



Transition Debates in a Transforming Middle East



Colophon

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Table of Contents

Editorial	3
<i>Willemijn Verkoren, Kawa Hassan, Jan Jaap van Oosterzee, Jacqueline Eckhardt-Gerritsen</i>	
Introduction	5
Three Major Moments	5
Research methodology	6
The future of political Islam	6
The future of the Arab state	8
The debate on national unity, sectarianism and citizenship	10
The debate on tolerance	12
The debate on civil society, women's rights and the youth	13
The role of the media	15
Conclusion	15
About the Author	16
About the authors of the editorial and partner organisations	16
Publications of the Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia	17

Editorial

Willemijn Verkoren, Kawa Hassan, Jan Jaap van Oosterzee, Jacqueline Eckhardt-Gerritsen

Making sense of the new Middle East is not an easy endeavour. Since the start of the Tunisian uprising on 17 December 2010, the region has been the scene of complex, revolutionary and rapid transitions that defy conventional knowledge and wisdom. The scope of these shifts and the speed with which they occur surprise even seasoned local analysts in the region and beyond.

The dramatic developments in Egypt are emblematic of this transforming Middle East. Between 25 January 2011 and the time of writing of this special bulletin, Egypt has experienced at least eight major complex changes that have shaped, reshaped and continue to recast a tough and turbulent transition. The country has seen the removal of President Mubarak by a powerful protest movement; the assumption of power by The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF); the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections that led to the victory of Islamist parties (Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists) and the election of the first ever Islamist president; the removal of Tantawi, Minister of Defence in the Mubarak era and head of SCAF, by the Muslim Brotherhood President Morsi; the pushing through of authoritarian constitutional decrees and a controversial constitution, which excluded and enraged large segments of the society and led to the emergence of the grassroots youth movement *Tamarod* and the removal of president Morsi by a combination of unprecedented popular mass demonstrations and a military coup; and the approval of a new constitution. This turbulent transition process is marked by a continuous dynamic and shifting struggle between empowered social actors, old and new, and adaptive authoritarianism. In short, what we have witnessed over the past three years is a sequence of rapid, radical changes compressed in time.

In Syria, what started as a peaceful protest against the al-Assad regime has turned into a complicated national, regional and international conflict. The Syrian popular protest remains active, but wider geopolitical dynamics are now crucial to the development of the Syrian stalemate.

In Tunisia, despite huge political, economic and security challenges, the political transition is so far the most promising of all transitions in the region. Civil society, in the form of the Tunisian Quartet - comprising the largest trades union, the national human rights league, the employers association and the lawyers' syndicate - has initiated a national dialogue process. These groups are mediating between the ruling parties,

led by Ennahda, and the secular opposition in order to agree on a transition road map that aims at solving the political crisis. At the time of writing, thanks to the efforts of the quartet, Ennahda Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh has resigned, the constituent assembly is deliberating and voting on the compromised constitution and an interim technocrat government is supposed to be ruling the country until new elections are held.

Libya held its first free and fair elections in more than four decades in 2012. Despite no tradition of strong political and civil societies, the liberals and secularists defeated the Islamists, defying the expectation that the Islamists would win as they had in Egypt and Tunisia. However, at the time of writing, Libya's transition is beset by the absence of a strong central authority and the presence of powerful revolutionary militias, regionalist tendencies, terrorism and criminal networks.

If recent developments in the Arab world have shown anything, it is that there is much that we do not understand about the nature of such transitions. This realisation has brought together our four organisations with the aim of launching a joint research programme on transitions in the Arab world.

This academic-practitioner collaboration aims to enhance understanding on transitions away from authoritarianism in the Arab world and the role of social actors in such transition processes.

As transitions elsewhere in the world have shown, these processes do not necessarily lead to democracy and there is a (perhaps, at times, inevitably) high risk of violence associated with such transformation. It is, as yet, unclear whether countries in the region will develop towards real democratisation, adaptive authoritarianism, or state failure.

Mindful of the complexity and ever-changing dynamics of these transitions as well as the need to increase awareness about the knowledge produced in the region itself on such transitions, we commence our research project with a literature study of local debates in the Middle East on Middle Eastern transitions.

We are united in our belief that knowledge production about, and international support for, such transitions should be informed by local debates, dynamics and needs, not the reverse. This Special Bulletin therefore aims to shed light on the major debates in the Middle East on overarching themes that dominate the academic and journalistic debates. In studying the debates currently taking place in Arab countries, the following six themes emerge: 1) the future of political Islam; 2) the future of the Arab state; 3) national unity, sectarianism and citizenship; 4) tolerance; 5) civil society, women's rights and

youth empowerment; and 6) the role of media in transition processes. For each of these themes, this Special Bulletin maps out the debate as it takes place in different Arab countries and raises a number of questions that will continue to define both discussions and policies related to the Arab transitions.

We believe the insights of this Special Bulletin are relevant to a broad, international audience of academics, practitioners, policymakers, journalists and opinion makers who do not speak and read Arabic and, hence, do not have access to important local knowledge on transitions.

Introduction

This paper outlines the major debates since the Arab Spring and the changes that have occurred since the military coup in Egypt on 30 June 2013. The paper maps the debates in local Arab media and academic works, especially in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria. Initially, the debate was lively and rich, presenting different perspectives and ideas, and it was mild and relatively open; however, since the military coup in Egypt, these debates have taken a sharper, more hostile tone. Now, it seems to be more of a clash than a debate, fuelled by violence, both symbolic and real, that polarises not only the intellectual climate but also the society and politics. We can surely speak of pre- and post-30 June debates.

Before 30 June, one could easily observe the attempts of different political and ideological groups and movements to find common answers for different challenges and problems; since 30 June, many of these collective attempts have vanished or been heavily shaken. Currently, an important part of the debates in Egypt and Tunisia are reduced to mutual demonisation and hostile disputes, mainly between the Muslim Brotherhood and 'the rest' (comprising secularists, the left wing, liberals, some Salafists and other religious groups and institutions). In Syria, the debate was crushed under the weight of the daily need to survive the horrors of the war in that country.

