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OF WISE OLD MEN AND REBELLIOUS YOUTH

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Abstract

The Arab world is often depicted as incapable of developing democracy, treating its citizens in a decent way or allowing freedom of speech and religion. Quite a few authors, scholars and journalists blame the Arab culture. In this paper we analyze Arab culture using the Hofstede dimensions and apply the same dimensions to unravel the Western presuppositions about democracy. We see that what Arab citizens expect from decent governments and leaders, differs largely from what Western citizens expect of good leaders and governance. Just as management techniques or advertising cannot be exported across cultures, the concept of good leadership and democracy cannot be copy-pasted across cultures.

Key words: Hofstede dimensions, Arab world, democracy, good governance

Introduction

Khazal Hussain Uday was a wise man. Sheikh of the Msari branch of the Al-Ta'i tribe in Central Iraq, people would come from lo and far when he held diwan to put their matters to him, resolving disputes of cattle or land, dowries, killings and robberies, disagreements over hospitality and many more.

Khazal would listen intently to the complainant's plea. He would not intervene. Only after the complainant was done, he might ask for clarification on one or two points or request the input of the other party or witnesses. Then he would pass his judgment.

And in general, it was accepted. People went home content. Maybe the verdict was not what they had hoped for, but they had been taken seriously, listened to and heard.

Khazal practiced government Arab style, where the powerful listens to the powerless, where the powerful in their wisdom, take decisions that benefit the entire group rather than individuals, founded in the mores and traditions of that group.

Democracy, as we know, originated in ancient Greece. For centuries, if not an entire millennium, Greece was the hinge for ideas and inventions to pass from the East to West and vice versa.

But all this was a long time ago and democracy has since evolved into many variations. Yet, Western democracies in North America and northern Europe are convinced that all nations should embrace their form of democracy.

To Larry Diamond, an influential American scholar on democracy, modern democracy is based on four pillars:

1. Fair and free elections (one man one vote).
2. Rule of law (the same laws apply to everyone, regardless of social or economic position).
3. Rule of the majority.
4. Active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life. (Diamond, 2015)

It holds the following presuppositions:

1. Citizens are capable of making decisions that not only impact their own lives, but also the lives of others and large social superstructures. Such decisions are based on information that is free and available.
2. Countries are sovereign and can determine their own destiny.
3. Democracy is essentially an uncertain process; no single process or actor can determine its outcome.

So, let's take this as our point of departure and explore. Is it true? Is democracy not possible in the Arab world as Larry Diamond claims? Is it even desirable? (Diamond, 2010)

Culture and the Characteristics of Democracy: the Pyramid and the Village Market

The scene is the main post office in Damascus, in 1987, the only place in Syria where mail from abroad arrives and is distributed. A small group of foreign students await their packages from home to pass through the customs. Every single package from abroad is rudely opened and its contents taken out publicly. Newspaper clippings, books that look suspicious and unknown objects are thrown away. "What is this?," asks a duty officer sternly while holding up a Tampax. "It's for women", says the student girl. The duty officer blushes deep in his neck and hands over the package to the foreign girl.

In the entire city of Damascus there is only one place where international phone calls can be made.

You need to show your passport and state with whom and why you want to make that phone call. Then wait for permission. Every phone call is tapped. If you are lucky, you speak a language of lesser diffusion, which no secret police officer speaks.

Every letter is opened, every foreign radio and tv station is interfered. The only news from abroad is from forbidden Radio Monte Carlo.

Rumors have become the only source of information and therefore, the truth.

I vividly recall one late afternoon in a Damascene kitchen in 2005, when we received a Skype call from Bagdad. The connection was awful, but we knew what it meant: Skype cannot be tapped, it's a new and free way to communicate whatever you want.¹ The internet was open. New worlds and new truths reached hungry populations. It opened their eyes and many of them felt betrayed by their regimes whom they had served so loyally.

This was the onset of the Arab Spring, when ordinary citizens took it to the streets and shouted: "The people want to bring down the regime" (الشعب يريد إسقاط النظام)

We will explore the Arab Spring and its subsequent Winter later, but for now, let's focus on that sentence: "The people want to bring down the regime." Not a chant commonly heard in rallies in the streets of San Francisco, Amsterdam or Dublin. Yet it spread like a wildfire throughout the Arab world.

