Conventional Explanations of Egyptian Democratization

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Since the early 1980s, there had been an upsurge in scholarly interest in the processes of democratic transition. This was in large part due to the democratization of the remaining authoritarian regimes in southern Europe, in addition to the then ongoing processes of democratic transformation in Latin America, which cumulatively became known as the 'Third Wave'. The new scholarship also gained further momentum with the opening up of political systems in South East Asia, which was in turn followed by the political and economic transformation of former communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe. Critically, most of the theoretical and comparative democratization studies that were conducted during this period overlooked the Arab world. This was evident in the exclusion of the Arab countries in the two most important research projects on democratization published in the 1980s; the first was O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead's comparative study on *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*: *Prospects for Democracy*, published in 1986, and the second was Diamond, Linz, and Lipset's four-volume study on *Democracy in Developing Countries*, published in 1989. Although this period witnessed the rise of some studies devoted exclusively to the analysis of political and economic liberalization in selected Arab countries, such as the ones by the Center for Arab Unity Studies (Beirut), the Arab Thought Forum (Amman), and Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (Cairo), the majority of these studies did not appear to have achieved significant recognition beyond the community of Arab social scientists. This scholarly neglect of the region was largely an outcome of academic bias within the democratization literature, which took political change as a criterion for case selection, thereby excluding the Arab world as a domain of analysis (Brownlee 2005: 45; Niblock 1998: 226).

It was not until the mid-1990s that efforts to bring the Arab world into the study of democratization achieved some recognition from comparative scholars. This was an outcome of a number of developments. Chief among them was the greater attention paid to the phenomenon by Arab intellectuals and civil society organizations, both at the Arab and international levels, which increasingly saw them grapple with the question of democracy and political reform. Moreover, the merger between Middle East area expertise and social science theory, with focus on state development, directed attention to democratization, manifesting in a growing number of scholarly works and conferences on the subject of Arab democratization. Among the first and most influential scholarly production, thanks to which a thorough conceptual examination of the theme of democratization in the Middle East became available in English, was Tim Niblock and Emma Murphy's comparative volume on *Economic and Political Liberalization in the Middle East*, published in 1993; Ghassan Salame's volume on *Democracy without Democrats*? *The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, published in 1994; and Brynen, Korany, and Noble's volume on *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, published in 1995.

The literature on Arab democratization has, since this beginning, been preoccupied with the search for the factors conditioning a potential path towards democratization in the Arab world. In this context, the literature has branched into two main schools of thought. The first is the 'domestic factors' school, which emphasizes the domestic sources of democratization. These accounts, usually conducted by comparative politics scholars and political scientists interested in political development, look at the democratization process as a product of internal historical processes and socioeconomic change. Under this school, one could identify four scholarly approaches, namely (i) the 'political culture' approach, (ii) the 'structural' approach, (iii) the 'institutional approach', and (iv) the 'political agency' approach. The second school of thought is that focused on 'external factors', which stresses the effects of external actors and the structure of the international system and its institutions on democratization. Under this school, one could also identify four scholarly approaches to the study of Arab democratization, namely (i) the 'great powers' approach, (ii) the 'dependency' approach, (iii) the 'regional conflict' approach, and (iv) the 'advocacy' approach.

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2.1 The Domestic Factors School

The 'Political Culture' approach dominated first generation studies of democratization in the Arab world. Proponents of this approach advocated the thesis of Middle East 'exceptionalism', which was embedded within essentialized notions of Arab-Muslim political culture. Scholars such as Lewis (1993), Kedouri (1992), and others writing within the scholarship of 'orientalism', argued in favor of an inherent incompatibility between democracy and the Arab-Muslim culture. It was contended here that the Islamic belief-system, which embodies divinely ordained prescriptions covering a wide range of political, social and economic aspects within adherents' lives, negates the concept of popular sovereignty and, therefore, renders it impossible to create a political system that functions according to popular suffrage. Such scholarship often referred to a perceived general emphasis within Arab culture valuing obedience to the ruler, arguing that these values were inculcated in the Arab populations over a long period of time. This sociological phenomenon, it was argued, resulted in a public behavior of compliance to authority negating accepted tolerance of a 'loyal' opposition that therefore resulted in tyranny (Weedan 1999; Sharabi 1988).