The debates that this publication focuses on are: the future of political Islam; the future of an Arab state; national unity; sectarianism and citizenship; tolerance; civil society, women's rights and the youth; and the role of the Arab media. This does not mean that the discourse in the Arab world should be reduced to these issues. There are more debates going on, but these particular themes have been selected because of their prominence, and actuality, and because we

simply cannot cover all the issues in one publication.¹

Three Major Moments

Three major moments in the recent history of the Arab world constitute a transitional era with a series of considerable promises and challenges. First, 14 January 2011, when the dictator, Bin Ali fled Tunisia. Second, 25 January 2011, when Hosni Mubarak was forced out of power.² The third moment occurred on 30 June 2013, when the army in Egypt brought an end to the power of the elected President Mohammad Morsi, resulting in serious internal divisions in the society. This period of transition is characterised by a number of processes that go beyond the authoritarian systems and consolidating democracy to include opposite processes of reinventing authoritarianism in new forms and shapes.³

The first two moments are moments of success: the overthrow of autocratic regimes and the creation of new political openings in modern Arab history. The political powers that benefited most from these changes were the Islamists, especially in Egypt and Tunisia. In both countries, Islamists won the elections, formed post-revolution governments and heralded a new era of democratisation. Three years on, these democratisation processes face incredible challenges relating to creating national frameworks, respecting diversity, power sharing, creating an acceptable relationship between politics and religion, empowering civil society, etc.

The impotence of the Islamists in the face of these challenges paved the way for the third moment. According to many observers, the entire transition process in the Arab world is on

¹ Among the more substantial and important debates omitted from this publication are:

- The economic situation and the problem of unemployment and poverty.
- The role and future of the army: army and politics. Three models: Pakistan, Turkey, Iran.
- The role of America in the Arab Spring and post-Arab Spring era.
- The role of and the position relating to Israel.
- Globalisation, new liberalism and the new Arab world.
- Regional conflicts and concurrence after the Arab Spring
- The role of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the Arab Spring and post-Arab Spring period

² For a short history of the period before 30 June see: Egyptian crisis: The throes of intricate democracy at: www.sudaress.com/sudanile/47829, accessed 9 August 2013.

³ For a good discussion on the nature of this transition see: Bashara, 'Azmi (2013). 'on the revolution and the era of transition' at: www.sudaress.com/sudanile/51457, accessed 10 August 2013.

the verge of sliding into a spiral of violence.⁴ Fears for clashes in the streets are real and the internal politics and power struggles within the major political groups are fuelling the possibility of more confrontations. Indeed, violence and counter-violence are a real possibility, as is the wholesale demolition of democratic transition.

This new and uncertain era is framed by debates on many different topics, from the future of political Islam to the relationship between politics to religion, from women's issues to the question of youth, from citizenship and tolerance to the nature of the state, etc. The coming pages will reconstruct the main themes of these debates and elaborate on different local perspectives on transitions.

Research methodology

This special bulletin uses a social science methodology, which combines relevant theoretical literature on the Arab world with media analysis of newspapers, digital websites and academic publications in books and journal articles. Special attention has been paid to the publications that are available on the internet, as a significant and rapidly growing number of people in the Arab world deploy technology for communication. Special attention has also been paid to the language of the debate. Language is not a neutral means of communication, but rather a tool to construct and reconstruct social reality,⁵ language has a 'performative' power.⁶ In this sense, the language of the debate could generate agencies that could, in the long run, turn into a social force for change. The main research question answered in this special bulletin is: What are the main topics of debate in the Arab world since the Arab Spring? The research concentrates mainly on Egypt and Tunisia, but also pays significant attention to Syria.

The future of political Islam

The primary debate in the Arab world, especially since the military coup in Egypt on 30 June 2013, is on the future of political Islam; specifically, the three major components of political Islam: the

⁴ Al-Warfali, Magdi (2013). Transition track in Tunisia shaking: Assassinations, slaughters, bombing and divisions in the street at: www.elaph.com/Web/news/2013/8/827995.html?entry=Tunis, accessed 4 August 2013.

⁵ See: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990). See also: Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Economy of Linguistic Exchanges', *Social Science Information*, Vol. 16, No. 6. (1997), pp. 645-668.

⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993).

Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafists and the Jihadists.

Prior to the Arab Spring, Islamists had faced various forms of repression under the Arab states; they were denied political participation, their activists were jailed and their leaders mostly exiled. The Arab Spring brought an end to this situation and shifted political Islam to the centre of political life in the countries of the Arab Spring.⁷ The Arab Spring gave different factions of political Islam the opportunity to bring their "utopian ideals"⁸ into the reality of social, political and economic life. It also gave Arab societies the opportunity to discover their governance capacities and to formulate answers to the challenges of those societies.

Compared to the nationalists, pan-Arabists, socialists and the secularists, the Islamists were the only ideological group that had not being in power in the Arab world in the post-independence era.⁹ The Arab Spring provided them with this opportunity and brought them to power.

Many commentators, even secularists and leftists, believe that the Islamists played a rational, positive and well-calculated role at the beginning of the Arab Spring, by creating an image of being just one of a number of participants in the revolution; that is to say, the image of a social force aimed at "participating" in the revolution not "dominating" it.¹⁰ This certainly gave the Islamists a degree of credibility. However, many groups claim that as soon as the Islamists won the elections and seized power they changed their strategy from "participation" in the revolution to "domination" of political and cultural life through their attempts to monopolize state power.¹¹ This had negative consequences in terms of their credibility and they lost a great deal of support, also from other religious institutions and movements.¹²

The result was the military coup in Egypt. Since then, the tone and language of the debate has radically changed; the demonisation of the Islamists by the secularists and the infidelisation (*takfir*) of the secularists by the Islamists has

⁷ For a good discussion of the role and positions of political Islam in the Arab Spring see: Al-Haroub, Khalid (2012). *In praise of revolution: The river against the swamp*. Beirut, Dar Al-Saqi. pp.91-115.

⁸ Ibid p.91.

⁹ Ibid p.91.

¹⁰ Ibid p.93.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of this issue see: Al mustaqbal al-arabi.