Understanding culture's consequences: The Hofstede model

In order to compare cultures, several models have been developed to help understand the differences between nations or other large groups. Such models include dimensions that represent the averages of human values of groups to explain differences in behavior. The Dutch scholar Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010) developed six independent dimensions of national culture. His six dimensions are labeled: *power distance*, *individualism/collectivism*, *masculinity/femininity*, *uncertainty avoidance*, *long-/short-term orientation* and *indulgence/restraint*. Three of his dimensions are relevant for understanding differences in the organization of governments and politics.

¹ In 2005 the Arab regimes were taken by surprise by the digital revolution, and had no technologies in place to tap digital communications.

In spite of its cultural variation, the Arab world shares three value dimensions of the Hofstede Model: large Power Distance, Collectivism and strong Uncertainty Avoidance. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010)

The combination of these three cultural values makes the Pyramid the implicit model of social organization in the Arab world.

PDI+

Everyone holds his/her rightful place
Powerholders have privileges but ought to use them with restraint
Centralization
Ideal leader is a benevolent 'father'
Inequalities are expected and desired
The way to change a system is revolution

Here, power is concentrated at the top and there is a need to structure activities. People accept their rightful place in society and what's more, this pyramid stands because those with little power accept and expect this unequal distribution. They will not challenge the hierarchy or jump it, but go through their immediate superior, be it their father or mother, teacher, direct boss or political leader of their neighborhood.

Good leaders know it is the base that carries their power and they ensure that those below receive ample attention to their needs and are taken care of. They use their power and privileges with restraint and govern their people with honesty and integrity while making them feel proud to have such a good leader.

IDV- (Collectivism)

People are born into groups
Opinions are predetermined by the group
Collective interests
People vote for persons they know
Law and rights differ by group - 'Wasta'

UAI+

Uncertainty is a threat and must be fought
Citizens feel incompetent towards authorities
Many laws and unwritten rules
Expression of emotions
People prefer the known even if it is not optimal

Bad leaders abuse their, sometimes unlimited, power and let their cronies (for instance secret police - '*Amicales*', '*Mukhabarat*'- or clan members) profit in return for unquestioning loyalty. Such leaders know that those below will not readily speak up but accept their bad fortune to be oppressed by a tyrant.

In the heartlands of modern democracy, Northern Europe and North America, we see a different implicit model of social organization: the Market Village. Here debate is encouraged, no matter who you are or where you are from. People negotiate the outcomes with each other and feel free to join groups or teams that fit their current interests, whether competitive or consensus-seeking. There is emphasis on the individual and an equalitarian attitude towards the political process: one man one vote, Rule of Law, and 'From newspaper boy to billionaire'.

PDI-

Equality and equity are the norm
Privileges are not by right
Decentralization
Ideal leader is a coordinator
Everyone can become president
The way to change a system is evolution

Good leaders coordinate this market place but do not interfere. They ensure that everyone gets a fair chance to wheel and deal. This market should not be hampered by too many rules, although the few that do exist, should apply to all without exception.

IDV+

People take care of themselves and immediate family
Individual opinions
Self-interest
People vote for programs and ideologies
Rule of law

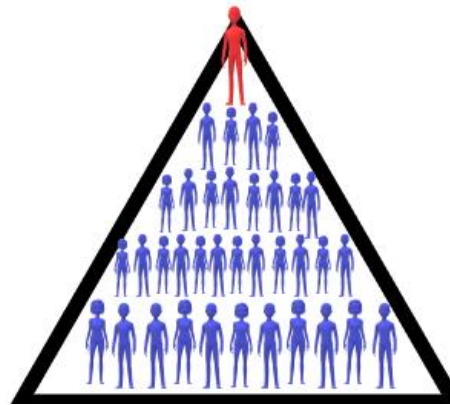
UAI-

Uncertainty is okay
 Citizens feel competent towards authorities
 Few laws and rules
 Emotions not shown or even frowned upon
 People like to try things out

Bad leaders impose too many rules and controls (micro-management), do not explain why they demand certain actions and do not delegate but run their personal show, favor their friends, evade taxes and divert the business to their partners.

The social and political organization of scoring high on power distance, high on uncertainty avoidance and low on individualism can be depicted like a pyramid where guidance as well as control from placed persons are expected.

In politics, the Arab cultural preferences consist of delegation upwards who have more life experience and knowledge, voting for people you know appeal to rather than impersonal party. There is acquiescence towards abuse of until it becomes too much and the people take it to the streets and shout: "The people want to bring down the regime".



cultures
 pyramid,
 higher
 to people
 and can
 programs.
 power

The following paragraphs will illustrate this with sources from personal experiences and interviews among literature and newspapers.

