Abstract

While the dust of Arab revolutions has not yet settled, calls for democracy have never stopped, even after toppling a number of dictators and holding apparently fair elections. Scholars started to focus on the issue of democracy in the Arab world, as it has gained a great deal of attention with the advent of the Arab Spring. This article espouses a nuanced approach in addressing the issue of democracy in the Arab world, where we will try to draw some relevant conclusions of the future course of events in the region in light of the ongoing Arab Spring.

Keyword: Arabs, the Arab World, Islam, the Arab Spring, Democracy
Introduction
Traditionally known for its immunity toward democratic transformations, the Arab Spring shocked all observers across the globe and hit the Arab world to its core as popular uprisings began in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, where the course of the movement settled in Syria. While the revolts succeeded in toppling a number of autocratic regimes, demonstrators have not withdrawn their calls for reforms and freedom that based on the principles of human rights and democracy. Enthusiasm towards fully-fledged democracy has been mounting and has involved intellectuals, politicians and other various actors of civil society. Much analysis has been attempted to investigate this issue of democracy in the Arab world. To keep readers informed, this article examines this state of affairs from three main dimensions; theoretical, historical and practical. To attain this aim, the first part of this article examines the various terms under study that include democracy, Arabs, the Arab World and the Arab Spring. The second part of this article highlights the various hypotheses concerning democratization in global and regional contexts, and provides a historical background of democracy in the Arab World. In the third part, the article discusses the issue of democracy in practice and analyzes the current developments in the Arab World. The conclusion of this article tries to put these contours within a bigger framework and context where it suggests the factors that are deemed impediments to democracy in the Arab World.

Democracy
The word democracy has become one of the most used terms of quotidian politics. In etymological terms, according to democracy comes from ancient Greek ὀνήμοκρατία (dēmokratia), which combines dēmos, the “people”, with kratos, meaning “rule”, “power” or “strength”. Hence, the literal denotation of democracy is “rule by the people” (Campbell, 2008: 5). Fathi
Osman, Georgetown University, says “democracy represents an ideal of justice, as well as a form of government. It develops a belief that freedom and equality are inherently good and that democratic participation in ruling secures, deepens and enhances human dignity”, stressing on the necessity of freedom of expression and assembly for the life and flourishing of democracy (2001: 5).

According to Cherif Bassiouni, the term democracy can mean different things to different people depending on the various philosophical, ideological, political, cultural, social, and economic backgrounds (1998: 2). Still, there is no definite and agreed upon definition of the term democracy, yet one can say that the crux of democracy is that people choose who governs them and those elected rulers will be held accountable for their actions and decisions. This involves political, social, economic and cultural conditions that enable freedom of expression and equality of practices. Hence, democracy refers to a system involving multiparty elections, representative government and freedom of speech. As per democratic leadership, John Gastill summarizes the various efforts to define it as «a behavior that influences people in a manner consistent with and/or conducive to basic democratic principles and processes, such as self-determination, inclusiveness, equal participation, and deliberation (1994: 956).

David Beetham proffers that the principles of democracy are basically popular control and political equality. In other words, democratic value should guarantee that people have a right to a controlling influence over public decisions and to be treated with equal respect. These key principles in addition to human rights and the dignity of the individual person are set by institutions and practices (1998: 21).

Initially, democracy appeared as an alternative to ancient monarchies where kings and emperors reserved the rule and when moribund, transferred their crowns to their heirs, even if the latter were
ineligible, thus creating dynasties. This norm has changed, and republics and constitutional monarchy appeared as a logical alternative. Today, there is no one definite structure for a democratic government: they can rule in republics, as in France; kingdoms, as in the UK; and even empires like Japan.

**Arabs, the Arab World and the SPRING**

The Arabs are a very well-known nation, yet they are neither a nationality in the legal sense nor have they ever had a single state. They lived scattered as tribes before the period of the prophet Mohammed; thereafter they started to live together as one people, under Islam; then under western occupation and colonization; and finally under modern states and incumbent regimes. They share history, language, religion and traditions and they have always felt closer to other Arabs rather than to any other nation. The Sykes–Picot agreement of 1916 divided Arabs into different nationalities, separate states and various regimes. Now, there are Arab states that are members of the Arab League of States, but there is no single Arab state of which all Arabs are nationals (Lewis, 2002: 1).

Thus, the Arab World includes Morocco to the West, the Arab Peninsula to the South, Iraq to the East and North Africa to the North. Politically, the term “the Arab World” encompasses all members of the Arab League; excluding observer members such as Turkey. This will therefore originate from the six founding members of the Arab League in 1945: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Other Arab countries joined the league after winning their independence including Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Kuwait, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Mauritania, Somalia, Palestine, Djibouti and Comoros. Five out of the twenty-two Arab League member states experienced genuine uprisings, while ten other countries have shown less pronounced but
real enough levels of mass movements (Elhusseini, 2014: 6-7).

