13 Civil Society, Youth and the Arab Spring

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Over the past few decades most regions around the world have undergone significant transitions and democratisation efforts with varying degrees of success. The Arab World had remained the 'exception' for the analogy. Analysts and politicians, and even Arab rulers themselves, continually highlighted a 'zero-sum' equation which illustrates the regional scenario: either stability under what Jack Goldstone refers to as "sultanistic" dictatorships[1], or dominant political Islam constituting the only alternative. Accumulated political suppression and a weakening economic reality led to what is nowadays referred to as the Arab Spring, Rise and/or Awakening. Traditional protagonists are no longer the only main actors in the regional political arena; rather a paradigm shift is unfolding, whereby young Arabs –the majority of the population—are increasingly realizing an empowered and influential role in all the various aspects of public life. The balance of power between the *'one-man/one party' autocratic regimes* on the one hand, and the *people* on the other; is shifting. Therefore, in light of these grave changes many ponder on what new prospects lie ahead today for transforming states, traditional civil society organisations and the 'awakened' strategic player: the *people*?

This article highlights the changing role of civil society organisations in the Arab Spring and further tackles the emerging role of the younger generation of Arabs, in driving and leading change in the region. Investigation was based on primary resources by interviewing local and

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[1] Goldstone, Jack, 2011: "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies", in: *Foreign Affairs*, 90,3 (May/June): 8. Goldstone refers to Sultanistic regimes as dictatorships which arise when a national leader expands his personal power at the expense of formal institutions, holding no ideology but a sole aim to maintain personal authority. They may preserve some of the formal aspects of democracy – elections, political parties, a national assembly, or a constitution- but their rule is entrenched through compliant supporters in key positions, and by declaring a state of emergency, which they justify by appealing to fears of external (or internal) enemies.

international analysts and practitioners who have extensively worked in the Arab World, as well as young activists who have contributed to influencing public opinion. More so, secondary research is mostly based on recent publications and analysis by think-tanks and regional experts. It bears no doubt, that when referring to the Arab World, in the general sense, one does not overlook the diverse spectrum where each of the 22 Arab States (members of the Arab League) falls individually into. Arab States have different dynamics as to their regimes, demographics and social challenges. Therefore, this article tackles mostly Egypt and Tunisia with some references to other Arab States.

I.   Overview

Self-determination in Arab states was embodied in a different context than other regions around the world. In fact, even those regimes that resulted out of revolutionary quests for self-determination and self-governance have tightened their grip, and became more radical over time in response to international or neighboring conflicts;[2] such as both Egypt and Tunisia. Arab rulers created an environment which not only ensured their indefinite time in office, but also managed through "an interlocking system of restrictive laws and several security apparatuses that monitor and pervade every aspect of social life to keep all potential opposition forces weak and fragmented"[3]. In fact, Goldstone explains that 'Sultanistic' regimes worked to keep the masses 'depoliticised' and 'unorganised' by weakening the electoral systems and existing political party infrastructures, ensuring that their populations are continually growing more economically dependent on subsidies and public sector investment, and finally imposing strict surveillance, media control and intimidation to guarantee that citizens stay disconnected and passive.[4]

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[2] Ibid.: 9, International and neighboring conflicts refer to the Cold War era after the end of the Second World War, and the establishment of the Israeli State in the heart of the Arab World.

[3] Moheb, Zaki, 2007: "Civil Society and Democratisation in the Arab World", *Annual Report*, Iben Khaldoun Center for Development Studies: 15.

[4] Goldstone, 2011, art.cit.: 9.

Samir Amin gives an evident example in Egypt when the regime ensured the integration of reactionary political Islam into its power structure, by giving it control of the education sector, courts, and a considerable number of national media outlets, particularly television. The sole permitted public speech was that of the radical Islamist mosques allowing them, he explains, to pretend to make up the "opposition".[5]

> *"The fake freedom of the press given by Mubarak was but a bone thrown to obsolete pseudo-intellectuals-slash-regime-brown-nosers and seemingly-dissenting yet unfocused traditional media. As long as it is contained within the conventional realm of information dissemination, it could be controlled at will. Regime-defined lines will not be crossed. A truly Orwellian nightmare for reformists."*

-Hani Morsi (Egyptian Blogger) [6]-

Even more so, to a large extent the international community, led by the United States and European Union as the forerunners of democracy promotion, has had hesitant approaches towards exerting genuine and real pressures on these authoritarian regimes to liberalize and democratize. In fact, one would notice a radical shift in the international community's approach with its democracy promotion efforts in the Arab world, personified in a "democratise yet stabilise"[7] approach, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 'fight against terrorism'. This uncertainty was heightened after the 2006 Hamas-won Gaza Election; an internationally contested free and fair election, leaving the West and its

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[5] Amin, Samir (2011, June 19). An Arab Springtime? *Monthly Review*. Available at http://monthlyreview.org/commentary/2011-an-arab-springtime.