One village, one vote

Lebanon prepared for its first elections in 20 years in the fall of 1992 after the destructive civil war. An informal council of elders for various neighborhoods of a village in the Beka'a valley had gathered to discuss which candidate they would vote for. They took their time and heated debates were combined with large amounts of sweets and tea, plus a good meal to lift the spirits and forge the bonds. In the end, the elders settled for an independent candidate, who, so they trusted, would take care of the interests of the village. On voting Sunday two busses were chartered to take those entitled to vote (plus of course their children) to the polling station. There was singing on the bus, candy was shared and everybody was happy on this village outing to the ballot box. They all casted their votes for the candidate selected by the elders and had a jolly day.

The independent observers, all foreign reporters, were aghast. The very foundation of free elections -blind voting- was not observed. (Hamza, 2012)

Of course not. The villagers felt incapable of understanding this intricate political process and were highly aware of the historical importance of their vote. Who were they to make their own decision? They delegated the responsibility upward to people they knew were wise and who had ties with the political spectrum.

Why in the world would they wish to divert from the advice of the elders? Blind voting means you have something to hide. They wanted to show they had not.

Information behavior and locus of control

The basis of a properly functioning democracy is the degree to which people inform themselves in order to make a choice and whether they do so consciously through the media or other people.

In small Power Distance and strongly Individualistic cultures where individuals search for information to maximize their personal utility, people base their decision-making more on facts and data, consciously gathering information, whereas in Collectivist and large Power Distance cultures, personal contacts tend to serve to form opinions, and people rely more on online forums and social media (Mooij, 2014). Whereas in the Western world people discuss and criticize government and politics openly and in a direct way, this is less so in many large Power Distance societies where power holders may control the media. In addition, personal communication is more indirect in these cultures.

Collectivists are born in a group that takes care of you, in return for unquestioning loyalty. Your individual needs are not the priority. The needs and opinion of the group are more important than your own. Improper as it may seem to the individualist Westerner to adapt their opinion to that of the group, it is equally improper to collectivists' eyes to forward your opinion about everything all the time.

Internal or *external* locus of control refers to whether people expect that a result depends on their own behavior and personal characteristics, or on chance, luck or fate under the control of powerful others (Mooij, 2018). Understanding this difference is important because locus of control shapes some fundamental assumptions about how civil society should operate. North Americans tend to experience that they personally control events in their daily experience. They hold an exaggerated sense of control or mastery (Mooij, 2018).

In cultures that for centuries have been characterized by indirect communication and external locus of control, the media have developed in different ways from cultures where people communicate more directly. Decision making and choice behavior are also affected by this.

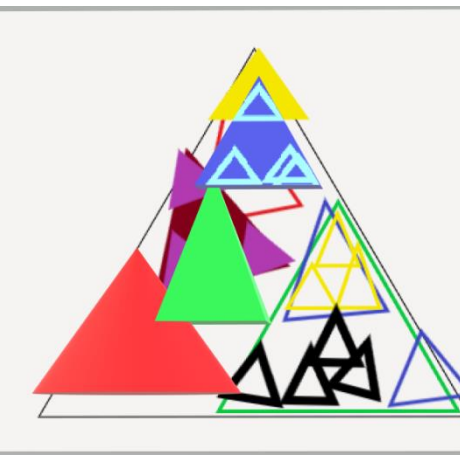
Several large Power Distance cultures have adopted a democratic system, but the type of democracy tends to be different and usually doesn't incorporate essential pillars of Western-style democracy. The degree to which people participate in politics also varies with Power Distance. Generally, large Power Distance cultures prefer strong leaders. The World Values Survey asks respondents whether a government with a strong leader is good or bad. The responses "good" correlate positively with Power Distance. Russia scores very high on the Power Distance scale and Russia's kind of democracy is quite different from Western democracies.

The Wobbling Pyramid

In the Arab world the group into which one is born plays a strong role in and throughout life and to leave it is very difficult and will cause great distress. Groups can be linguistic (Kurdish, Tamasigh), religious (Copts, Shia, Sunni, Alawite), ethnic (Turkmen, Armenian), or based on place in society (Bedouin, farmer, city-dweller), village, extended family, and so on.

There are certain large well-to-do families whose members are of different religious denominations and political outlook, so that even when the regime is toppled, they will always have some of their members in power.