In the Egyptian case, the use of the political culture approach did not take a purely Islamic or Arab oriented dimension, but rather extended to include other sources in relation to Egypt's own historical and cultural context. For example, Ibrahim (1982: 27–28) traced the origins of Egypt's political authoritarianism to the ecology of the Nile River Valley, arguing that in a hydraulic society like Egypt, irrigation became analogous to societal organization, and society at large became subordinate to an absolute public power. This tradition, which can be traced back to the Pharaonic state, was deeply rooted in the social history of Egypt, leading to the creation of a set of social and cultural values embracing the concept of absolute submission to the ruling authority. In the same vein, Hemdan (1984: 552–553) contended that the Egyptian tradition of tyranny emerged as the inevitable consequence of the centralized state, which was in itself an inevitable consequence of the presence of the Nile River as the source of life. In Hemdan's analysis, societies dependent on hydrological irrigation for wealth had an inherent cost represented by the freedom of the peasantry being handed to the state. According to such logic, Egyptians gave up their political freedoms in return for access to water and the bounty of irrigated crops, thus exchanging social freedom for social security. The result was that submission to the ruler—the distributor of water—became part and parcel of their social and cultural personality.

The 'Structural' approach focused on the specific arrangement of the relationship between state and society in the Arab world. It contended that social groupings were in a weak or dependent position in relation to the state, and thus were not capable of challenging state authority and its ruling elite. The bourgeoisie, often regarded as an autonomous social force with an important role in leading towards democratization through their opposition to absolute authority, emerged across the Arab and Islamic world. However, they remained dependent on the state. In addition, the intelligentsia and the wider middle classes, who represented the driving force toward democratization in many Western societies, were also dependent on the state within the Arab context. Outside of signature examples, this cohort proved incapable of impelling the state towards an agenda of political reform. This dominance of the state was the result of various economic and politico-historical processes that occurred in the Arab world, and which remained unaltered over the last half a century.

In the modern Egyptian context, a number of scholars have examined the effects of Egypt's economic liberalization on state-society relations and the path of democratization in the country. Initiated with Anwar Sadat's Open Door Policy (*Infitah*) in 1974, this effort to open and transform the Egyptian economy culminated in Hosni Mubarak's structural adjustment programme and embrace of neoliberalism in the 1990s, all of which profoundly altered the Egyptian social fabric. Amin (1982, 2000) observed that economic liberalization did not bring about the economic and social changes of the kind expected to lead to political mobilization in favor of democracy. Rather, economic liberalization ultimately resulted in undermining the process of democratic transition. According to his analysis, economic liberalization triggered significant inequalities in income distribution, deficits in balance of payments, and a crippling external debt, while negatively affecting cultural values such as corruption, apathy, and disrespect for law, all of which did not work in favor of a genuine democratization process in Egypt. Imam (1986) shared a similar view, arguing that the "haphazard implementation of economic liberalization" led to the impoverishment of large segments of the middle class, in turn undermining its role as an engine for democratic transition. In the same vein, Owen (1995: 242) contended that economic liberalization and structural adjustment created a crony entrepreneurial class in close alliance with the state. Instead of emerging as a ballast to state power, their ties to the state incentivized their having no interest in political opening beyond that which safeguarded their own economic position and influence. Other scholars advocated the 'rentier state' thesis, linking the persistence of authoritarianism in Egypt to the primacy of external revenues or economic 'rents' in the state's fiscal budget. For example, Bellin (2005: 32) attributed the ability of the Mubarak regime to sustain its authoritarian grip over society to its excessive reliance on external rents driven from different

endowments such as petroleum resources, the control of critical transit utilities, and foreign aid from the United States. This gave the regime more access to "substantial discretionary resources" which enabled it to submit to conventional economic wisdom and pay itself first, even if the country was in poor economic health overall.