The tragic death of a Tunisian man Mohamed Bouazizi in December 2010 ushered unprecedented upheaval in Tunisia, followed by similar events of popular outcry in Egypt and other Arab countries (Libya, Yemen and Syria) declaring a new regional order or what best called the Arab Spring. The term Arab Spring is an allusion to the Revolutions of 1848, which is sometimes referred to as the "Springtime of Nations" and the Prague Spring in 1968. According to several scholars, the current round of revolts "the Arab Spring" constitutes the third spate of Arab mass protests that have led to a change in the social and political structure of Arab societies.

The first spate of Arab revolts took place in 1914 and was called "the Great Arab Revolution". What characterizes this revolution is that it had a leader, Sharif Hussein, whose main target was ending Ottoman rule in Arabia. Obviously, this wave was externally driven as the revolutions were supported by the British, who were aiming to end and replace the Ottomans presence in the region. Nationalism and Arabism were among the major outcomes this wave brought about. Following suit many other European nations, nationalism was deemed important at this stage in order to encourage Arabs to get rid of any connection to the Ottoman Sultan and the warding off of any yearnings for the Ottoman heritage (Sahin, 2012: 3-5).

The second wave of Arab revolts took place in the 50s and 60s, and was called "the Arab Spring" by a French writer. In his book "Un printemps arabe" published in 1959, Jacques Benoist-Méchin (1959: 13-15) describes the Arab revolts that took place in the "Arab" Middle East, and tries to link them to the European Revolutions of 1848, known as the 'Spring of Nations' or 'Springtime of the Peoples'. These revolts inspired new revolutions in former Czechoslovakia and led to what was best
known as the "Prague Spring". Similar to the first spate of Arab revolts, this one was also driven by external factors as Communist powers wanted to fight the Western presence and colonization in the Middle East. 'Fighting Imperialism', 'Progressivism' and 'Progressivism' were among other key slogans and themes of this period (Robins, 2002: 6). Although this series of revolutions gave a blink of hope for democracy in the region, especially with the establishment of new republics in the Arab world, the new regimes were authoritarian and produced long-lasting dictatorships. Conditions of democracy and freedom deteriorated noticeably even though the new rulers included democracy and human rights in their daily speeches.

The Arab Spring was seen by many Arabs as a definitive outcome of an increasing frustration among Arab Youth. This generation, which constitutes the majority of Arab population, inherited stories of glory and magnificent history of modernity, development, advancement in civilization, arts, science and might. But these stories hit day after day the wall of a frustrating reality as they (Arab youth) found themselves in fully dependent states (on foreign powers), experiencing successive defeats and in living bleak economic conditions, poverty, deep social malaise and a lack of democracy and freedom of expression. In parallel, the oppression of their regimes continued, rulers exaggerated in their grip and confidence and their hyperbole made parliamentary elections a joke and a scene of irony, while the issue of inheritance of power to their sons (in "theoretically" Republican regimes) became a mixed source of comedy and bitterness. Such confluence of factors constituted the backbone that triggered the first spark of the current Arab Spring.

Karen Kaya finds the Arab Spring a complex, rapidly unfolding phenomenon of uprisings, revolutions, mass demonstrations, and civil war with diverse
instigators as freedom, economic opportunity, regime change, and ending corruption (2012: 26). Eugene Rogan refers to two names for the revolutionary movements that struck the Arab World: the Arab Awakening and the Arab Spring. The latter is a Western reference while Arabs opt to call it an “Awakening” (2011: 4). Tariq Ramadan refers to the fact that while some call it the 'Arab Spring or Revolutions', other cautious writers tend to use the term 'Arab uprisings', noting that it remains difficult to ascertain and to assess what has happened or actually happening in the Arab World (2011: 13).

The Arab Spring 4.0 Wave of Democratization

The Arab Spring or the current 'wave' of revolts can be dovetailed in a global nexus and might arguably be considered the fourth wave of democratization, each followed by a reverse one. This hypothesis goes in line with the concept developed by Samuel M. Huntington (1991) in his book “The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century.” Huntington posits that the first wave of democratization occurred between 1828 and 1926, with its roots in the recent French and American revolutions. This wave swept Europe and Latin America, and was marked by military coups. It lost momentum in the interwar period between World War I and World War II when a number of dictators rose to power, which led to a shift away from democracy toward traditional authoritarian or new ideologically-driven, mass-based totalitarian regimes.