[6] Morsi, Hani, 2011: "The Virtualisation of Dissent: Social Media as a Catalyst for Social Change Part two: From Reanimating the Social Discourse on Reform to a Grassroots Revolt for Change", Blog posted on 17 February 2011 in Egypt. Available at: http://www.hanimorsi.com/blog.

[7] Menotti, Roberto, 2006: "Democratize but Stabilize – Democracy in the Middle East", in: *Middle East Quarterly*, 13,3 (Summer):12.

ambiguous 'fight against terrorism' unhappy with what democracy can yield.

> *"The 25 January elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council have so far marked another important milestone in the building of democratic institutions. These elections saw impressive voter participation in an open and fairly-contested electoral process that was efficiently administered by a professional and independent Palestinian Central Elections Commission."*

> -Statement by EU Election Observation
> Mission to West Bank & Gaza, 2006[8]-

Slight improvements were undeniably made as to political liberalisation under former Arab regimes; competitive parliamentary and even presidential elections were conducted – although chances of real systematic and/or regime changes seemed almost nonexistent. Large-scale administrative corruption, election fraud, and instilled intimidation by state-managed security forces were some of the many tools used, to refrain from any real democratic progress. Regimes, such as Ben Ali's in Tunisia and Mubarak's in Egypt, were commonly acknowledged for being regional pioneers in democratic liberalisation and transition; yet, their dedicated steps towards maintaining the weakness of a rather crippled civil society guaranteed the sustainability of the status quo.

The 2011 Arab revolts were unexpected, since they succeeded in achieving the desired outcomes. The magnitude of mass mobilisation in a relatively short timeframe, by which the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt spurred, could not have been predicted by any political forecaster. Nonetheless, rising movements can be traced back to the early 2000s. In fact, research conducted by the Iben Khaldoun Center identified in 2007,

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[8] European Union Election Observation Mission to West Bank & Gaza 2006 (2006, January 26). *Statement of Preliminary Conclusions and Finding*. Available at: http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/db942872b9eae454852560f6005a76fb/236f02cf53 9aa9418525710600587785.

that "cracks are beginning to show in the authoritarian structure of most of the Arab states, as people in many Arab countries came out into the streets, in defiance of emergency laws, calling for freedom and reform. Citizens' pressures are therefore mounting on the incumbent autocrats to open up their system to greater participation by the various opposition forces." [9] Issue-based demonstrations and protests were organised by labour movements in Tunisia, in response to industrial policies; workers' strikes in 2007 in Egypt were the strongest strikes on the African continent in the past fifty years; the Kefaya and April 6th movements, also in Egypt, were increasingly becoming more outspoken with intensified efforts to exert pressure on government and state. These early movements have escalated to what is currently witnessed as the popular uprisings—triggered, of course, by a deteriorating economic situation.

Ziad Abdel Samad explains the underlying causes to be "compounded political repression and lack of democracy with economic and social marginalisation, high inequalities, and the violation of rights. Corruption and lack of accountability in some cases turned the state and national resources into private property for people in power and reached levels that could not be ignored or unfelt by the citizen."[10] To face these crippling challenges, young Arabs realised the strength of organizing and mobilizing, and headed to the streets in protest—disregarding the "traditional ineffective civic forms of organizing such as political parties and the so-called non-governmental organisations".[11]

II.   Civil Society Organisations in the Arab World

The term 'civil society' has been one of the most widely spread and vaguely used terminologies globally. In the Arab World, similar to a number of other states, the term was even integrated in political speeches