The 'Institutional' approach has focused on the study of both formal organizations and informal rules and procedures that structure political conduct. It covered a wide range of state and societal institutions that shape how political actors define their interests, and which structure their relations of power to other groups within both Egyptian society as well as the international community. It also engaged in an analysis of institutional structures such as the rules of electoral competition, the structure of party systems, and the relations among various branches of government. For example, Kassem (1999: 36–37) highlighted the role of Egypt's constitutional structure in imbedding democratic transition, arguing that the 1971 constitution provided the president with enough powers to overrule both the legislative and judicial institutions. In her subsequent analysis of the 2005 constitutional reforms, Kassem (2006: 129) contended that the reforms represented 'tactics primarily intended to stabilize and reinforce the survival of authoritarian rule rather than being carried out in order to create genuine liberalization and democracy in contemporary Egypt'. In the same vein, Pool (1993: 50) noted that although the Egyptian state had allowed for greater political freedoms throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it retained control through a set of legal and institutional means, including restrictive voting thresholds on party representation in the national assembly, as well as restrictions on party programmes, policies, finance and registration (For similar accounts, see also Rabie' 1997; Ibrahim 1997). Other scholars examined the role of institutions in the persistence of an authoritarian power structure in Egypt. For example, Egyptian political scientist Abdullah (1990) examined the role of the military, arguing that the involvement of the military in politics and its backing of the ruling regime, itself dominated by ex-military officers, played the most important role in forestalling potential development toward democratization (For similar accounts, see also Harb 2003; Frisch 2001). Albrecht (2005) analyzed the role of opposition parties in the democratization process. According to his analysis, Egypt's opposition parties worked in support of authoritarian rule by serving functions entirely different from those in liberal democracies, where opposition would represent an alternative to the ruling elites in a competitive contest for political power. This was so because the emergence of opposition parties in Egypt was not the consequence of a weak authoritarian state incapable of suppressing societal dissent. Rather, opposition parties were permitted by the regime in order to provide for a façade of democracy, which contributed to the political legitimacy of the regime both domestically as well as in international fora.

Finally, the 'Political Agency' approach emphasized variables such as the political and strategic choices made by political elites to bring about democratization in a society undergoing a process of modernization. Such scholars identify 'agency' as a category inclusive of not only the regime, but also members of the nominal opposition as well as various civil society organizations. According to advocates of this approach, democratization is seen as an elite-driven process in which "political elites, as rational actors, will only democratize if they think their vital interests will survive or even be enhanced by the transition from authoritarianism or that the costs and risks of democratization would be lower than those of continued repression" (Hinnebusch 2006: 387). In this context, a number of scholars attempted to explain the process of democratization in Egypt in terms of the calculations of the political executive, with arguments that Egypt's limited democratic transition was the outcome of well-calculated policies crafted by successive Egyptian presidents to absorb external and domestic pressures, while consolidating an authoritarian power structure in a new form (Hinnebusch 1985; Naf'a 1988). Other scholars focused on the role of civil society actors in Egyptian politics, arguing that Egypt's democratic deficit was the result of the stunting of a dynamic civil society that could act as a counterweight to the state (Thabit 2007; Fandy/Dana 1999; Ibrahim 1991).

2.2 The External Factors School

The 'Great Powers' approach emphasized the role of the great powers in directing the democratization process in Egypt. Building on a widespread anti-colonial sentiment, it examined how the foreign policy platforms and the instruments of action by the great powers influenced the movement toward or away from democracy in the country. In this context, Ibrahim (2003) argued that the strategic importance of the Arab world prompted the United States to provide support to authoritarian Arab regimes in an effort to protect American strategic interests in the region. These included the stability of petroleum supplies, the containment of Islamic fundamentalism, and the protection of Israel. To maintain these interests, the United States was willing to allocate immense military and economic aid to its regional Arab allies such as Egypt, while turning a blind eye to human rights abuses, economic mismanagement, and authoritarianism. This contributed to the continuance of large coercive state security apparatuses that were used to suppress internal dissent. Perry (2004: 99–100) subscribed to the same view, arguing that Western powers, particularly the United States, contributed significantly to the bolstering of authoritarianism

in Egypt. In his view, the failure of Egypt to democratize during the 'third wave' of democracy can be seen in large part as a function of America's need to secure reliable allies in the Arab world, and to maintain Egypt's separate peace with Israel amid a growing popular resentment within Egypt and across the Arab world, in opposition to American and Israeli policies in the region. In this reading, the United States ironically came to fear the potential rise of a genuine democratic system in Egypt, in turn causing it to staunchly support Egyptian authoritarian regimes with economic and military aid (For similar accounts, see Hamarneh 2000; Murphy/Gause 1997; Hawthorne 2005; Abdel-Hay 2001; Brown/Shahin 2010; Azabawi 2007). Badran (1992) examined the influence of American aid on Egypt's democratization process in an alternate yet equally important way. According to her analysis, American economic aid to Egypt did not create the type of economic and social development conducive to democratic transition. Rather, due to the set of restrictions attached to the aid with respect to administration, allocation, and areas of spending, American aid created a sort of unbalanced development among the different sectors of the Egyptian economy, and thereby contributed to a widening of an already existing gap in the distribution of national income across society, all of which had the effect of hindering the movement towards a genuine democratic transition (For similar accounts, see also Sullivan 1996).