In essence these groups are pyramids as well, with a leader at the top and everybody occupying his or her rightful place, which makes the structure complex and confusing for outsiders.



The pyramid of a country is not a stable one, but constantly changes its shape. Not because group members change their affiliation, but because the alliances between groups change as their leaders forge new alliances and break up old ones.

Locals are usually highly aware of the position of each and every group and its alliances. For outsiders it is a very risky endeavor to enter this wobbling pyramid and try to change it.

Such a structure demands constant talking and smoothing by the leaders of the pyramids, whether small or large. And oftentimes, there is brawling, threats, fighting. Remember that the power is in the person of the leaders, who each head a strongly cohesive group. It is not in things such as ideology or principles.

In the political process it means that people vote for leaders they know and trust. They do not vote for abstract party principles such as solidarity, free market mechanisms or a green future. They are not against such principles either, if their leader embraces them.

Is this bad? Well, it is not uncommon in Europe and the USA that party programs and principles fall in action after the elections when deals need to be made. For example, you vote for Brexit, a US presidential candidate swears he will not raise taxes, the campaign of the liberal party in France puts healthcare No1, and guess what happens.

So as a voter, you might as well place your trust in someone you know.

The flip side is, that such leaders are endowed with huge power and it is hard to resist the temptation of abusing this power for your own group (clan). There are too few checks and balances until it is too late, when people cannot bow any deeper, when they have cracked down and have nothing left to lose.

Then the only way out for them is Revolution, which can turn into pay-back time and bloody vengeance.

It may well be, that monarchies are therefore so popular in the Arab world. Although they embody absolute power, they have also learned through the generations that a monarch needs to take care of his people. No monarch has thrown his own people into devastating wars (Iran-Iraq), mass-murdered its people using gas (Syria, Iraq), or crashed down ignominiously on student protesters (Egypt).

Yet we cannot claim these monarchs are good leaders as such. They can be dictatorial and intolerant of criticism. Even so, many civilians do think their monarch is engaged with the country. I cite here a Moroccan lady, who complained bitterly about the catastrophic health care in her country, immediately followed by saying that this is not the fault of the King: "He is working day and night to repair the damage that the people below him are causing. Our King is a good man."

The Volkskrant quotes journalist Omar Brousky, who states that the majority of the Moroccans do not consider the richness of King Mohammed VI as something bad. After all, this richness has been bestowed upon him by God. On the other hand, Brousky notices that ever more Moroccans mention the King in social media networks. Then it is not so much about democracy or freedom, but they do believe that the King should intervene and act against the inequalities in society and the privileges of certain small groups. (Bakker, 2019)

The story below may serve as an example of how deeply ingrained the notion is that people embody power, instead of abstract ideas:

Abdulridha's father comes from a well-to-do-family and has received an excellent education in Iraq. Highly political engaged, he had to flee the country and was granted political asylum in the Netherlands. After three years, he was allowed to vote for the municipality elections. He was overjoyed that for the first time in this life, he could participate in free elections. He prepared well, engaged in discussions with Dutch people and read party programs.

On voting day he set off to the ballot box, but returned without casting his vote. Why, I asked him, you prepared so well?

"I did not know anybody on the list", he said: "I never met one of them."

Rule of Law versus Wasta

Rule of Law is the proclaimed fundamental principle of modern democracy. It means that the same laws apply to everyone, regardless of status, background or context. No handing out of privileges or favors, no arbitrary judges or civil servants. As a civilian, you know what you can expect and you can claim your rights with the government and complain when you are not well attended.

No matter your family name or size of your bank account, the way to obtain your drivers' license or building permit is the same. The fine for ignoring a red traffic light is exactly the same for the Mayor of Amsterdam as it is for the author of this article. Even the Royal Family is supposed to stick to the traffic rules.

Its Arab parallel is Wasta, and it is contrary to Rule of Law in more than one aspect. Loosely translated it means 'Friends in high places', and literally: 'connection'. It means: I know you, and you can introduce me to someone who can speed up the bureaucratic process, get me a ticket to a sold-out concert, or anything rare and difficult to obtain.

It also works the other way around: It adds to my status when people come to me for wasta, and I can generously grant it. It even adds to your social status when it is known you know certain people and can approach them on behalf of others.

We clearly see the pyramid at work here, and, what's more, we also see once again the abstract rule versus the personal connection.