The second wave took place from 1943-1962, and featured coups and the establishment of authoritarianism across Latin America, South and East Asia and allied occupation post- World War II. Huntington proposes that the beginning of the end of Western colonial rule produced a number of new states with democratic tendencies. Yet, he argues that political development, especially in Latin America, took on an authoritarian cast, and the
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Some scholars, like Ali Sarihan of Qatar’s Georgetown University and the German scholar Klaus von Beyme, opted to include the events after the collapse of the Soviet Union leading to democratic transitions of varying success in Eastern Europe in the fourth wave of democracy. However, Sarihan (2011) inserts the current Arab revolts within this framework. He opines that with the onset of the current Arab Spring, the fourth wave of transformation or “Democratization of Communist and Islamic Regimes” began. As per the fact that it has an impact on other regions which inspired revolts and demonstrations in Europe, Asia, Latin and North America, it gained its global contours. Differently, Kenan Engin (2011) finds the Arab Spring the fifth wave of democracy that has begun in 2011 and still ongoing.

Historical Background: Since the Islamic State to-Date

In order to enunciate the issue of democracy in the Arab World from a historical standpoint, Islam, which rose from the Arab region, cannot be overlooked. Islam, as a religion not a mere political system, has a vision of a just society and introduces general principles of a whole way of life for the individual, the family, the society, the state, and the world relations in order to secure balance and justice. Islam offers the basic moral and organization rules for relations
between men and women, between the elderly and the young, in the family and in the society, between the rulers and the ruled, and between Muslims and others within the local society and throughout the world and Islam offers freedom and equality for all human beings. The second Caliph of the ancient Islamic State Umar Ibn Al-khattab tersely addressed the Muslim governor of Egypt whose son beat a non-Muslim Egyptian child, “Since when did you impose slavery on human beings while their mothers born them free” (Osman, 2001: 8-10).

In early times of Islam in the Arab region, the Caliph was nominated among other candidates by senior members of the community and endorsed by the people. This process was executed at the Shura (consultative) councils. Later, the Shura councils were one of the democratic platforms where the Caliph used to consult wise men before making decisions, whether political or social or economic. In Abderraziq’s view, there are two main theories explaining the philological statements on the terms of “Caliph” and “Caliphate”. The first “wants power to derive directly from God,” and thus the Caliph is God’s representative on earth. The second “the power comes as a delegation of responsibilities coming from the people, from the umma to the Caliph” (Ettmueller, 2006: 20).

Osman (2001: 8-10) refers to the fact that the Quran makes “shura” or “a serious and effective participation in making a decision that concerns them,” subsequent to and a consequence of the faith in God. Thus, the Quran makes “shura” subsequent to and a consequence of the faith in God. It represents the positive response to His message and comes next to making prayers to Him, “and those, who respond to [the call of] their Lord, and keep up the prayers, and whose rule in a matter [of common concern] comes out of consultation among themselves...” (2001: 10).
However, this trend had changed with the assassination of the fourth Caliph Ali Bin Abi Talib and the emergence of the Umayyad Caliphate (centered on the Umayyad dynasty) and continued with the following Caliphates (Abbasid Caliphate, Fatimid, Ayyubid) and lasted until the last Islamic Caliphate of the Ottoman Empire (centered on the dynasty of Osman I.). Although a consultative process was in place through Shura Councils, the final word rested with the Caliph, Sultan or Amir, whose word was law! No council would dare to question or remove the Caliph, Sultan or Amir. Hence, it would not be any surprise to learn about the numerous revolutions and coups, some of which were from inside the Palace of the Sultan himself, during that époque.

The last Islamic Caliphate (the Ottoman Empire) was replaced with the republic of Turkey that ceased to control Arab territories which remained under the role of the Ottomans for more than 400 years. The last years of the Ottoman rule was mired with political traps, economic malaise and nationalistic tendencies. In much of the Arab World, nationalism rose and Arab intellectuals began to talk about freeing themselves from Ottoman rule. The assumption of power in 1908 by the Young Turks in Istanbul also stimulated Arab nationalism, which assumed that there would be a single large Arab state. The Ottoman authorities attacked Arab nationalists and the tribes that joined them, and dealt with them harshly. General Commander of the Ottoman armies of Middle East, Cemal Pasa, had many Arab intellectuals arrested, tried for treason and executed. Arab intellectuals assumed that the Ottomans came under the influence of Turkish nationalism and thus they were perceived as foreign rule (occupation) on the Arabs (Kalaycioglu, 2005: 34-35). As a result, Arabs commenced their revolution at the aim of ending "Ottoman" atrocities, occupation and seeking freedom and an independent Arab State. These conditions ushered the first spate of Arab mass revolts.
The old adage of "the road to hell is paved with good intentions" was conspicuously manifest in the course of the events of these revolts. This myopic wave was externally driven, as the revolutions were supported by the British, who were aiming to end and replace the Ottomans presence in the region. As a result, the effect of the revolts was ephemeral as they were bereft of their main goal of independence and democracy. This fact was referred to by Mehmet Sahin (2011: 2), Turkey’s Gezi University, pointing out the final result of the Great Arab revolution, "... was only a change of the master. Instead of Muslims (Turks) the new masters were Christians (British and French)".