Rizq (2005) viewed the influence of Western powers on Egypt's democratization process from a historical perspective, arguing that Western attempts to push for the democratization of Egypt were hindered as a result of the prevailing patterns of Egyptian historical memories towards the West. In his view, democratization in Egypt was shaped by the nation's historical encounter with Western powers since the 19th century expansion of European imperialism into the Arab region. This experience resulted in the abortion of Egypt's modern renaissance and the exploitation of its natural and human resources. Even with the achievement of independence in the 1950s, Egyptian perceptions of the West remained unchanged, and continued to fall into the trap of an often-acrimonious history. This was the result of several factors, chiefly among them were Western attempts to skirmish with communism and therefore re-enter the region during the Cold War; the West's unconditional support for Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab states; and the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. Indeed, the invasion of Iraq, which was followed by the virtual destruction of the Iraqi state, revived memories of the colonialist age in Egypt and across the Arab world after almost half a century following the retreat of European powers from the region. In this context, the Western democracy-promotion policies in Egypt and the Arab world had the effect of reaffirming Egyptian perceptions of Western dominance and interference in the internal affairs of Egypt, thus rendering these policies largely ineffective. This led many scholars under the 'Great Powers' approach to devote their analysis to an examination of Western democracy-promotion initiatives in the Arab world in the post 9/11 era. These studies focused on examining the content of the democracy-promotion initiatives, the motives and conditions under which they were formulated, the reactions they triggered in the Arab world, as well as their efficacy on Arab democratization. In their final analyses, scholars differed in their assessments of the democracy-promotion initiatives and their overall impact on Arab democratization. Whereas a number of scholars viewed such initiatives as motivated by a genuine Western desire to democratize the Arab world, arguing that they had a positive impact on triggering some measures of political reform in a number of Arab countries (Said 2006: 24–29), the majority of scholars were skeptical about the real intentions of these initiatives, viewing them merely as foreign attempts to dominate the region under a new political pretext (Mohammad 2006: 70–88; Al-Ghamri 2004: 197–209, 275–280; Shadi 2005: 264–290; Al-Guhari 2005: 135–163; Azabawi 2007).

With the outbreak of the Arab Spring uprisings, a number of scholars contended that the uprisings were an outcome of a carefully planned US strategy aimed at restructuring the political map of the Arab world in tandem with American interests in the region. Glenn, for example, argued that the Arab uprisings were the outcome of persistent US efforts from 2008 to remove specific Arab regimes through various democratic movements funded by the US government. This was achieved in an attempt to maintain control over particular countries passing through difficult socioeconomic conditions, and accordingly to abort the outbreak of a "true grassroots revolution" as had occurred in Iran in 1979. According to his analysis, "The United States is allowing all of this instability that is taking place…What they [the Americans] are doing is preventing true revolutions from taking place by creating revolutions of their own".[1] In the same vein, Ramadan, Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University, argued that it is 'naïve' to relate the Arab uprisings to popular will in Arab countries. Rather, the United States pushed toward the outbreak of these uprisings in an attempt to restructure the region in line with US interests.[2] Engdahl (2011), an American analyst, put it bluntly by arguing that the United States orchestrated the Egyptian as well as other regime changes from Libya to Yemen and beyond, in a process referred to as "creative destruction." This was achieved, Engdahl argued, with a

[1] 'US planned Arab world revolutions out.' Interview with Mark Glenn, *PressTV*, 17 April 2011; at: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/175293.html>.
[2] Interview with Tariq Ramadan, *RT* (*Russia Today*), 17 June 2012; at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ny_ajpUMoA>.

view to creating the conditions conducive to the establishment of the Greater Middle East project advocated by the George W. Bush Administration. "This is the first time since the US-backed regime changes in Eastern Europe some two decades back that Washington has initiated simultaneous operations in many countries in a region. It is a strategy born of a certain desperation and one not without significant risk for the Pentagon and for the long-term Wall Street agenda," he stated.[3]