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[9] Moheb, Zaki, 2007, art.cit.:15.
[10] Ziad, Abdel Samad; Mohamadieh, Kinda, 2011: "The Revolutions of the Arab Region, Socioeconomic Questions at the Heart of Successful Ways Forward", in: *Perspectives – Political Analysis and Commentary from the Middle East,* Special issue 2 (May): 112-118: 112.
[11] Sharif Mahmoud: a young Egyptian activist who took part in the Tahrir Square 18-day demonstrations. Quote captured in an interview by author on June 7th, 2011.

by governments, elected institutions and media. Nonetheless, references to what constitutes civil society differ from one definition to the other. The World Bank has adopted a comprehensive definition of civil society, developed by a number of leading research centers: "it refers to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organisations: community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations".[12]

In light of this definition, it is necessary to underline that: (a) civil society is **not** an alternative to the state –nor vice versa; (b) true vibrant democracy cannot be achieved without civil society; and (c) good governance and development will require strong partnerships between the state, civil society organisations and the private sector, in areas specifically pertaining to decision-making and policy development.

Traditionally, civil society organisations in the Arab World have been commonly viewed as "governmental-non-governmental registered organisations–(G-NGOs)"[13] having a controversial relationship with the regimes, partly as a survival mechanism, and mostly due to regime restrictions imposed on them. MENA Governments' consistent efforts in the region, to undermine the efforts of NGOs, have become more aggressive in the past few years; a considerable number of tactics was used to discredit civil society –especially human rights organisations. For instance, Pitner refers to the creativity of the Tunisian government, when it decided to create its own NGOs (or G-NGOs), staffed by members of the general intelligence services (*mukhabarat*)[14], to attend

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[12] The World Bank (2010, August 4). *Defining Civil Society.* Available at: http://go.worldbank.org/4CE7W046K0.

[13] Ahmed Karaoud- Head of MENA Regional Office at Amnesty International, Beirut; words quoted from an interview by author conducted on 27 May 2011.

[14] The Arabic term "*mukhabarat*" is a very common term used amongst all Arab States referring to the national intelligence apparatuses; normally the right arm of Arab regimes. The word also carries a negative context which connotes repression by secret police and

conferences and monitor what was being said about Tunisia (particularly by representatives of Tunisian NGOs).[15]

CSOs were generally seen as philanthropists and sometimes even as service providers, with their role mostly aligned around emergency assistance –especially with early and rapid responses to conflict and crises (such as Sudan and Palestine), poverty alleviation, community development and micro-credit interventions (like in Morocco, Egypt and Jordan). Since the early 1990s, Arab countries sought an increased momentum for human rights organisations advocating equality of rights, particularly with respect to vulnerable groups and women movements.

The reality of civil society organisations, as per the aforementioned perceptions, has been characterised as disappointingly weak and fragile. Internally, CSOs face challenges of identifying clear missions and strategies; a common trend amongst Arab CSOs can be identified as being mostly donor-driven, implementing sporadic ad hoc programs and projects. Also, a weak internal governance structure and lack of internal democratic procedures are major obstacles towards the efficiency of their work and also their transparency, credibility and accountability to their constituency. In fact, CSOs' limited capacities in maintaining strong relations with their constituency and their inefficiency in mobilizing, networking and entering into coalitions, toppled by their lack of financial autonomy, led to rather limited and fragmented impact within their societies.[16]

External challenges which faced, and in many cases still do, CSOs in the Arab World can be labeled under what Ziad Abdel Samad refers to as

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state terror. Cases of abduction, detention and torture of activists and opposition figures are usually directly implemented by Arab intelligence agencies. See, Pitner, Julia (2000). NGOs' Dilemma [Electronic Version]. *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 214 (Spring). Available at http://www.merip.org/mer/mer214/ngos-dilemmas.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Rishmawi, Mervat; Morris, Tim, 2007: "Overview of Civil Society in the Arab World", *Praxis Paper* 20 (October), International NGO Training and Research Center: 32. As well as, Pitner, Julia, 2000, art.cit.
Also, interviews conducted with Ziad Abdel Samad and Ahmad Karaoud highlighted the above mentioned issues.

the '*enabling environment*'.[17] Arab regimes have placed numerous restraints on civil society work through tight regulatory control whereby the lack of an enabling legal framework ensures the freedom of civil groups is contained. Intrusive regulations such as monitoring the finances and supervising different activities were continually practiced; especially for events organised by opposition groups, preventing them from holding mass meetings or demonstrations and restricting them from getting their message across, to further build and expand their constituency.