¹² The dispute between al-Azhar and Muslim Brotherhood is an example of the disputes between the Muslim Brotherhood and non-secularist, religious institutions.

become the rule, rather than the exception.¹³ The secularists believe that the Muslim Brotherhood cannot be integrated into the culture and system of democracy. Brotherhood leaders are characterised as professionals in conspiracy, sabotage and betrayal, and their Islam is portrayed as an Islam that is utterly at odds with the Islam of the average citizen of Egypt.¹⁴

In response, the Brotherhood speaks of a well-organised campaign to 'demonise' them and they accuse the liberals and secularists of being the puppets of the West and traitors to Islam. Fahmi Hwaidi, a moderate Islamic writer, does not hesitate to describe the leftist and secularist groups "New Fascism"; he talks about the end of democratic transition.¹⁵ Hwaidi and others predict a renaissance of Jihadist groups, the militarisation of the conflict between the secularists and the Islamists and increasing violence in the near future. They argue that the army, the liberals and the secularists do not respect the rules of the democratic game and have ousted an elected president and the parliament.¹⁶ The opposite group mirrors this language with terms such as "Islamic fascism" and they talk of the incompatibility of Islamism and democracy. This debate takes place on a daily basis in Egypt and Tunisia; social and other media play an important role in polarising this debate further.

The Salafists

The mass participation of Salafist movements in the politics of post-revolution has nourished the assaults on the credibility of Islamists. After the Arab Spring, most of the Salafist groups, in contrast to their pre-revolution promises, turned to politics and gained considerable political power. This development astonished not only observers of the Arab world, but also all those secular forces who were expecting only to compete with the Muslim Brotherhood.

¹³For example, one Salafist preacher says "whoever questions the return of Morsi to power, questions the existence of God". See: www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-and-world/egypt/2013/08/13-.html, accessed 13 August 2013.

¹⁴ See: www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-and-world/egypt/2013/07/10/%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9.html, accessed 10 July 2013.

¹⁵ See: www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-and-world/egypt/2013/07/10/%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9.html, accessed 10 July 2013.

¹⁶ 'Abdulmajid, Wahid (2012). "Egypt... where to? At the junction of three roads". Al Mustaqbal Al Arabi, The Arab Future, Centre for Arab Studies. Beirut-Lebanon.

Before the Arab Spring, the Salafists were disdainful of politics and they refused to participate in any political activity. For Salafists, politics was at odds with religion and they were working as missionaries: calling people to lead a correct and pious life, teaching the 'correct' doctrine, replying to 'wrong' forms of religious beliefs and practices. They led schools and religious centres and had various media outlets under their control. Politically, they defended and applied the classical Islamic principle of "obedience to the ruler." Accordingly, they were against any form of political opposition. They even defended the government's repression of other political groups, including Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷ They also disapproved publicly of the democratic system and regarded it as non-Islamic.¹⁸

In the debate on the Salafist movements, the Muslim Brotherhood has been constructed as a more moderate force. In this context, the main question in the debate is how these two groups will develop their politics and perspectives in the future; namely, after the military coup of 30 June 2013.¹⁹

Generally speaking, the Muslim Brotherhood accepts the rules of the democratic game and it believes, to a degree, in political, religious and cultural pluralism. The Brotherhood claims that their aim is to establish a 'civil state', rather than an 'Islamic state' and they are open to working and cooperating with the liberal and secular forces. In contrast, the Salafists are socially and politically more conservative and aim at the total Islamisation of society. Their position towards secularism, liberalism and religious pluralism is one of aggressive refusal. They emphasise the Islamic identity of the state, with Sharia as the only law; they have huge reservations about the notion of a 'civil state'. The Salafists do not deny that they are accepting democracy, but they see it purely as a procedure, not a philosophy; they reduce it to an election.²⁰ In other words, Salafists see democracy as a means to an end; namely, the establishment of an Islamic state.

¹⁷ Abu Raman, Mohammad (2012). Al-Jamiyya Salafism: The believe of obedience. Dubai, Al-Msbar Center for Research.

¹⁸ Abu Raman, Mohammad & Abu Hanyya, Hassan (2012). Islamic solution in Jordan: The Islamists and the possibilities of democracy and security. Amman, Frederic Ebert Foundation. pp 243-250.

¹⁹ See: al-Said, Razwan (2013). 'The new perspectives and the emerging scenes' at: www.aawsat.com/print.asp?did=737696&issueno=12659, accessed 27 July 2013.

²⁰ See: Abu Raman, Mohammad (2013). The Salafists and the Arab Spring: Tthe question of religion and democracy in Arab politics. Al Mustaqbal Al Arabi, No. 411 May 2013. Lebanon, Center for Arab Unity Studies.

The debate on the role and future of political Islam is primarily an Egyptian debate, because of the electoral power of the Brotherhood and the Salafists; however, it does resemble the debate in Tunisia. Indeed, the debate in Tunisia is as sharp and as polarised as in Egypt. Although there are big differences between the two countries, many Tunisian writers, secular civil society activists, political parties and youth groups emphasise the similarities. They stress the incompatibility of democracy, human rights and pluralism with the ideology and practices of al-Nahdah movement and the Salafists in Tunisia.²¹ The same debate is ongoing in Syria, but to a lesser degree.

The questions central to this debate are:

- How should the relationship between religion and politics be organised in the post-revolutionary era?
- Can political Islam contribute positively to the democratisation process, or does it form a fundamental obstacle to a democratic transition?
- What is the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists?
- What will happen in the near future: the Salafisation of the Brotherhood, or the Brotherhoodisation of the Salafists?²²
- Will the moderate factions of political Islam turn to violence after the military coup in Egypt?
- The Arab Spring was a big assault on the Jihadists; will the new political reality in Egypt help the Jihadists to gain more space and credibility?
- What will be the relationship between political Islam and the secular groups in the Arab world?

In the case of Syria, a fundamental question is how to tackle the problem of Jihadist groups and their militant organisations. The question in this case is how can these radical Islamist groups be integrated into post-revolution arrangements?

The future of the Arab state

The second major debate in the Arab world is the debate on the post-revolution Arab state. While the debate on the future of political Islam has mainly taken place in newspapers and non-

²¹ There is a big debate on the similarities of the situation in Egypt and Tunisia in the Tunisian media; indeed, almost every newspaper in the country participates in this debate on a daily basis.