The 'Dependency' approach adopted from international political economy (IPE) a perspective incorporating Egypt's peripheral and dependent position in the international capitalist system with its corresponding impact on democratic development in the country. This dependency was an outcome of a historical process whereby many Third World countries, including Egypt, were forcibly integrated into the global capitalist system, and eventually became part of the periphery. This opened the door for Western powers to exercise significant influence on the decision-making process in many Third World countries, subsuming such actions to the interests of global capital rather than those of the local populations. Abdallah (1997: 68–74) understood this dependency as one of the defining characteristics of the Arab world, as Western powers were able to penetrate the region in order to secure strategic trade routes and the flow of energy resources, all of which came at the expense of the political and economic development of the region. Indeed, Abdallah viewed the requirements of securing Western interests and those related to the promotion of genuine democracy as two irreconcilable processes in the Arab world. According to her analysis, the major threat to Western interests in the Arab world came from the potential rise of democratic Arab regimes responsive to popular demands for political and economic independence. This desire to avoid popular sovereignty led Western powers to support the presence of client police states to suppress anti-Western sentiments and maintain strong holds over local societies. For other scholars, dependency conditioned the path of democratization in Egypt indirectly through its effects on the economic and social fabric of society. Although dependency had always constituted an important dimension of Egypt's interaction with the outside world, this dimension became more evident with the adoption of an economic open-door policy from the mid-1970s. According to Thabit (1992), the open-door policy served to perpetuate Egypt's dependency within the global economic system. This resulted in the rise of new political and economic elites that sought to establish close alliance with their Western counterparts. In this context, the newly emerging elites were able to use their linkages with the Western centers of economic power to accumulate massive amounts of wealth, while the latter sought to promote the authoritarian rule of their domestic counterparts in Egypt in order to protect Western economic interests and secure access to the Egyptian market (For a similar account, see Ibrahim 2003a).

The 'Regional Conflict' approach examined the effects of the regional security environment, including regional conflicts, on Arab democratization. Its advocates focused primarily on the role of the Arab-Israeli conflict in hindering the democratization of the Arab world. For example, Harb (1989) argued that the Arab-Israeli conflict played a major role in feeding authoritarian politics in the Arab countries that were involved in the conflict. In Egypt, the centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the state's security agenda made the state less eager to open up the political system under the pretext of preserving the solidarity of the internal front amid the presence of an external threat. Toward this end, the concept of national security was invoked and underpinned by notions of national identity that must be secured against infiltration from outside. This provided justification for the state to suppress domestic dissent. Harb (2002) concluded later on that democracy in Egypt was 'just one of the more obvious casualties of the Arab-Israeli conflict'. In the same vein, Gause (1995: 287) contended that the Arab-Israeli conflict, coupled with the presence of real or perceived external threats for Arab states, resulted in two disincentives for Arab states to risk opening up their political systems. First, it enabled Arab states to "rationalize the avoidance of such domestic distractions as open debate and political contestation in order to concentrate all the country's resources on the foreign threat". Second, it encouraged the creation of strong security and intelligence agencies, the empowerment of which came at the expense of the status of democracy and human rights in these countries (For similar accounts, see Korany/Nobel/Brynen 1993: 206–213; Brynen 1991: 607–610).

Finally, the 'Advocacy' approach is characterized by its emphasis on either promoting or rejecting the involvement of external powers in the democratization of the Arab world. It gained prominence in the scholarship of Arab

[3]This view was even shared by some experts in the Arab world. For example, Hossam Sowailam argued that the Arab uprisings were part of an overall strategy led by the International Crisis Group and George Soros, in addition to a whole array of American institutions, and supported by the American government. The main strategy was to support 'Cyber dissidents' to enable them to overthrow Arab regimes through the introduction of "Creative Chaos". This would result in the establishment of new democratic, but weak and loyal regimes to the USA so as Israel would be the only power in the Middle East. See Interview with General Hossam Swailam, *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), 1 July 2011. Similarly, Gamal Afifi claimed that "the United States worked to prepare a number of active groups from Arab youth to lead the Arab Spring revolutions under the banner of democracy in order to serve that project (to divide the Arab world)". The main evidence is that "some of the youth of the Egyptian revolution have been trained since 2005 trough American programs entitled 'democracy and the skills of political organization'." See Afifi (2012).

democratization when it engaged the internationalization of reform arrangements in the Arab world after 9/11. This exigent focus triggered an intensive debate among Arab scholars on the question of reform arising from outside. Accordingly, one could distinguish between two trends in this context, neoliberal and rejectionist.