Other national legislation, considered as critical constraints to effective civil society, were laws pertaining to the right to assemble, freedom of expression and access to information, as well as the right to form and enter into political parties.[18] It is also inevitable to highlight other external obstacles which faced CSOs throughout the past decade or so, such as the lack of a national development vision which CSOs could contribute to, and participate in the overall implementation of, as well as the lack of a favourable environment for participatory policy processes and an institutionalised platform for dialogue and partnerships.

When discussing the role of civil society – in its traditional sense of organised and institutionalised groups working for a common interest – throughout the rise of the Arab revolts, CSOs played an undeniable role in the early years leading up to the eruption of the mass protests and popular citizen mobilisation. Abdel Samad argues that "the achievements were an accumulation of the efforts and struggles of various societal factions and civil society groups."[19] Nonetheless, youth have countered the argument with responses similar to Sharif Mahmoud's statement, "CSOs cannot take the credit for the achieved successes of the revolution in Egypt. Young Egyptians were the driving engine; political parties and

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[17] Ziad Abdel Samad: Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) Beirut; quote captured in an interview conducted by author on 1 June 2011.
[18] Ahmad Karaoud, Ziad Abdel Samad and Nicole Rowsell – all indicated these factors throughout individual interviews conducted by author.
[19] Samad, Ziad Abdel; Mohamadieh, Kinda, 2011, art.cit.:113.

organisations rode the current – quite late. Yet, they still helped with increasing the magnitude of protests and citizen outreach."[20]

It is crucial to note the extent to which civil society groups, especially human rights organisations, have contributed largely to building a new rights-educated generation. Women organisations have admittedly advanced the gender mainstreaming efforts by consistently pressuring regimes to ratify international treaties and conventions on women's rights such as CEDAW, ICCPR and ICSECR. Even more so, civil society groups have, for long, lobbied for better quality and access to education, where school enrollments have risen markedly in the region throughout the past two decades. Primary education is practically universal, and higher education has also grown significantly in most countries in the MENA region.[21]

Furthermore, international democracy-promoting organisations have increased their efforts in recent years to expand and promote an increased role of civil society organisations in political life, decision-making and policy-development. Many supported initiatives led by local non-governmental organisations in countries like Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan, introduced concepts such as domestic election observation, parliamentary monitoring and civic advocacy. This augmented role of the public meant that governments can be held accountable, policies can be amended, and change can be driven by the people.

Analysts and practitioners, since January 2011, have commonly referred to the sidelined role of civil society organisations in the Arab revolts. Many consider that their ability to mobilize and organize was insignificant to the magnitude of the uprisings, and the achieved

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[20] Sharif Mahmoud: a young Egyptian activist who took part in the Tahrir Square 18-day demonstrations. Quote captured in an interview by author on 7 June 2011.

[21] For additional information on Progress of Arab Countries in Education see United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2008: *EFA Global Monitoring Report. Regional Overview of Arab States*. Available at: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/regional-resources/.

outcomes. As characterised above, the challenges that had faced civil society organisations (be it external or internal) have crippled their credibility to operate as legitimate representatives of their constituency. Therefore, young educated Arabs, whom to a large extent were marginalised not only by states but also by CSOs themselves, formed their own self-help groups and took necessary actions to voice their demands. Samir Amin indicated that there were three active components which drove the revolution in Egypt: youth 're-politicised' by their own will who expressed themselves in 'modern' forms that they invented, and were joined *at a later* stage by the radical left (or the traditionally labeled 'opposition' groups) and the democratic middle class – those who rally around the democratic objective, without necessarily objecting against market forces or resource allocation or even foreign alignment.[22]

III.   Arab Youth: The New Strategic Actor

> *"Develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation"*

-Brazilian Educator Paulo Freire (2000 [1090]:83) [23]-

The context of political engagement of youth in the Arab World has been significantly shaped by the recent youth-driven revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. For the past decade, there has been a growing recognition of the unique demographic situation in the region that has to be factored into all decision-making: youth make up the majority of the population. Recently published reports indicate, that the percentage of young adults – aged 15-29 as a fraction of all those over 15– ranges from 38 percent in Tunisia to over 50 percent in Yemen. Their numbers have grown rapidly over the past two decades; in fact, since 1990, youth