²² On this topic, see two Hivos publications: www.hivos.net/Hivos-Knowledge-Programme/Themes/Civil-Society-in-West-Asia/News/Hivos-analyzes-the-future-of-the-Egyptian-Muslim-Brotherhood; www.hivos.net/Hivos-Knowledge-Programme/Themes/Civil-Society-in-West-Asia/Publications/Working-Papers/From-Prison-to-Palace-the-Muslim-Brotherhood-s-challenges-and-responses-in-post-revolution-Egypt.

academic writings, this debate has a more academic character.

For years, one of the main themes of the intellectual and political debate in the Arab world has been the Arab state, its nature, forms and its cultural, religious and civilisational references. This debate goes back to the 1970s and, in particular, the publication of an influential book by the Moroccan intellectual Abdullah a-'Arawi.²³ Later, other intellectuals joined this debate, among them the Syrian Burhan Galion, who theorised the Arab state as an authoritarian state ruled by a tiny elite that not only excludes but dominates the whole society.²⁴ The Arab state has been given many labels, including 'patrimonial state', 'family state', '*mukhabarat* state', and 'despotic state'. Though there are many nuances in this debate, much of the literature emphasises the authoritarian and corrupt character of the Arab state. Its institutions have habitually humiliated Arab citizens and its security apparatus has been used to quash every form of social and political opposition. In short, this state has been seen politically, economically and socially as an "illegitimate state,"²⁵ and the ruling elite considered it as "war loot."²⁶

After the Arab Spring and the fall of autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt this debate has gained a new vitality. The three slogans of the Arab Spring: Social Justice, Freedom and Dignity, were strong statements against the Arab authoritarian state. What is new in this debate is the participation of the Islamists, especially the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists. Almost everyone, with the exception of the Salafists, talks of the need to establish a 'national', 'patriotic', 'democratic' or 'civil' state.

Two themes have played a negative role in this debate. First, the military coup in Egypt radically deepened the degree of disagreement between the different participants on the nature of the Arab state. This coup divided the participants into two hostile camps: secularists and Islamists, each with contradictory views of the state. The second problem is that there is no consensus on what comprises a 'national' or 'patriotic' or 'civil' state; what are its institutions, what kind of constitution is needed, what are the sources of legitimacy, what would be the role of religion in the state, etc.? At this moment, we can distinguish three contradictory perspectives in this debate: the old secularist perspective, the old

²³ See Al-'Arawi (1993). 'The concept of the state'. The Arab Cultural Center. Beirut, al-Dar al-Baiza'.

²⁴ See Ghali.un, Burhan (2007). *Critic of the Politics: The state and religion*. Morocco, Al-Makraz al-Thaqafi al-Arabi.

²⁵ Albughanmi, Aiman (2011). *State of post revolution*. Tunis, Karam Sharif Publication. p13.

²⁶ Ibid p.13.

religious perspective and the new 'civil state' perspective. These visions clash and the debate is often conducted in the language of hostile rhetoric, with accusations of treachery, of being *kafir*, Westernised, even fascist and despotic. I will elaborate briefly on each of these three visions.

Secular perspective: Separation of the state from religion

Prior to, and since the overthrow of autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt and the emerging political power of the Islamists, the notion of a 'secular state' and secularism has undergone a frontal attack from the Islamists. Some writers speak of an Islamist "war against the secular state" and the secularists have frequently been portrayed as *kafir* (*Infidel*).²⁷

Secularism has more than a century of history in the Arab world and Nasserism, Bathism and Bourqibism were secular ideologies. In these ideologies politics and religion were not connected. The contemporary secularists in the Arab world have different ideological backgrounds; they are leftists, liberals, socialists, feminists, nationalists. These groups believe that a secular state, in which religion and politics are radically separated, is the only solution to the lack of national unity, to patriotism, the politics of fragmentation, sectarianism, the minorities' issues and women's issues in the Arab world. Religion in general, and Islam in particular, should not be part of the state; the state should adopt the abstract notion of national citizenship, which makes room for every group and individual in society, regardless of ethnic, religious and cultural background.

Religious perspective: The need for a religious state

According to Islamists, and particularly politicised Salafists Islam is simultaneously religion and state; one cannot carry out Islamic religious duties if there is no religious state. Some Islamists go even further and assert that there is no room in Islam for the sovereignty of human being; God's sovereignty is the only tolerated form of sovereignty. In this version, Islam is a complete system of governance and morality and the laws and principles of Sharia should be the fundamentals of governance.²⁸ Indeed, in this vision, the Islamic state implements Sharia law and society must submit to it. The term used by

²⁷ Al-Shnufi, Radha (2012). *Tunisia: Religion or state: Wrong perspectives and solutions*. Tunis, Ceres books. pp. 7-8.

²⁸ The source of this kind of political vision goes back to Said Qutb's political philosophy. See: Qutb, Sayyid (2005). *Milestones*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Islamists for this version of a religious state is *khalafa*. The radical Jihadists, some branches of the Salafist movement and a few factions within the Muslim Brotherhood defend this vision of an Islamic state. These groups defend the notion of the 'sovereignty of God,' the imitation of the *salaf al-salih* ("the righteous predecessors") and adherence to the 'right' religious tradition.²⁹

Civil state perspective: Unclear concept

The civil state is posited by the Muslim Brotherhood in both Egypt and Syria, Ennahda in Tunisia and some non-religious parties as the alternative to both the secular and Islamic states. But the ambiguity around the position of Islam within such a civil state renders the concept a vague one. At best, it points to a vague form of a hybrid state; a state that is neither religious, nor secular. In both cases it has no clear democratic character.³⁰

Some Islamists see Islam as a 'civilisational framework' and not a 'political framework': Islam as identity and not as politics; others want the implementation of Sharia law.³¹ The Nahda Movement in Tunisia is closer to the first interpretation, while Muslim Brothers in Egypt favour the second interpretation.