The neoliberal trend subscribed to the basic philosophy of the Western democracy-promotion projects in the Arab world, and advocated external intervention to democratize the region. This trend was represented by a group of Arab neoliberals who argued that Arabs should fully and unconditionally integrate with all aspects of globalization, including the embrace of US regional and global projects. In fact, some adherents were openly supportive of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, did not consider the Arab-Israeli conflict as a security priority, and were critical of the slow pace of privatization and trade liberalization in many Arab countries. On the question of Arab democratization, they argued that Western pressures, both politically and militarily, were the only available avenue for Arab societies to democratize as local regimes were not likely to move in this direction on their own. Further, they viewed reformists within Arab societies as relatively weak in relation to ruling elites, especially singling out reactionary intellectuals incapable of adapting to international changes, and who resisted change under the pretext of resisting Western imperialism and defending Arab values.[4]

Said (2006: 24–29) was one of the strongest advocates of external intervention to democratize the Arab world, arguing that external pressures were among the major factors that triggered a wave of limited Arab political openings in the post 9/11 era. He criticized Arab elites and intellectuals who viewed external pressures for democratization as an encroachment on 'national sovereignty', stressing that in the era of globalization, the distinction between domestic and external politics became largely blurred. He also criticized the mainstream Arab view linking the Arab endorsement of the Western democracy initiatives with the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, arguing that making reform conditional upon resolving the Palestinian problem led to the triggering of a 'definite political and moral tragedy' in the Arab world. In his view, this linkage indicated that 'the Arabs made their civil rights hostage to the Palestinian problem; that they were not serious about the reform process; and that they had no value independent of the entire Arab collective, while the truth was that every Arab and every Arab country had a separate existence worthy of respect and rights [worthy of] defense in every way'.[5] In the same vein, Ibrahim supported external intervention to promote the democratization of the Arab world where internal powers blocked change. He defended US military intervention as a means to democratize the Arab world, arguing that the US removal of Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq was a decisive factor that helped promote democratic forces in the region.[6] Although Ibrahim, later on, reconsidered his position on the US occupation of Iraq and viewed it as 'a major setback for nonviolent opposition movements and other indigenous pro-democracy actors in the Middle East', he, nevertheless, continued to support political intervention by foreign governments to empower democracy and human rights activists in the Arab world. In his view, this intervention could be established through a variety of channels, including funding for political parties and civil society organizations, as well as direct pressures on local regimes to adhere to the demands of the pro-democracy movements (Zunes/Ibrahim 2009: 93–98). Ibrahim further advocated the attachment of conditionality guidelines to US aid to Egypt in an attempt to force the latter to democratize. In September 2008, he met with a number of US Congress members to discuss the future of democracy in Egypt, and lobbied that conditions be placed on US aid to Egypt.[7] (For similar accounts, see Harb 2007; Mustafa 2006).

The rejectionist trend opposed pressure for change from the outside, viewing external pressures for reform in the Arab world as attempts to serve the political agendas of great powers, rather than genuine attempts to democratize the region. This rejection was not directed to the values of democracy and political reform, as most of the advocates of this trend supported a process of genuine democratization in the Arab world. Rather, advocates of this trend rejected Western policies in the region, including those related to democracy-promotion. The rejectionists were a conglomeration of Arab nationalists, Islamists, leftists, and some segments of the liberals, largely representing the mainstream view in Egypt and the Arab world. All of them had in common either the rejection of globalization, which they perceived as equivalent to 'Americanization', or the advocacy of a cautious and conditional integration with its processes. They also viewed hard security issues, such as the Iraqi and Palestinian questions, as the most crucial security issues facing the Arab world, and were critical of the Western projects centered on security concerns that were focused on terrorism, radicalism and general opposition to state authority.

Al-Bishri was one of the strongest critics of the various Euro-American projects to democratize the Arab world. According to his view, the West was never interested in

[4]For a review of the intellectual background and political discourse of the Arab neo-liberals, see 'Abboud (2005: 118–150).

[5]*Al-Ahram Al-'Arabi* (Cairo), March 27, 2004.

[6]Interview with Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt Today* (Cairo), September 2004.

[7]"Dissident Lobbies for Conditions on U.S. Aid to Egypt," *The Washington Post*, 23 September 2008; at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/22/AR2008092202880.html.