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[22] Amin, Samir, 2011, art.cit.
[23] Underwood, Carol; Jabre, Bushra, 2010: "Reflections on Civic Participation and Emerging Leadership in the Arab World", Paper for the NYU, Abu Dhabi Institute Workshop: 'Appreciating and Advancing Leadership for Public Wellbeing', February: 5.

population aged 15 – 29 has grown by 50 percent in Libya and Tunisia, 65 percent in Egypt and 125 percent in Yemen.[24] These numbers indicate a vast untapped human potential, which can be utilised to help mitigate and overcome social and economic difficulties. Nevertheless, authoritarian regimes have underestimated the repercussions of having youth –and women – underrepresented in civic and leadership roles in most of the Arab World.

Disproportional rates of progress of a number of Arab states in various components of development indicators have resulted in an imbalance between the supply and demand chains of the labour market. Arab States, for example, have noticeably achieved high rates of educational attainment and college enrolment for both young men and women. Indicators of educational attainment have doubled and tripled in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen. These changes, nonetheless, were countered by minimal efforts to provide the vast majority of educated youth with jobs and opportunities. Frankly, the rapidity of population growth had been almost impossible to meet and manage by any government, including also the 'sultanistic' regimes Goldstone refers to such as Mubarak's, Ben Ali's and Qaddafi's, amongst others.

Some efforts can be traced back to governments' attempts in providing subsidies, trying to encourage foreign investment and promote vocational training; yet, youth unemployment in the Middle East hit 23 percent, or twice the global average, in 2009.[25] Abdel Samad explains that the whole society was suffering from the repercussions of bad governance; however, young Arabs were the largest consumers of the job market – and with scarce supply not meeting the ever-increasing demands, the boiling point had to be reached inevitably.[26]

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[24] Goldstone, Jack, 2011, art.cit: 12.
[25] Assaad, Ragui; Roudi-Fahimi, Farzaneh, 2007: "Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: Demographic Opportunity or Challenge?", *Mena Policy Briefs* (April), Population Reference Bureau: 6.
[26] Ziad Abdel Samad: Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), Beirut; quote captured in an interview conducted by author on 1 June 2011.

The Bouazizi[27] effect triggered local protests and demonstrations of young educated Arabs to call attention to high unemployment, low wages, security apparatus harassment, and state corruption. These demonstrations, although not the first attempt at mobilizing, have succeeded with large scale support and participation from the mass public. The protests were, later, joined by other groups in both Egypt and Tunisia- mostly the traditional civil society organisations such as trade unionists, Islamists and other political parties, but also all other citizens who were dissatisfied by the regime and its autocratic governance. Nonetheless, the driving force and organizing kernel remained the educated, secular, tech-savvy middle class young Egyptians and Tunisians. These are young people, who have consistently experienced malaise, alienation and isolation from the broader society.

> *"Yesterday was a firm answer putting an end to all the allegations and brainwashing that claimed that the current system is better than all other options in front of us; it was also a good revision to all that I have learned through my Political Science courses."*

-A young Egyptian woman activist[28]-

Through this process of '*conscientisation*', as Underwood and Jabre explain, young men and women "learn to analyze critically their circumstances, come to recognize that the world is subject to change, and ultimately are empowered to rise to the challenge of changing the world in which they live."[29] In fact, what Huntington labeled as

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[27] Bouazizi refers to Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor living in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, who set himself on fire outside the City Hall to protest police harassment, humiliation, economic hardship in December 2010 in Tunisia. His self-immolation has triggered the Tunisian revolution with mass demonstrators protesting against the Ben Ali regime and their realities.

[28] A young Egyptian woman who took part in the Egyptian Revolution, featured on the famous blogspot of Hani Morsi: "From clicktivism to activism: How shutting down the Internet helped fuel the Egyptian uprising", Blog posted on 22 February 2011 in Egypt. Available at: http://www.hanimorsi.com/blog.

[29] Underwood, Carol; Jabre, Bushra, 2010, art.cit.: 5.

"*praetorianism*" [30] was evidently noticed in the Arab Spring, whereby in societies lacking institutions that could accommodate new social actors, Huntington explains that political participation takes the shape of strikes, demonstrations, protests and violence.