The conditions of freedom and democracy had not improved with the ascension of the colonial powers. United Kingdom and France ruled most of the Arab region, and they started introducing their own practices and life-style, inserting their culture and injecting their notions, among which was democracy. More startlingly, they have “assigned” governments in the Arab societies that resembled their democratically “elected” governments. Bernard Lewis (1992: 102) says: "the word 'democracy' in Arab political discourse has for long denoted the sham parliamentary regimes that were installed and bequeathed by British and French empires." Even when revolutions (as seen in the second spate of Arab revolts) toppled a number of those governments, new authoritarian regimes replaced them and introduced a novel era in the Arab World that was marked with dictatorships and a one-party system (for example, the Ba’ath party in Iraq and Syria).

A closer look into the Arab Revolts:
The current series of Arab revolts, which erupted in Tunisia in December 2010, has its own characteristics. First and foremost,
and unlike the previous two spates, the current revolts have neither a well-known leader, nor an external provenance. It is obvious that socio-economic conditions were the main drive for such revolts. Arabs, mainly youth, were seeking democracy and political freedom. In addition to economic reasons and human rights needs, international motives and democratic aspirations encouraged Arab youth to join their fellows to change the status quo. In discussing whether the Arab Spring would be classified as endogenous or exogenous, Nadia Mustafa (2012: 18-19), Cairo University, believes that Arab revolts were stimulated solely by internal dynamics. Similarly, this view was also put forward by Ziya Onis (2011: 46-48) who proffers that the current Arab revolts are “internally driven”. Social, economic, youth bulge and the remarkable evolution in the means of communication were among many crucial factors that led to the eruption of the current wave of revolts and there is no indication that they were instigated by a specific country or model. In his book, Wissam S. Yafi (2012: 3-47) explains four dynamics lead to inevitable change in the Arab world; geo-economics dynamics, geo-socio dynamics, geo-political conditions and technology. In the same context, the Arab Spring came in the aftermath of major global and regional transformations. On the global level, the collapse of the former Soviet Union produced unlimited repercussions as most maladroit Arab regimes were lying idle and could not adapt themselves to such massive changes. Against the emergent dynamism, they remained static, failing to sense the seriousness of these reverberations, and could not adjust their status quo ante policies and practices, especially when it comes to domestic conditions of democracy. On the regional level, the major transformation was manifested in the US occupation of Iraq and the collapse of the first dictatorship in the region. One of the important ramifications of the latter was
the fading of the praxis of “Arabism”. To elaborate, Saddam Hussein of Iraq was one of the staunchest supporters and believers in “Arabism”, and when he was attacked by the US, other Arab countries either watched or supported the American invasion. This led to a great shock for those who still believed in “Arabism” and significantly helped to strengthen two main ideologies in the region: Islamism and liberal modernism. In addition to Islamism and modernism, the revolts produced social demands including human rights, democracy and independence (from foreign influence) that helped fuel the revolts targeted against corrupted regimes (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria) which were deemed responsible for their stagnant social and economic conditions and known for their alliance with the West.

**Counter Revolutions: ISIS and Houthis**

After decades of democratic failure in the Arab World, Arabs were hinging hopes on the “Spring” to help building their own democratic experience. Nonetheless, any revolution should expect a counter-revolution that is typically led by ousted forces or frustrated masses eager for swift change. According to theoretical frameworks, especially the work of Samuel Huntington (1991), each wave of revolution is followed by a counter-wave or a reverse one. The reverse wave can be carried out by the remnants of the former regime who wish to retrieve power. Other forces who wish to impose their ideas, beliefs or ideologies try to gain power after breaking the wall of fear, and may seek such end.

With the exception of the Syria, the other Arab Spring countries witnessed drastic changes that poured at certain historical moment in favor of Islamists. Those, who were once deprived from political participation under the rule of toppled regimes, had the upper hand in post-revolutionary era. In Egypt, Freedom and Justice Party won parliamentary elections in 2011 and presidential elections in 2012. Al-Nahda won the constituent assembly
elections in Tunisia in 2011 and the Justice and Development Party won in Morocco in 2011. Election results in Libya Braked the Islamist wave that swept across post-Arab Spring countries and the Yemeni case was different as the GCC initiative (Yemen transition agreement 2011) preserved the statuesque (the regime) through transferring power to vice president Hadi.