creating genuine democratic governing structures in the Arab world, and whenever the West spoke of reform and democracy in the region, it did so as a means to serve its strategic interests rather than the interests of Arab societies.[8] Al-Ghamri (2004: 275–280) was also skeptical of the US democracy initiatives in the Arab world, arguing that they were instruments to restructure the political and ideological map of the region in tandem with American interests. He also understood the US democracy initiatives as a threat to Egyptian and Arab national security, as one of the objectives of these initiatives was to integrate Israel into the region prior to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was evident in the emphasis placed by these initiatives on the domestic sources of instability in the Arab world, while excluding regional factors such as the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict. According to Al-Ghamri, this de-emphasis on the Arab-Israeli conflict was meant to legitimize Israel's occupation of Arab territories (For a similar view, see Mohammad 2006: 86–88). In the same vein, Habib (2006: 11–13) also rejected external attempts to democratize the Arab world, arguing that Arabs must distinguish between an externally-driven reform installing a Western political model, and a home-grown reform bringing about a political model in line with their cultures. He understood the question of reform from outside as equivalent to the 'Westernization' of Arab politics and culture, and viewed external pressures to reform the Arab world as an encroachment on Arab sovereignty, and an attempt to "conquer the Arab mind and bring the region under a new form of Western hegemony and imperialism" (For similar accounts, see 'Aref 2004; Said 2005).

2.3 Assessment

Although the mainstream literature highlights important dimensions on the role of external factors in Egypt's democratization process, one could raise a number of critical remarks in terms of its theoretical assumptions, methodological basis, and domain of analysis. First, despite some analysis of the perspective, the mainstream literature gave little attention to examining the effects of the external environment on the democratization process in Egypt. Rather, most of the literature focused on the role of domestic factors, whether those related to the role of existing structures and institutions or the role of political agency. This is clearly evident in the large quantitative gap in academic production between those studies examining the domestic conditions of democratization in contrast to those dealing with the external dimensions (For more details, see Ibrahim 2005: 343–345). Even with the recently growing realization of the influence external factors came to play in the field of democratization in the post 9/11 era, most scholars continued to overlook the role of external factors in their studies on Egyptian and Arab democratization. For example, in her account of the dynamics of authoritarian governance in Egypt, Kassem (2004: 3) related the persistence of authoritarianism exclusively to domestic mechanisms of rule maintenance, while downplaying the role of external factors in the endurance of authoritarianism, arguing that "it is the internal political dynamics and manipulative strategies of the authoritarian regimes themselves that predominantly determine their own survival". Although Abdallah had previously referred to Egypt's peripheral position in the global capitalist system as one of the factors hindering the country's democratic development, in a later book published in 2005, she paid no attention to the role of external factors in her assessment of the composite of forces she believed to have an influence on the democratization process in the country (Abdallah 2005). In the same vein, in an edited volume on the limits of political reform in Egypt published in 2007, Thabit and others examined the factors with a democratizing effect on Egypt. Their analyses included references to such factors as political leadership, civil society, culture, and social structure. However, this was accomplished to the exclusion of external factors, implying that scholars of democratic transition in Egypt were still unsure of the exact role of external forces in the analysis of democratization (Thabit 2007).

This tendency to overlook the role of external factors is highly problematic for the analysis of Egyptian and Arab democratization, since one of the defining characteristics of the region is its vulnerability to external influences. Following the 19th century expansion of capitalism, the Arab states have been penetrated, to varying degrees and effects, by great power imperialism into the region. With the termination of European colonialism by the mid-20th century, the region remained subject to the politics of foreign powers, with the result that its internal politics have become deeply shaped by external forces. This persistence of the foreign penetration of the Arab world makes external factors, therefore, highly instrumental to the study of political development in Egypt and the Arab world.

Second, the limited literature on external factors suffered from a lack of theoretical accounts that could enhance our understanding of the role of external factors in the democratization process in Egypt. Instead, the focus was on the empirical dimension and policy implications of the external factors under examination. In addition, for scholars who looked at the effects of external factors on Egypt's democratization, there was little systematic thinking in their studies about the spectrum of external forces shaping the democratic

[8]Interview with Tarek Al-Beshri, *Islamonline*, 11 September 2003; at: <http://www.islamonline.net/arabic/arts/2003/09/article10.shtml>.

environment in domestic systems. Indeed, their analyses were confined to an examination of the roles of Western powers and the Arab-Israeli conflict in impeding democratic development in Egypt, with only few studies that were prepared to look at a range of other international actors and processes. One could refer here to Brown and Shahin's edited volume on the regional and external dimensions of democratization in the Middle East. In this volume, the various contributors examined the prospects for democracy in the region from a variety of perspectives. However, as far as the role of external factors was concerned, they confined their analyses to the study of American and, to a lesser extent, European foreign policy on the question of democratization in a selected number of Middle Eastern countries (Brown/Shahin 2010). Further, some of the approaches under the 'external factors' school suffered from a lack of systematic thinking. This was especially the case with the 'great powers' approach where scholars confined their analysis, even more so, to the role of the United States in Egypt's democratization process, while little attention was given to the EU. Considering the role of the EU as an international actor with a presumingly active democratization agenda in the Arab world in the post-Cold War era, this absence was manifest. Simply focusing on the American contribution to the case of Egyptian democratization (or the lack thereof) is methodologically suspect and empirically flawed. Even for scholars dealing with the role of the United States, they also had methodological and empirical shortcomings as they reduced their analysis to an examination of the US-Egyptian strategic alliance. While focusing on the influence of US aid to successive Egyptian regimes, these studies often overlooked other layers of interaction as far as the US democracy-promotion policies were concerned, including the US policy of funding opposition groups and civil society organizations.