Youth movements witnessed in many countries around the Arab World, but mostly successful in Egypt and Tunisia (*so far*), with Syria and Yemen also witnessing significant successes, can be characterised as widespread and decentralised grassroots participation which took rapid steps towards organizing as the revolutions were unfolding. In the case of Egypt, the youth movement is diversified in its social composition and in its political ideological expressions; yet, it still considers itself as a whole leftist opposition. With many inspired lessons from the Tunisian revolution, and with constant exchange of knowledge, advice and experience from Tunisian youth, the Egyptian youth movements and their allies were able to mobilize 15 million Egyptians from all districts of big and small cities, and even villages, into demonstrations. More so, as protests and demonstrations on January 25th started growing in size and momentum, young activists formed the *Coalition of January 25 Youth* to present a series of demands to the regime: the resignation of Mubarak, the lifting of the state of emergency, the release of all political prisoners, the dissolution of parliament, the appointment of a government of independent technocrats, the drafting of a new constitution, and for those who were responsible for violent attacks on protestors to be held accountable.[31]

In Tunisia, un-politicised youth – some employed and others unemployed – took to the streets in protest against the reality imposed by the non-representative Ben Ali administration. Soon after Ben Ali's ousting, youth groups became more aware of the benefits of organizing. Youth movements have developed into three types of organised entities to ensure the sustainable outcome of their revolt: newly-founded youth-driven political parties; non-governmental civil society organisations;

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[30] Fukuyama, Francis, 2011: "Political Order in Egypt", in: *The American Interest*, 3,5 (May/June): 8.
[31] Shehata, Dina, 2011: "The Fall of Pharaoh: How Husni Mubarak's Reign came to an End", in: *Foreign Affairs*, 90,1 (May/June): 30.

and finally unstructured youth groups working together, reporting and informing the public on developments and violations, in the hope of safeguarding the 'right to know'.[32] The third form of organizing involves all young tech-savvy Tunisians, the new generation of citizen journalists, whose sole duty is to expose and inform to ensure large-scale civic participation in a new Tunisia.

External factors also contributed to the 'awakening' of the younger generation of Arabs; most importantly are the positive and constructive opportunities arising from globalisation and the increased and hardly-contained access to information. Access to the international community increased the exposure of average Arabs to what practices and freedoms are available in other parts of the world. The younger generation's global interconnectedness through media and technology has presented them with images of possibilities besides their current realities. This 'socio-political jealously' spurred an attitude of 'Why could they? Why can't we?', which was directed towards job opportunities, role in decision making, the right to have contested free elections, and the right to determine their own destinies. These factors, amongst others, gave youth both the impetus and vision to lead change.

The information revolution championed by the Internet has provided young Arabs with the opportunity to access information, which otherwise can be intentionally blocked by the government. In its recent 2011 annual report, Amnesty International tackles the emerging role of new technology, in the sense that "it is and will continue to be a tool used by both those who want to challenge injustices around the world and those who want to control access to information and suppress dissenting voices."[33] Media observers and analysts have had contrary opinions on the role of social media in pushing Arab revolutions forward. Some would argue that, in the case of Egypt with more than 42% illiteracy rate, the internet was inaccessible to the wide masses

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[32] Nicole Rowsell: Senior Program Manager at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)- Middle East and North Africa, Tunisia Field Office, interview by author on 19 May 2011.

[33] Amnesty International, 2011: *Annual Report 2011. The State of the World's Human Rights* (London: Amnesty International): 20.

protesting around different Egyptian cities. Blogger Hani Morsi's response to these remarks in his famously-read blog is that "this minority [of middle class, educated and internet-accessing youth] spoke for all of Egypt. By taking the war for reform to their *virtual turf*, away from the regime's clamp down on political action in real space, then funneling it all back out to real space in the form of a mighty wave of revolt, this minority has reclaimed Egypt." [34]

It is important to note, while agreeing with Morsi, that social media has been utilised by young Arabs long before the revolutions – what we saw in Tunisia and Egypt was rather the escalation peak of many years of accumulated 'vocalised dissent', which then reflected back to 'real space' in the form of strong confrontational popular action.[35] What young citizens were unable to express in real life, for many years now, has been expressed and discussed virtually with a higher ceiling of freedom. In fact, authoritarian regimes had feared, to an extent, the repercussions of a free virtual space for a rapidly increasing rate of internet consumers. Bloggers and online activists have been detained, harassed and even attacked by government security apparatuses. An example of this is the case of 28-year old Khalid Said in Egypt, who died after the severe assault of two police officers in an internet café in Alexandria earlier in 2010, after posting controversial material holding police forces responsible for citizen aggression.