Deep state

In the last two years, the notion of a *deep state* has frequently been used to refer to the post-revolution states in Egypt and Tunisia. The *deep state* is another name for a state within the state, or "parallel power".³² It also comprises a combination of longstanding political and bureaucratic forces that wield tremendous influence. Before the last military coup in Egypt the secularists used this notion to describe the post-revolution state in Egypt and Tunisia. For the secularists, the political agenda of the state was not stipulated by the state's institutions, but by the political players outside the state. In the case of Egypt, this was by the '*maktab irshad*', the politburo of the Muslim Brotherhood; in the case of Tunisia it was the international wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. Since the military coup in Egypt, when the Islamists speak of a deep state, they point to the role of the army and they

²⁹ The Righteous Predecessors are often taken to be the first three generations of Muslims; that is, the generations of the Prophet and his Companions, their Successors, and the Successors of the Successors.

³⁰ See: Mohamed Habida (2013). *The religious state and the civil state: An historical approach*. Al Awan.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Raf'at, Said (2013). 'The Islamic rule: Between internal capacity and external realism'. *Journal of Arab Affairs*. The League of Arab States. p.5.

claim that the real power is in the hands of the generals, not in the hands of state institutions.

Debate about the future of the state is an important part of the public discourse in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria. In the case of Syria, this debate is strongly related to the fear of a failed state and the collapse of an already minimal 'national' framework, i.e. a state that cannot provide basic public services, has lost control of its territory and cannot maintain the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force.

The central questions to this debate are:

- Is it possible to move beyond the religious state? What kind of constitution is needed?
- Can religion contribute to building a national democratic state?
- Is secularism an inescapable pre-condition for a democratic state? What is the relationship between secularism and democracy?
- Is it possible to move beyond the binaries of secularity/religiosity?
- What are the challenges to the deep state? What are the experiences of other countries that went through transitions?
- How can a 'decent state' be established, i.e. a state built on institutions that do not humiliate its citizens?³³

The debate on national unity, sectarianism and citizenship

One of the major themes in the public and intellectual debate in the Arab world is the theme of citizenship. In this debate, citizenship refers to a specific form of relationship between the state and individuals that currently does not exist in the Arab world - a relationship based on rights and duties. The background to this debate is: within the concept of citizenship, the state views all individuals as equal members of society and society belongs equally to all of its citizens. Citizenship makes everyone feel that they belong to the society and the state, based on mutual respect, non-violence, human rights and equality before law. Debates on religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities are also strongly linked to the question of equal citizenship.

The debate on citizenship in the Arab world is also directly related to two other major themes; namely, the questions of national unity and sectarianism. In terms of discourse, almost every social, religious and political group in the Arab world, with the exception of the radical Salafists and Jihadists, emphasises the need to achieve and preserve national unity, combating sectarianism and defending and promoting equal

³³ For more on 'decent' state and society see: Margalit, Avishai (1996). *The Decent Society*. Harvard University Press.

citizenship. Apart from the radical Jihadists and Salafists, almost every group sees equal citizenship as the solution to the social, cultural, religious and political fragmentation in the Arab world.

One of the major promises that has emerged during the Arab Spring was a pledge to create this equal citizenship. Many revolutionaries still speak of 'the School of Tahrir Square' as a sign of national unity, leaving all forms of sectarianism and religious fragmentations behind, and acting as equal citizens.³⁴ Tahrir Square, these revolutionaries suggest, would be the socio-political model not only for different communities and ideologies in Egypt, but also for the whole of the Arab world.

From the beginning, it was obvious that demolishing the authoritarian regimes would not be enough to bring an end to the social, religious and ideological sectarianism that dominate different aspects of social and political life in the Arab world. A Tunisian sociologist speaks of "long decades of silent *fitna*," meaning decades of social, tribal, racial, religious, linguistic, regional and ethnic fragmentation as well as discrimination and a lack of mutual trust between different groups. Facing this reality is one of the major challenges in establishing democracy and creating real citizenship.³⁵

The debate emphasises the need to create what one writer calls a "new citizenship contract,"³⁶ in which every citizen in the Arab world becomes "an actor and participant in the processes of developing the Arab societies, and under no circumstances would any single citizen accept any forms of human rights abuse."³⁷ The debate stresses that growing sectarianism has created more fragmentation in the Arab world and destroys every framework that has the potential to become a national framework. The rise of Islamists to power following the Arab Spring has further complicated the situation. According to many critics, instead of facing the real economic and social problems, they introduced an ideological identity politics that emphasises the difference between religious and secular groups. One sociologist asserts that the main division in societies like Egypt and Tunisia is between Islamists and secularists.³⁸ He writes:

³⁴ Al-Boughanmi, Aiman (2011). *The post revolution state*. Tunis, Karm Sharif Publication, p. 103.

³⁵ Ibid pp. 103-104.

³⁶ Al-Wahib, Mohammad (2011). 'The Arab Spring: New Citizenship Contract' at: <http://aafaqcenter.com/index.php/post/930>, accessed on 3 August 2013.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Al-dajni, Husam (2013). 'Coexistence between the political and religious powers no longer exists'.

There is a sharp polarization between different ideologies that exceeded the geographical boundaries, so the secular Egyptian became closer to any secularist in the Arab countries than to his fellow Egyptian Islamist, and this applies to Islamists, too. [...] If this continues, we will be in front of a new map of bloodshed, which divides the Arab world further ideologically and ethnically.³⁹

To counter sectarianism and the lack of national unity, many writers see citizenship as the only solution for this problem. This view argues that citizenship in the twenty-first century transcends national borders and embodies different international features, among them: recognising the existence of different cultures; respect for the rights and freedoms of others; recognising the existence of different religions; understanding and activating different political ideologies; knowledge about the world economy; interest in international affairs; participation in the promotion of international peace; and participation in the management of conflicts in a non-violent way.⁴⁰

Tunisia has a more homogeneous society than most other Arab societies and does not have different religious schools; even so, the country still faces the problem of fragmentation. Besides the division between the Islamists and secularists, Tunisia has - as one author emphasises - a strong division between "provinces and individuals;" that is to say, inequality between provinces and among citizens in the country.⁴¹ According to this author, there are a lot of social inequalities between different parts, social groups and individuals in Tunisia, especially in the southern part of the country. These inequalities are the source of social and political insecurity and a threat to the already fragile stability. The Tunisian revolution in 2011 began in these marginalised provinces, where people did not feel they were equal citizens of the country.⁴² Creating national unity through equal distribution of wealth is the only way that will help the country to solve the problem of fragmentation.

