth century is a direct reaction to the increasing political, economic, and cultural interdependence of our planet.[21] In short, the rise of particularist identities is a natural concomitant to globalization. Post–Arab Spring societies are deeply affected by this phenomenon of identity politics; and, as a result, this process will complicate future transitions to democracy.

On the plus side, however, the Arab Spring has opened up new opportunities that were previously inconceivable. Two years ago, the very thought of a post-Mubarak Egypt or post-Qaddafi Libya or post-Ben Ali Tunisia was unimaginable; today these are realities. The demise of long-standing dictators has shaken the foundations of authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa. The ripple effects of these developments will resonate far and wide.

NOTES

[1] Leon Neyfekh, "Is This 1848?: What History Can Teach Us About Arab Revolutions," *Boston Globe*, March 27, 2011; Larry Diamond, "A Fourth Wave or a False Start? Democracy After the Arab Spring," ForeignAffairs.com, May 22, 2011; www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67862/larry-diamond/a-fourth-wave-or-false-start.

[2] David Horovitz, "A mass expression of outrage against injustice," *Jerusalem Post*, February 25, 2011; www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=209770.

[3] Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu: Arab Spring pushing Mideast East backward, not forward," *Haaretz*, November 24, 2011.

[4] Aaron David Miller, "The Stalled Arab Spring," *The National Interest*, June 6, 2012; nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-stalled-arab-spring-7014.

[5] Isaac Chotiner, "V. S. Naipaul on the Arab Spring, Authors He Loathes, and the Books He will Never Write," *The New Republic*, December 7, 2012; www.newrepublic.com/article/110946/vs-naipaul-the-arab-spring-authors-he-loathes-and-the-books-he-will-never-write.

[6] Pew Research Center, "On Eve of Foreign Debate, Growing Pessimism about Arab Spring Aftermath," October 18, 2012; www.people-press.org/2012/10/18/on-eve-of-foreign-debate-growing-pessimism-about-arab-spring-aftermath/.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[7] The economic and development factors that led to the Arab Spring are essential to a comprehensive understanding of the topic. In this essay I focus only on a few of the political and historical variables.
[8] Kareem Fahim, "Slap to a Man's Pride Set Off Tumult in Tunisia," *New York Times*, January 21, 2011. He was posthumously awarded the Sakharov Prize and the Tunisian government has honored him with a postage stamp.
[9] Rana Kabbani, "From the Turks to Assad: to us Syrians it is all brutal colonialism," *The Guardian*, March 29, 2011; www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/30/turks-assad-colonialism-family-mafia.
[10] Liam Stack, "In Sometimes Deadly Clashes, Defiant Syrians Protest," *New York Times*, April 17, 2011.
[11] Ilan Pappé, interview by Frank Barat, "Reframing the Israel-Palestine Conflict," *New Internationalist*, April 1, 2011; newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2011/04/01/palestine-israel-interview-pappe/. See Rami Khouri, "The Long Revolt," *Wilson Quarterly* (Summer 2011), pp. 43–46.
[12] Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), p. 8.
[13] Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1–3.
[14] Alfred Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations,'" *Journal of Democracy* (October 2000), pp. 37–57.
[15] Marc Champion and Ayla AlBayrak, "Erdoğan Gets Warm Welcome in Cairo," *Wall Street Journal*, September 13, 2011.
[16] Marc Champion and Matt Bradley, "Islamists Criticize Turkish Premier's 'Secularist' Remarks, *Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 2011 and "Analysis: Erdoğan Presents Turkey as Model for Arabs," *Today's Zaman*, September 14, 2011.
[17] Ipek Yezdani, "No Need for Secularism in Tunisia: Ghannouchi," *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 24, 2011.
[18] Rashid Ghannouchi, interview by Adell Dellal, "Post Revolution Politics in Tunisia," *Euronews*, January 13, 2012; www.euronews.com/2012/01/13/post-revolution-politics-in-tunisia/.
[19] Tim Lister, "Gadhafi's Demise and the Arab Spring," CNN.com, October 21, 2011; www.cnn.com/2011/10/21/world/gadhafi-arab-spring.
[20] Emphasis added. L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 137.
[21] Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679413000099 Published online by Cambridge University Press