> *"The year 2010 may well be remembered as a watershed year when activists and journalists used new technology to speak truth to power and, in so doing, pushed for greater respect for human rights."*

> -Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International[36]-

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[34] Hani Morsi Blog, 2011: "The Virtualization of Dissent: Social Media as a Catalyst for Social Change Part two: From Reanimating the Social Discourse on Reform to a Grassroots Revolt for Change", Blog posted on February 17, 2011, Egypt. Available at http://www.hanimorsi.com/blog/.

[35] Khoury, Doreen, 2011: "Social Media and the Revolutions: How the Internet Revived the Arab Public Sphere and Digitalised Activism", in: *Perspectives – Political Analysis and Commentary from the Middle East,* Special Issue 2 (May):80-86: 83.

[36] Amnesty International, 2011, art.cit.:11.

Needless to say, the fact that social media has played a key role in organizing and mobilizing young protestors nationally and regionally, does not diminish the importance of traditional media. *Al-Jazeera*, since December 2010, has by far surpassed all news agencies and media outlets through its 24/7 coverage, widespread and extensive outreach, and even through monitoring social media and encouraging a new generation of grass-root citizen-journalists. Both forms of technological communications have, complimentarily, challenged restrictions on the freedom of expression, defied physical state boarders, and channeled the voices of the repressed to the rest of the world.

IV.   Prospects and Opportunities

Victory has been attained. Change has just begun. Reform and real democratic practices are yet to be achieved. When change is the goal; there is a fight every step of the way.

Today, the real challenge lies in finding a platform which can bring together those who initiated the revolutions, the larger periphery with those who joined the protests, and the new entities administering the transition. Citizens, youth groups, civil society organisations, the private sector and the new governments are all held responsible to lead a process of change. The prospects for the future are infinite; yet, all actors ought to ascertain their rights and responsibilities, in order to safeguard the genuine goals and principles that ignited the revolution. Everyone needs to reiterate the question; 'Why did we do it in the first place?'

Youth groups have tremendous opportunities ahead; nonetheless, prudence and patience are necessary to the rebuilding process of a state. There lies a clear differentiation between idealism and pragmatism, as societies are in transition. Young Arabs, in both Egypt and Tunisia, are charged with passion, pride and drive to perceive the tangible outcomes of their hard work. With little or no political education and an understanding of the pragmatic strides of the political process, young Arabs can deplete their own progress and developments. Policy-making and political negotiation require time and participation. It is true, that collective action and mass demonstrations have proven to be successful

tools in bringing about change; yet, they are not necessarily constructive tools to *manage* change.

> *"The world is watching closely to see how if these movements can consolidate an agenda of the many different young people they represent, and how this platform may be incorporated into the policies and institutions of the developing states."*

-Stephanie Schwartz [37]-

How youth choose to consolidate their achievements is a determining factor as to the role they would play in the design of the new political system. Many youth groups, as Rowsell explains above, are moving towards institutionalizing as registered political or civic entities. She also highlights that this does not mean other non-traditional decentralised groupings have no legitimacy. In fact, Abdel Samad explains that "these youth groups have acquired and earned their legitimacy from the people –their constituency". [38] Greater investment must be made in organizing and mobilizing a culture of open-channel discussion, monitoring, consistent evaluation and advocacy, in order to instil effective and genuine democratic reform.

Youth movements must step up their game; especially when the more established parties who have the leadership and the experienced political machinery can co-opt the process of state-building for their own goals. It remains for certain, that youth interests can no longer be treated as an 'add-on'; they must be central to all policy decisions. Youth interests will have to be explicitly addressed and mainstreamed. Yet, it necessarily involves youth themselves having an active and institutionalised role in the decision-making process. Youth will have to assert this right, and gain the necessary skills to claim their rights and shoulder their responsibilities.

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[37] Schwartz, Stefanie (2011, April 28). *Youth and the Arab Spring*. United States Institute of Peace. Available at: http://www.usip.org/publications/youth-and-the-arab-spring.

[38] Ziad Abdel Samad: Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) Beirut; quote captured in an interview conducted by author on 1 June 2011.