"Building a new political culture" is another requirement for solving the problem of

<http://rasseen.com/art.php?id=586c98b5f9a7ed7d12e25a976fea40704467fa30>, accessed on 4 August 2013.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Bin Salih 'Amr, Othman (2011). 'The concept of citizenship and its relationship to belonging'. <http://aafaqcenter.com/index.php/post/743>, accessed on 2 August 2013. This article has received 10,000 hits.

⁴¹ Ma'ali, Mansur (2013). *The Revolution ... and After*. Tunis, Dar al-Jnub. p. 145.

⁴² Ibid. pp.145-146.

fragmentation. It is the task of this new political culture to make social and political cooperation between different social groups possible. There is also a huge need to establish new institutions for education, law, economy and politics, in accordance with developing a new political culture.⁴³ According to this approach, citizenship generates opportunities to solve the disputes peacefully, while showing respect for opposing perspectives. It also creates a context in which contending groups do not turn their differences to suspicion or to labelling opponents as traitors and criminalising each other.⁴⁴

In Syria, the debate on fragmentation and the absence of a national framework has become more prominent since the developments of 2013. Yasin Haj al-Salih, a prominent Syrian intellectual, speaks of "the collapse of the national framework of the Syrian conflict." Salih sees this collapse as a consequence of the mass use of violence against the Syrian society by both the regime and different Jihadist groups of the Syrian opposition.⁴⁵ Another Syrian writer, Fawwaz Haddad, tells the same story of a fragmented and divided society:

Syria has abandoned its dreams and has sunk to the lowest depths of an ugly and painful reality, burying its dead day after day – and it makes no difference anymore whether someone is for or against the regime, whether they have joined the rebels or the government militias, whether they call themselves secularists or Salafists. All of them are children of a divided Syria.⁴⁶

Both writers see the creation of a national framework, via equal citizenship, as the answer to this state of division and fragmentation in Syria.

The questions that are central to this debate are:

- How can the loyalty of individuals and groups be transformed from sectarian loyalty to national loyalty?
- Which institutions can help this transformation?

⁴³ Safi, Luai (2012). *Freedom, citizenship and political Islam: Questions of the Arab Spring and the major political transformations*. Germany, Civil Society and Constitution Publication. p. 55.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 56.

⁴⁵ Haj al_Salih, Yasin (1013). 'The collapse of the national framework of the Syrian conflict', at: <http://ar.qantara.de/content/tdyt-lzm-fy-swry-nhyr-ltr-lwtny-lsr-lswry>, accessed on 27 October 2013.

⁴⁶ Haddad, Fawwaz (2013). 'Children of a Divided Nation', at: <http://en.qantara.de/content/essay-by-the-syrian-writer-fawwaz-haddad-children-of-a-divided-nation>, accessed on 27 October 2013.

- What is the role of the state and its policy in building citizenship?
- How can a new political culture be established, in which the notion of citizenship plays a central role?
- What is the role of political parties, civil society and media in this process?

The debate on tolerance

Tolerance has been a key theme in the public debate since the Arab Spring. 'The need for tolerance' is the title of a 'debate circle', organised by the Centre for Arab Unity Studies on 2 February 2013. The centre gathered leading Arab intellectuals and academics to debate the need for tolerance in contemporary Arab societies. According to the Centre's director, the reason for organising this meeting was that new developments in the Arab world in the last decade are "seriously dangerous and cause a lot of worries."⁴⁷ The papers written for this conference make clear that these 'dangerous developments' refer, primarily, to the emergence of radical Salafist and Jihadist groups in the Arab world, attacks on and disrespect for religious minorities, and the oppression by authoritarian states that do not tolerate any real opposition. In short, among the disturbing developments are an emerging religious fanaticism, political antagonism and hate between political Islam and liberal and secular forces, and the oppressive political behavior of the authoritarian state.

Much of the debate on tolerance in the Arab world concerns the lack of a culture of tolerance. Furthermore, tolerance should not be limited to the behaviour and mentality of the elite; it must be part of society as a whole and it must be supported by public opinion. In this approach, tolerance is related to a real recognition of the right of people to be different - different in terms of religion, opinions, behaviour, political affiliation, etc. Mutual recognition is essential.⁴⁸

The debate accentuates that the concept of tolerance should not be limited to religious tolerance and the neutrality of the state; it should be developed to a full recognition of different aspects of a multicultural society.⁴⁹ The debate stresses further that tolerance becomes meaningless when sectarian groups are armed and when a state imposes a specific religion on a society. Thus, the disarming of sectarian groups and the separation between state and religion are

⁴⁷ Al-Sawani, Yousif (2013). 'Introduction'. Centre for Arab Unity Studies. Al- Mustaqbal al Arabi No. 411 May 2013. p. 95.

⁴⁸ Omlel, Ali (2013). 'From tolerance to multiculturalism'. Centre for Arab Unity Studies. Al-Mustaqbal al Arabi No. 411 May 2013. pp 96-102.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 100.

crucial preconditions for developing a culture and mentality of tolerance. In addition, "bringing change to the closed and dogmatic religious consciousness, which is developed in the last decades" is another fundamental condition for promoting tolerance.⁵⁰

A well-known Islamic writer sees no exit strategy out of religious fanaticism without two major changes in the mindset of Islamic activists: first, they must debunk the belief among Muslims that the world is against them; second, they must convince Muslims that their current piety is good enough and that they do not need a religious political party to save their souls.⁵¹ This writer believes that to be tolerant, you must believe in yourself and not be afraid of others and the world. He is of the opinion that political Islam is a serious obstacle to implementing these two major changes.⁵²

Another aspect of this debate relates the notion of tolerance to the notion of citizenship. According to this approach, when society recognises individuals as equal citizens with equal rights, the issue of tolerance becomes less pressing.⁵³

In the Syrian case, some writers speak of the need for "transitional justice".⁵⁴ According to this view,

[...] there are hundreds of thousands of families that have lost their breadwinner due to death or disability, and they are in urgent need of compensation. On the other hand, there are individual rights for the families of the victims, these rights will not be met through national reconciliation. It will do justice to them to compensate the victims and, through this, to help them to be tolerant. This strategy is different from the humanitarian compensation based on relief or securing the lives of some families.⁵⁵

Clearly, tolerance will be a fundamental issue in post-conflict Syria.