The Syrian case constituted the most difficult quandary facing the issue of democracy in the Arab World. Peaceful demonstrations of the Syrian people quickly turned into bloody clashes and dramatically transformed into a civil "proxy" war. Foreign intervention, both direct and indirect was another ordeal for the Syrian case, crowned with the emergence of ISIS and its control of large swathes of the country. ISIS is a group once known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, October 2006–April 2013), the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS, April 2013–June 2014), and the Islamic State (IS, June 2014–present). This usage conforms to the group’s own shorthand for itself—as “the Islamic State” (al-Dawla al-Islamiyya), or merely “the State” (al-Dawla)—going back to 2006 (Bunzel 2015).

That is, with the emergence of ISIS, the Assad regime does not appear the sole obstacle for democracy in Syria. With the continuous crimes ISIS and other radical groups commit in Syria, it seems that the path of democracy, that was charted in the first place with peace demonstrations at the outset of the so-called Arab Spring, not in the offing. Thus, it would not be of any surprise to see that in 2015 Syria received a downward trend arrow of freedom and democracy due to worsening religious persecution, weakening of civil society groups and rule of law, and the large-scale starvation and torture of civilians and detainees by the regime or the militants. Also, Syria received the lowest Freedom in the World country score in over a decade, political rights rating declined to seven and civil liberties rating also declined to
seven, according to Freedom House report on freedom in the World 2015 (Brown, 2013: 45).

The Syrian regime proved to be adept in charting profound alliances which prevented, hitherto, an end similar to Gaddafi’s regime in Libya. It can be said that the Syrian debacle became a battle field for global and regional interests and influence and was transferred into a proxy war (BBC, 2015). Turkey and Qatar from one side supported the Syrian rebels, mainly the Free Syrian Army. Russia from the other side backed and supported the Syrian regime. ISIS and other radical groups in Syria, for example Al-Nusra, were believed to be funded and supported by many regional countries and other Western states who were aiming to weaken Assad. Although apologized afterwards, US Vice President Joe Biden said that the militant Islamist groups in Syria had been inadvertently strengthened by actions allies took to help opposition groups fighting against Assad. Biden Says, “They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad…Except that the people who were being supplied were al-Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world” (CNN, 2014). A Similar conclusion was reached by a declassified U.S. government documents written by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency on August, 12 2012 stating that the powers supporting the Syrian opposition (the West, some Gulf US allies and Turkey) wanted an Islamic caliphate in order to challenge Syrian president Assad (Judicial Watch document, 2015).

Hitches and problems facing the current wave of democracy featured again. Egypt, for instance, is considered a central country and a natural leader of the Arab World. With the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood by force in Egypt in 2013, a historical setback for any democratic aspirations in the region featured. After living with the empowering glimpse of a
democratic transition, the army overthrew the elected president Mohammad Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood was banned in Egypt following popular protests that broke out on June 30, 2013. According to Nathan J. Brown, these events clearly marked the failure of Egypt’s two-year attempt to realize a transition to democracy (Brown, 2013: 45). Foreign intervention was also obvious in the 2013 events since Saudi Arabia was linked directly (with the known carrot- the promise of financial bailout) to toppling Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. As a result, in 2015, Egypt received a downward trend arrow of freedom and democracy due to the marginalization of the opposition, state surveillance of electronic communications and the mass trials in Freedom House report on freedom in the World 2015 (Puddington, 2001: 9).

In Libya, following the downfall of Gaddafi, the country enjoyed tentative improvement in democracy, including staging democratic elections, forming a parliament and a government. However, Libya fell into a new internal conflict and instability continued to ravage the country amidst the emergence of ISIS fighters in the Eastern territories of the country. In addition to the threat of ISIS, tribal mentality is still prevailing and remains a Sisyphean Ordeal that threatens the country of further fragmentation and tribalism. Due to the ongoing chaos and democracy down turn, Libya lost its designation as electoral democracy, political rights rating declined from four to six, civil liberties rating declined from five to six, and its status declined from Partly Free to Not Free, according to Freedom House report on freedom in the World 2015 (Puddington, 2001: 8).

In effect, the Libyan case revealed how far entangled interests can be superior to any democratic aspirations or will in the region. For instance, Turkey and Qatar from one side and Egypt and the other Gulf countries appeared at odds on the Libyan case. Egypt and United Arab
Emirate appeared as staunch supporters of retired general Khalifa Haftar in his fight against Islamist groups in Libya where Qatar and Turkey appeared on the other side of the spectrum. On June 22, 2014, Haftar called on Turks and Qataris to leave eastern Libya within two days, accusing both their countries of supporting "terrorism". As a result, four hundred and twenty Turkish citizens who had worked for a power plant in the central city of Sirte were evacuated from Libya two days after Haftar's threat (Elumami, 2014).