Civil society organisations, on the other hand, have a larger role today than ever before. While any functional democratic structure is missing, CSOs can lead the example by practicing democratic principles internally; developing their existing structures on principles of equality, inclusion and transparency. We can see successful examples, such as the recent developments within the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), which has been undergoing full-scale restructuring of its organisational system in order to lead the example of democratisation.[39] As for CSOs and their civic responsibilities; there is dire need for CSOs to work closely with youth and civil movements to raise awareness on political procedures and processes, to manage expectations, and to educate on constructive ways for political negotiation and lobbying.[40] CSOs need to fill in the current prevalent gaps between citizens and the new state in-transition. They need to ensure, that the voices of the public are being channelled to decision-makers, and to continue to exert pressure on emerging new governments to secure democratic principles and practices. Based on the premise that "civil society supervision and involvement over the decision-making and functioning of the public sector is instrumental to improve governance,"[41] CSOs ought to build constructive coalitions with one another, and adopt collective approaches to lobbying and advocacy in order to drive effective policy reform, increase responsiveness of national agendas and policies to local needs; help in building social capital and developing democratic norms, and stimulate pluralism and increase civic participation.

Finally, newly emerging governments may choose different approaches to address youth and society's needs and demands. Experiences from around the world have produced broad knowledge on international best practices in development strategies and policy reforms, what works and what does not work. While learning and benefiting from other countries' experiences, every MENA government needs to design

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[39] Ziad Abdel Samad: Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) Beirut; quote captured in an interview conducted by author on 1 June 2011.
[40] Rowsell, Nicole: Senior Program Manager at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)- Middle East and North Africa, Tunisia Field Office. Interview by author on 19 May 2011.
[41] Ziad Abdel Samad: Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) Beirut; quote captured in an interview conducted by author on 1 June 2011.

its roadmap to reform in ways that are tailored to its country-specific conditions and desired outcomes.[42] Many of the new governments have been overwhelmed with structural reforms – which are of critical importance. However, it is worth highlighting that structural political, economic and social reforms are not the objectives; rather they are the means for building democratic momentum- the process which can deliver the original goals of the revolutions.

In state building, principles of democracy and good governance should overshadow individual aspirations. Participation, participation, and participation is the only way to guarantee constructive transitioning into democratic states. To start with, the constraints on the formation and the conduct of activities of political parties and opposition groups should be eliminated completely, in order to allow secular liberal parties to develop and to strengthen a real relationship with their constituencies. More so, loosening all restrictions on the right to assemble, the right to express one's thoughts and opinions freely and the right to access information and resources, is the base for ensuring effective open-channel communication and pluralism in a developing society.

Inclusiveness in all aspects of the decision-making process can guide the changing power structures in Arab states. Unfortunately, Dr. Natana J. Delong-Bas has stated in her most recent article, that although women were an integral part and active participants of the Arab Spring revolutions "hints of history repeating itself are already apparent in Egypt where the "Council of Wise Men" was established to advise the transitional government, leaving women without a direct voice. Demonstrations in support of International Women's Day in Cairo and calls for the protection of women's rights under Tunisia's Personal Status Code, were interrupted by men telling women to "go back home where they belong".[43] New governments are obliged to include youth, women and all segments of society into all levels of governance;

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[42] Assaad, Ragui; Roudi-Fahimi, Farzaneh, 2007, art.cit.: 6.

[43] DeLong-Bas, Natana, 2011: "Women of the Arab Spring." *Guardian Newspaper* (Common Ground News Service, 22 April). Available at:
http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=29898&lan=en&sp=0.
Dr. Natana J. DeLong-Bas is Editor-in-Chief of *The [Oxford] Encyclopedia of Islam and Women* and co-author of *Women in Muslim Family Law* (with John L. Esposito).

democratisation cannot be done as part of a top-down process, but rather as a holistic course which includes all actors in society.[44] Needless to say, accountability, transparency, rule of law and continuous responsiveness to citizen's demands are the building blocks of any democracy. People determining their future and the future of their countries, is the essence which drove the revolutions in the first place. After all, the realisation of the Arab people – those who have reclaimed their countries – has reached a point of no return. Their acquired sense of freedom will only drive them to sustain the fight for their rights.

"Freedom is in the mind."

-John Lennon-

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[44] Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2011: *The Arab World in Transition; Prospects and Challenges for a Revitalised Relationship Between Europe and North Africa.* Available at: www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de: 19