The questions that are central to this debate are:

⁵⁰ Al-Said Radhuan (2013). 'The need for tolerance'. Centre for Arab Unity Studies. Al- Mustaqbal al Arabi No. 411 May 2013. p. 107.

⁵¹ Ibid p. 107.

⁵² Ibid. p.108.

⁵³ Ibid. pp.129-130.

⁵⁴ Qadur, Omar (2013). 'And what if the 'coalition' had to attend 'Geneva 2'?

<http://alhayat.com/Details/563267>, accessed on 26 October 2013.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

- What does tolerance mean, and what kind of tolerance is needed in the Arab world?
- What is the relationship between tolerance and religion?
- Why is classical Islam more tolerant than contemporary political Islam; and why are new forms of religiosity, especially Salafist piety, less tolerant than older forms of piety?
- Is the secular state the only state that can solve the question of tolerance in society?
- What is the relationship between tolerance and citizenship? Would equal citizenship bring an end to the problem of fanaticism and the lack of tolerance towards different minorities?

The debate on civil society, women's rights and the youth

Before going into detail on the role and power of some segments of civil society in Egypt and Tunisia, I will try to classify Arab civil society thematically, as follows.⁵⁶

1. The service-NGO sector: charity, job training, educational assistance, community development projects, and other non-profit organisations.
2. The membership-based sector: comprised of professional organisations, including labour unions, professional syndicates and chambers of commerce. These organisations provide economic and social services for their members; they also frequently offer a framework for political activism.
3. Pro-democracy associations with an overriding political agenda. These organisations seek to promote democratic concepts and change by carrying out democracy-education programmes, mobilising citizens, observing elections, monitoring the human rights practices of governments, lobbying for changes in laws and government practices, fighting corruption, and conducting research on these themes.

Religious groups certainly demonstrate aspects of all these categories of civil society. This special bulletin takes a non-normative approach to civil society; that is to say, that civil society is not 'good' in itself and it is not viewed as democratic as such. Furthermore, I do not assume that the development of civil society will automatically lead to transparency and accountability, or that it will create a stable, democratic society that will

⁵⁶ I use the thematic classification of Stefanos Vallianatos. See Vallianatos, Stefanos (2013). 'Arab Civil society at the crossroads of democratization: The Arab Spring impact', in: Neighbourhood policy paper, The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation. p.3. www.khas.edu.tr/cms/cies/dosyalar/files/NeighbourhoodPolicyPaper%2810%29%282%29.pdf, accessed on 7 August 2013.

empower citizens per se. Elaborating this issue goes beyond the scope of this publication.⁵⁷

The pro-democracy segments of civil society in Egypt and Tunisia are highly politicised and they play an important role in the current events of the both countries. The debate on civil society concerns the role of civil society not only in defending itself against the state, led by Islamists in Tunisia and until recently in Egypt, but also in defending secular and civil culture against the politics of Islamisation. A significant part of the debate is about the resistance of civil society to the rule of Islamic parties after the Arab Spring.

Commentators speak of 'fierce resistance' by civil society against the attempts to Islamise the society and to impose rigid cultural and behavioural rules. In this debate, civil society is presented as a social force that defends democracy, rejects authoritarian policies and opens spaces for diversity.⁵⁸ The linkages between civil society activism and the transition to democracy are strongly presupposed. Demands for wider and 'real' political participation, respect for human rights, preserving diversity, striving for accountability, guaranteeing the freedoms of speech, -religion and -association are among the demands of the pro-democracy civil society groups.

In Egypt and Tunisia, the debate is concerned with how civil society can resist and bring an end to the policies of indoctrination implemented by the Muslim Brotherhood in both countries, while not ignoring the urgent economic predicament.⁵⁹ The participation and contribution of women in democratic transition is crucial in this debate. A different aspect of civil society is its role as a space for creating and motivating social agency and empowering women as one of the main social actors in the revolution. From the beginning of the Arab Spring women participated actively in the protests. They have been beaten, humiliated, harassed and their reputations have been damaged. They have also been marginalised and excluded in the post-revolution political order. Again, religion has been used to limit their participation, minimise their rights and reduce their opportunities. However, many

⁵⁷ For a detailed discussion of this theme, see: Kanie, Mariwan (2012). 'Civil Society, language and the authoritarian context: The case of Saudi Arabia'. Orient IV/2012.

⁵⁸ Raf'at, Said (213). 'The Islamic rule between internal capacity and external realism'. Journal of Arab Affairs. The League of Arab States. p. 6.

⁵⁹ This does not mean that there are no conservative forms of civil society who defend the current situation and encourage Islamic parties to impose their ideology and vision on the state and society. But, elaborating on this is beyond the boundaries of this publication.

women in both countries refuse to give up and they resist these setbacks. In Tunisia, there is a strong women's movement that defends the secular civil code of the country against the attempts of Islamists to reduce the public role of women and reduce their rights, to impose 'Islamic' clothing and other religiously legitimated restrictions, and also to reintroduce polygamy.⁶⁰ In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood used large numbers of women in their demonstrations against the military coup on 30 July 2013 and in support of president Morsi. Women's rights associations in Egypt accused the Brotherhood of using the women as 'human shields' against any attacks from the opposition or even the army or police.⁶¹

The role of the youth has been as crucial as that of women in Arab civil society, both during and after the revolution. To elaborate on the role of youth in civil society, I will focus on the Tamarod Movement in Egypt and Tunisia. Tamarod is an Egyptian opposition movement, established in Tahrir Square on 26 April 2013. It called for the withdrawal of confidence in president Mohamed Morsi and for early presidential elections. They collected 22 million signatures calling for Morsi to be relieved of power.⁶² The movement has a website that reveals their identity:

We are the official site of the Tamarod movement, we spread the news of the movement by the hour[...] We have also established a young media organisation, different from the rest of the media institutions with their clear and absolute bias for the January 25th revolution and its objectives. We seek to build a media entity carrying the idea of "rebellion" and, armed with the spirit and creativity, ambition and talent of young people, we promise to break "taboos," and the fears of people or parties or groups, or even ideas.⁶³

The Egyptian Tamarod movement has inspired young people in other Arab societies; indeed, in a short time, similar movements emerged in

⁶⁰ See: 'Salafists of Tunisia want to apply God's law of polygamy', at: www.middle-east-online.com/?id=136636.