In Yemen, the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) initiative - named Yemen transition agreement 2011 - which preserved the regime after conducting elections could not stand. The first three years of transition were guided by the political roadmap formulated through the GCC initiative. The Houthis accused Hadi for worsening the lives of Yemeni people. Houthi leader Abdulmalek al-Houthi requested that fuel subsidies be reinstated; warning if the government failed to do so, "other steps" would be taken. The Houthis, a Shiite group began as a theological movement preaching peace. They prefer to be known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God) and began as a faction within the youth offshoot of Al-Haq, a Zaydi political party formed in 1990 to contest the united Yemen’s first legislative elections, held in 1993 (Salisbury, 2015: 4). The Houthis were also demanding a more representative form of government that would reflect the seats allocated to political groups and independent activists during Yemen's 10-month National Dialogue Conference following the 2011 uprising (Saeed Al Batati, 2015). The Huthis took advantage of the weakness at the state and both former president Saleh and his loyalists along with the Houthis obliged the new president Abdu Rabbo Mansour Hadi to resign.

On March 25, 2015 Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia, after over a year in which his government and tribal allies have gradually been supplanted by the Houthi
movement and loyalists of former president Saleh. In March 2015, Saudi Arabia and members of a coalition launched a military operation "decisive storm" aimed at fighting Saleh’s and Houthis’s hegemonic plans and restoring the rule of Hadi. Since the beginning of this operation, around 5,000 people have been killed, including 2,355 civilians (Sharp, 2015: 1).

Accordingly, Yemen received a downward trend arrow due to the presence al-Qaeda, the Houthi militant group’s seizure and occupation of the capital city, its forced reconfiguration of the cabinet, and its other demands on the president, which paralyzed Yemen’s formal political process. Political rights rating remained as low as 6, civil liberties rating also remained at 6, status declined from Partly Free to Not Free and received a downward trend arrow of freedom and democracy according to Freedom House report on freedom in the World 2015 (Puddington, 2001: 23).

The foreign fingerprints appeared clearly in the Yemeni crisis. The Houthis accuse the Saudis of interfering in the internal affairs of Yemen and trying to control the government there. On their part, the Saudis and incumbent president Hadi accuse Iran for distorting the democratic path in Yemen and funding the Houthis at the aim of dominating the country. In fact, Western and Yemeni officials have long accused Iran of supporting the Houthi militias with weapons shipments. In an article in the Financial Times in February 2014, a Yemeni official claimed that Iran and its Lebanese proxies provided direct financial and logistical support, as well as military advisers, to the Houthis. Several incidents (since January 2013 until September 2015) reported by either US or Saudi coalition sources that arms shipment seized had originated from Iran (Salisbury, 2015: 6-7). In retrospect, Hadi addressed the UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) on September 29, 2015, praised Saudi Arabia, accused Iran of seeking the
destruction of Yemen, and called upon Houthi forces to stop fighting withdraw from areas they have occupied (Sharp, 2015: 3).

Perhaps Tunisia represents a success democratic story. Following the Jasmine Revolution, Islamists won in a democratic election in 2011, assumed the presidency and ran the government. Although the country suffered for two years from terrorism, political assassinations and instability, democratic practices prevailed and power was shifted from Islamists to secularists. Islamic Al-Nahda party lost the elections after Nidaa Tounes (Call of Tunisia) succeeded in receiving the largest number of votes in the parliamentary elections in 2014. As a result, Peaceful transition of power from Al-Nahda to the winning party ushered a promising democratic practice in the country.

This was clearly reflected in Freedom House report where Tunisia was classified as a notable exception compared to its neighbors. Tunisia became the first Arab country to achieve the status of ‘Free’ since Lebanon was gripped by civil war 40 years ago (Puddington, 2001: 1). The report considers Tunisia an exceptional success story and finds that political rights rating improved from three to one. Five years ago, Tunisia was ranked ‘Not Free’ that placed among some of the most repressive regimes in the world. In 2014, Tunisia took its place among the ‘Free’ countries of the world and can be considered so far the only successful case among the many Arab countries that exhibited some political opening in the 2011 Arab Spring. The improvements included a progressive constitution adopted in January 2014 and well-regarded elections for parliament and president later in the year (Puddington, 2001: 6-7).