Third, among the scholarly approaches of the 'external factors' school, the 'regional conflict' approach, which focused on the role of the Arab-Israeli conflict in hindering Arab democratization, largely lost its explanatory power in the light of the recent changes that took place in the perceptions of Arab ruling elites towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. Traditionally, the Arab-Israeli conflict was viewed as the most central issue on the agenda of Arab regional politics, and since the outbreak of conflict, there had been a great deal of emphasis in Arab security discourse on the centrality of resolving this conflict as a pre-requisite for dealing with other hard and soft security issues. However, this emphasis declined after the events of 9/11 with a corresponding effect on the political and security agendas of Arab states. This change was reinforced with the United States-led Anglo-American occupation of Iraq (2003–2011). From 2002 to 2003, the United States strove to establish an Arab regional understanding against Iraq. Following the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, this was subsequently turned into an Arab-Israeli tacit understanding against Iran. In addition, the Arab states that joined the American-led regional understanding were more willing to enter into normalization initiatives with Israel, even though the Arab-Israeli conflict has not only remained unresolved, but witnessed episodic violence in Gaza. This was reflected in the various Arab regimes' endorsement of the participation of the League of Arab States in the Union for the Mediterranean, a combine in association with Israel. This was the first time the Arab League had taken part in a regional arrangement with Israeli participation. In Egypt, this trend had initially begun with the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979, and gained momentum with the establishment of a number of joint economic projects, including, but not limited to, the 2004 conclusion of the largest economic deal between the two countries, a contract worth $2.5 billion whereby Egypt was to supply Israel with below market price natural gas; and the 2005 opening of the *Qualified Industrial Zones* (QIZs), which allowed Egyptian goods with Israeli origins to gain tariff-free access to US markets. The rise of these new perceptions among Arab ruling elites suggests that the Arab-Israeli conflict had fallen on the agenda of Arab regional politics (For more details, see Selim 2011: 316–319). Normalization at the elite level, in all but name, removed the conflict's relevance as an external factor justifying the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world—a factor not always addressed in the literature.

Finally, most scholars built their analyses without challenging the proposition that the Egyptian political system was inherently authoritarian by nature. While devoting the bulk of their research to an examination of the underlying factors impeding democratization, whether of domestic or external origin, they failed to examine if these factors themselves reinforced the authoritarian structure. This trend created a condition whereby scholars of democratization frequently conducted their analysis with a predetermined view of the role of external factors as constraints on, rather than facilitators of, Egypt's democratization. In this context, scholars of democratization became mainly preoccupied with the task of searching for those constraints in the external environment that would account for the democratic deficit of Egypt, rather than objectively identifying and evaluating the effects of external factors on the movement toward or away from democracy in this domestic setting.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this review is that the literature on the international dimensions of democratization in Egypt is limited and characterized by the lack of theoretical accounts that help account for the role of external factors in the democratization process. In fact, one could argue that the field has witnessed limited academic effort addressed at locating the international dimension of Egyptian democratization within a larger theoretical framework.

The focus, instead, tends to be on the empirical dimension of selected external factors. This makes the literature largely atheoretical, since it does not include well-established theoretical perspectives that could structure an understanding of the international dimensions of democratization in the Egyptian domestic setting. Further, the literature relies on poorly developed assumptions with regards the impact of external factors on Egyptian democratization. In this context, it does not establish the empirical link between certain external factors—such as regional conflicts—and the process of democratization. Rather, it treats the impact of these factors on democratization as assumed rather than proven. This calls for the development of a relevant conceptual framework for the examination of the international dimensions of democratization in Egypt. As will be explained in the next chapter, the proposed framework should seek to define the exact role of external factors in the democratization process through systematically delineating the spectrum of external factors with democratizing effects on domestic settings in developing countries, as well as identifying the mechanisms, direction, and degree of influence.

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