⁶¹ See: Khairy, Amina (2013). 'Egyptian women expecting life and freedom after two revolutions'. <http://alhayat.com/Details/537888>.

⁶² See the official website of the movement at: www.tamarud.net/index.php and the facebook site of Tamarod: www.facebook.com/Harket.Tamrod.

⁶³ see: www.tamarud.net/%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%86, accessed on 8 August 2013.

Tunisia, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.⁶⁴ The Tamarod movement is a movement outside of the control of the state and its major aim is to bring an end to the rule of the Islamists in the post-Arab Spring era. The Tamarod movement tries to establish itself as a movement of active citizens who fight for democratisation and it forms a counterweight to the power of both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia. They also want to change and reshape the social attitudes so that they reflect those that were present on Tahrir Square during the first days of the Arab Spring; namely, the sense of being an equal citizen, regardless of religion, culture and political standpoints. This movement propagates liberal norms and a secular stance.⁶⁵

The questions that are central to this debate are:

- The debate is not only about whether civil society can play a role in the transitional phase, but *how* it can play this role?
- How can civil society defend itself and the whole society against the power of the state?
- What role can civil society play in solving the fundamental problems of religious and ideological fanaticism, the lack of tolerance, developing a democratic culture, strengthening the sense of citizenship, creating a framework of national unity?
- How can civil society contribute to political stability?
- What are the consequences of the Arab Spring for women's rights?
- Can religion strengthen women's participation in social change?

⁶⁴ For Tamarod movement in Bahrain see: www.bultannews.com/ar/news/6973/%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86.

For Tamarod movement in Morocco see: www.lakome.com/%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA/77-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB/27827-%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9.html.

⁶⁵ On the challenges facing Tamarod, see this interesting article: www.opendemocracy.net/vivienne-matthies-boon-brecht-de-smet/egypt-from-rebel-to-revolution.

The role of the media

In all of the above-mentioned debates, the role of the media is crucial. Most of the debates in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria occur in different national, regional and international media. In general, the Arab world is experiencing massive media developments; different forms of written and visual media appear constantly and the media field is becoming increasingly complex. Every political party, each social and political movement, each religious, ethnic and linguistic group has its own media, or media that sympathises with or opposes them. In this sense, the current media landscape is broadly politicised and deeply polarised. For example, Hani Shukrallah, a renowned Egyptian journalist and political scientist, calls the Egyptian media “propaganda machines.” He sees the development of the Egyptian media since the overthrow of president Morsi as a disaster. According to him, “there has been no respectable media outlet in this country. It’s all pure propaganda.”⁶⁶ Shukrallah goes further and criticises the Egyptian media after the military coup and the overthrowing of Morsi, declaring the media to be:

[...] opium for the people [...] They never showed us who was sitting in the protest camps of Morsi’s supporters. I’m certain that they weren’t all mad preachers of hate. Instead, we were just bombarded by vitriolic comments about Islamist terror. One thing is certain: all sides have failed. Neither the Western, nor the Egyptian media have succeeded in capturing the complexity of the situation. They report as if the situation was clear-cut, black and white. They are really advancing the polarisation of the country.⁶⁷

Developing an independent, critical and professional media is therefore crucial for the process of democratic transition.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The debate in the Arab world on fundamental social and political issues is lively and vital, but deeply polarised. Wide ranging viewpoints concerning issues of great importance are

⁶⁶ Shukrallah, Hani (2013). ‘Egypt’s Media are Propaganda Machines’, at: <http://en.gantara.de/content/interview-with-hani-shukrallah-egypts-media-are-propaganda-machines>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ On the polarised Egyptian media, see this interesting article: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23635879.

present in this debate. Important questions concerning big issues remain unanswered, such as: what kind of society do people in the Arab world want? What form should the state take? Which articulations of religion should dominate? How can a minimum national framework be created? How can citizenship be promoted and how should sectarianism, hatred and fragmentation be addressed and tackled?

The debates about these issues are far from value-free. The participants themselves are strongly engaged in the struggle to create a new social and political order and shape the future of the Arab world. There are clashing views and the language of the debate is sharp and frequently hostile. One positive aspect of this debate is that the participants believe that their views and agency may influence the direction of the transition.

These debates are taking place throughout the Arab world, but they are at the forefront in Egypt and Tunisia. This is due to the successful overthrow of autocrats in these two countries and the beginning of a complex process of transition. Similar debates emerged at the beginning of the Syrian revolution, but the subsequent militarisation and regionalisation of the revolution and the immense scale of violence has shifted the focus of the Syrian people to survival. This does not mean, though, that these issues are not fundamental to Syrian society and politics.

From the mid-1990s, there were a number of attempts to bring moderate Islamists and moderate liberals and secularists closer together, but in the current context of polarisation, in an atmosphere of mutual demonisation, it is difficult to achieve this. In addition, the Arab media, the platform for many of these debates, is deeply politicised and biased. Indeed, the media is no longer a tool to provide information, but rather to mobilise the masses. It will take time to get the different groups talking to each other and to reach compromises and mutual understanding. The contribution of the international community in this regard may be very positive and useful.

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About Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia

Hivos and the University of Amsterdam, Department of Political Science, initiated the Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia in 2008. This academic activist initiative ended in 2011 and generated insights on the role of civil society actors and Western donors in democratisation processes in Syria and Iran.

As of January 1, 2012 Hivos co-produces policy papers, policy briefs, briefing notes, working papers and special bulletins with think tanks, experts and activists mainly in MENA, but also in the US and EU.

These in-depth insights deal with dignity revolutions (Arab Spring) and transition challenges and how Western donors can accompany transitions through insider knowledge.

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