Impediments to democracy in the Arab world

The painful process of building a democratic system from scratch in the Arab World has brought out into the open
a number of critical issues that are relevant for other states in the region. After toppling a number of autocratic regimes and holding seemingly democratic elections, calls for democracy have surpassed the question of democracy when the opposition asked the newly elected rulers to step down; with no major crisis the new governments bear the brunt. The new rulers were also accused of firming their grip on power, through illegal practices, including cronyism and arming their supporters. Hence, the concept and the exercise of democracy, on both sides, are distorted and lack the correct parameters, with the exception of Tunisia.

Abdel Khaliq Hussein (2011) gives nine reasons behind this state of affairs; traditional value system, political Islam, religious conflicts and sectarian strife, the absence of an organized civil society, illiteracy and ignorance, oppression of women, opposition parties crisis, fragmentation of the forces of the youth of revolutions and last but not least Population explosion. Kenan Engin (2011) suggests three reasons for the lack of progress toward democracy in Arab-Islamic countries: first, the personification of those systems; second, the strong influence on legislation; and third, importance of tribal relations in governmental institutions.

In the same vein, Mustafa Dabee (2013) says that the path of democracy in the Arab world faces both internal and external obstacles, stressing on essentiality of education and preparation of the society as a prerequisite to practicing sound democracy. On the other hand, some scholars opted to connect the role of foreign powers, and their support to particular regimes or minorities and their overt intervention in domestic issues, with the poor democratic conditions in the Arab World. Although many other scholars limit the causes of these conditions to external factors solely, I believe the core general reasons are undoubtedly internal.
Firstly, readiness (applies to the Arab World in general): Arab societies had no opportunity to put democracy into practice since the death of the fourth Caliphs Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib, 1352 years ago. Despite rulers' claims to the contrary, the region has not practiced sound democracy, leading to a deterioration of the conditions of democracy in the Arab world. Thus, social preparedness is crucial. In comparison to the current conditions in Arab Societies, revolutions in Central and Eastern European States would not have succeeded without a suitable environment (Onis, 2011: 46-48).

Second, lack of democratic experience and culture (applies to the Arab World in general): in accordance with the previous factors, Arabs have not experienced democracy for ages and the practices of democracy became a matter of judgment in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. For instance, there was considerable debate in Egypt about the sequence of events and procedures that should follow Mubarak’s departure. Should elections come first, and if so, for what? Should a constitution be written first instead to clarify such questions, and if so, how should Egypt be governed in the meantime? Brown finds that most of that debate missed the point since all the questions were ‘partisan’ (Brown, 2013: 46). Also, the actors had bad choices and when Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were in power, their behavior ranged from high-handed to extremely heavy-handed. For example, the Brotherhood pressured institutions that were supposed to stand outside partisan politics and sent followers to prevent the Supreme Constitutional Court from meeting. Also, the Brotherhood called out its followers to protect the presidential palace in December 2012 and they attacked, beat, and interrogated other demonstrators. Brown suggests that the Brotherhood was not antidemocratic, but that its conception of democracy was shallow and often illiberal (Brown, 2013: 50-51).
Third, tribal and sectarian complexities (applies to Libya, Yemen and Syria): Syria constitutes a unique religious mosaic that includes Sunnis, Shiites, Alawites, Nusayris in addition to other groups like Syriacs, Armenians, Turkmen and Arabs. Those religious, sectarian and ethnic links remain stronger than any other relations with the government or any political institution. In Libya and Yemen, the tribal culture bounds people’s behavior to their links with their tribes and subordination to the decisions of the head of the tribe surpasses any other political one. When dictators fell, those groups reinforced their bonds for various reasons, among which security and power.

Fourth, emulation (applies to the Egyptian case): The haste and passion of Arabs to attain a democracy similar to that of other countries is another problem. With the advent of the Arab Spring, everybody was holding great hope for democracy and calls for the adoption of Western or Turkish model of democracy started to resonate in every corner of the Arab world. Nevertheless, one can argue that taking historical short-cuts is not always successful. Europe has paid a heavy price, including wars and revolutions, until it laid the foundations of its mature democracy. Turks too have acknowledged that they have paid a big price to develop their own brand of democracy, including democratic standards and institutions to uphold the rights of individuals. Erşat Hürmüzlü (2011: 39-42), chief advisor to Turkish President, says that Turks have designed their own fate, admitting that throughout the path of democracy in Turkey, many mistakes have been made, but learning from mistakes has been the best tool for building better practices. The current role of the military and the idea of entrusting the military with the role of regime protection (like in Egypt) is a clear reflection of how far these revolts are obsessed with the emulation of other models, especially the Turkish one.
Fifth, foreign intervention (applies to Syria, Libya and Yemen): as we have seen earlier, foreign intervention turned democratic struggles into ‘proxy’ civil wars. For instance, in Syria we have seen that various regional and global powers supported ISIS, funded the Syrian rebels ‘Free Syrian Army’, backed Assad’s regime, and thus aggravated the already stuck democratic path. Similarly, Yemen represented a battle field for contradictory interests where we see regional powers fight the influence of other powers.

Why did democracy succeeded in Tunisia?

Eva Bellin poists that although there is no economic determinism governing democratic transition, the correlation between economic development and sustained democracy is one of the strongest findings of democratization studies. Thus, socio-economic standing can be one reason explaining why democracy succeeded in Tunisia and failed in other Arab countries. Tunisia enjoys great wealth (measured on a per capita basis), a higher level of urbanization, a larger middle class, and a higher rate of literacy. Other factors, in Bellin’s view, such as leadership, strategic choice and the small, professional, with little experience of political engagement Tunisian military were behind such success (Bellin, 2014).

As per leadership and the strategic choice (either from the army or civil society or political elites), can explain the success story in Tunisia. For instance, the military elite in Tunisia announced that it would submit to civilian control and stay out of politics. The Civil society played a crucial role as a watchdog on the regime’s performance and facilitated dialogue and compromise across the political divides. The political elites were committed to the establishment of democratic institutions in the country: free and fair elections, freedom of speech, and commitment to dialogue. As an illustration of the latter point, Rachid Ghannouchi distinguished himself by reaching out to the non-Islamist
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camp and argued that even if Al-nahda had had the power to push through its views unilaterally, it should not, that in building the country’s foundational political institutions the country ought to come together and strive to build consensus (Bellin, 2014).

On his part, Juan Cole contends that among the reasons for the success of democracy in Tunisia were that the religious right was cautious and avoided deeply polarizing moves; the national labor union (UGTT- General Union of Tunisian Workers) was relatively independent and powerful and was able to lobby the government and step in as mediators in fall of 2013; the secularists did not demand a ban on the al-Nahda religious government and; Tunisia’s economy improved slightly and grew in 2013 2.3 per cent (Cole, 2014).

Considering the aforementioned factors for failed democracy in the Arab World, one must concede that Tunisia constitutes a different case at different levels. First, Tunisia's tribal culture is not as strong as many other neighboring countries. The country also enjoys a homogenous society compressed of very similar ethnic and religious affiliations. Tunisia is very well known for its close relations with the West, notably France. These close relations provided the Tunisians with ample experience of democracy to execute it in an advanced form, compared to its proximate Arab neighbors. Finally, bearing in mind that Tunisia has been always a French sphere of influence; the international intervention was at the minimum.

Conclusion

In a nutshell one can say that genuine democracy is practice and partnership, and cannot be confined to ballot box. Western democratic experience and practices have introduced effective institutions and legislation, capable of monitoring the whole political life and evading unsolicited scenarios. However, in order to have these practices viable in any society, the latter
has to be prepared and ready. From that, and after being away from practicing sound democracy for ages, the societies in the Arab world have to educate and adapt themselves to that end. Importing western or other experience can be helpful; yet copying others experience does not always guarantee coveted results. In other words, it is crucial to learn and accumulate the experience of others, but the final word shall be for Arabs who must build their own system and their own brand of democracy.

It may take Arabs some time to overcome several problems and face tremendous challenges to develop their own democracies, but the present upheavals cannot be construed as part of the process of Arabs building their own experience in exploring the path towards an independent democratic choice. Nevertheless, the longer the process lasts, the more susceptible the resources of moderation, enthusiasm and hope are to depletion. The bloody experience, instability, chaos and turbulence flowed in favor of the dictatorships which have been trying to show that the alternative to their rule signifies instability, chaos, extremism and a failed state scenario.

Finally, as the only full-fledged Arab democracy, Tunisia can set a positive example that can inspire the other Arab countries still struggling for democracy. Further, the success story of Tunisia and the peaceful transmission of power from Al-Nahda Islamic party to others confirm that democracy and Islam are in no way a contradiction.

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End Notes:

1 Arab Nationalism, which mainly meant adhering to Arab interests and unity.
2 Islamists are basically Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties and groups. Many of them named parties after the AKP in Turkey; for example the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt.
3 The Index of Political Freedom is normally based on a number of indicators that include: election of the head of government; election of parliament; fairness of electoral laws; right to organize political parties; power of elected representatives; presence of an opposition; transparency; level of corruption; freedom of assembly; independence of the judiciary; press freedom; religious freedom; rule of law and; property rights. See The Economist Intelligence Unit, The dynamics of democracy in the Middle East, London, The Economist Intelligence Unit, March 2005, p. 9.
4 Former general Haftar returned to Libya during the civil war in 2011. His self-declared Libyan National Army began "Operation Dignity" against Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia.

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