Arabs cannot do without this personal touch; it makes their world go round. One rule for all? No way, why would I treat my brother or friend I have known since kindergarten the same way as a total stranger? Of course there is one rule for my brother, and another one for an outsider. Children at a very early age are admonished by their parents and grandparents that they cannot treat a strange kid in the same way as they would their siblings.

Adel, a young Kuwaiti, visited Europe on a tour with his family, like many Gulf Arabs do. He was interested not just in the touristic highlights but also in the social fabric of Europe and expressed his amazement and concern that migrants in Europe are granted the same rights upon obtaining naturalization, as Europeans born from European parents.

He explained that there are clear categories in Kuwait for obtaining citizenship and that there is no way naturalized Kuwaitis have the same political rights as Kuwaitis by birth. People who have lived in Kuwait for a long time or even several generations but without Kuwaiti citizenship do not have access to the same health care or education as born-Kuwaitis are (Kuwaiti Nationality Law, n.d.; Kuwait Events of 2018, n.d.). That seemed very logical and justifiable to Adel: Who in his sane mind would offer the same rights to strangers?

"This complacent policy of granting equal rights to people just arriving, who have not contributed to the country, who do not speak the language and not even share its religion, will ruin Europe. You're throwing your culture and riches down the drain". (Ayman, 2019)

Adel is not a racist, he does not think of himself as discriminating, but to him, the "one-rule-fits-all" principle is nonsense.

Although many Arabs see wasta as the root cause of the bad political situation in which oppression and dictators reign, few Arabs would refuse a wasta when they need it and it is offered. Even less would bluntly deny a friend (or a friend of a friend) the favour of wasta.

The challenge when analyzing the Arab way of democracy is to find a system that protects the powerless from the powerful, while including the personal touch. After all, the objective of Rule of Law is to protect the powerless. Can't we find a mechanism by which the base of the pyramid is protected from the power ambitions at the top?

Let's explore the efforts Arabs are making, whether in their home country or in diaspora, and let's also explore the forces that counter their noble efforts.

The Sagging Pyramid

One always has the attention of Arabs when the subject of democracy is tabled. Immediately the debate starts, heated but also with lots of self-irony and humor. Turn on any Arab tv channel and you will see political programs with debaters banging the table to make their point. This is an issue at the heart of every Arab discussion, everybody contributes, no one stands at the side-line.

Here we touch upon one of the cores of democracy as defined by Larry Diamond (Diamond, 2015):

- a. "Active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life."

Next to this there are two conditions that underlie democratic systems, namely:

- b. Countries are sovereign and can determine their own destiny.
- c. Acknowledgment that democracy is essentially an uncertain process; no single process or actor can determine its outcome.

As to citizen participation we wonder where young adults discuss politics more: in the Arab world or in North America and Europe.

In Syria in the 1990s, where one of your friends might turn out to be a secret police officer ('Mukhabarat'), talking politics was outright dangerous. Talking about religion was equally a peril: you might end up discussing the Alawite religion and then the Alawite regime. Yet, politics were discussed everywhere: with the windows closed, checking the doors for spies and whispering softly. The best political jokes I ever heard, I heard in Syria. Literary cafés were numerous where authors and readers came together and hid their sarcastic comments in literary allusions.

The Arab Spring started exactly with those people: highly educated youngsters who demanded their share in determining their country's destiny. It started in Tunisia and has not stopped. At the moment of writing, rallies for more democracy are taking place in Algeria and Sudan.

This is the Sagging Pyramid: Power Distance has become smaller over the past decades and specifically among the higher educated. In general, higher education leads to smaller Power Distance.

All over the world, cultures tend to move towards a smaller Power Distance and higher Individualism (Beugelsdijk, 2015). That implies that differences between countries remain the same, so that from an US point of view, the Arabs are still very respectful to hierarchy. Yet within the Arab world there is a discrepancy between generations and level of education, which makes that a powerful appeal for democracy is swaying the Middle East.

So why don't these young people succeed? Why do we keep on seeing military coups d'état, monarchs clinging to their throne and dictators and warlords imposing their will? Why can't these youngsters shake them off?

For this, we need to look into these conditions:

- a. Countries are sovereign and can determine their own destiny.
- b. Democracy is essentially an uncertain process; no single process or actor can determine its outcome

The Middle East is a pivotal region for many external forces. Think of the abundance of oil, Israel's security, the strategic location of the Suez Channel, the Red Sea and the Arabian/Persian Gulf. The Gulf used to be the strategic route to the East Indies in the past, now it is for airlines en route to Singapore or Australia. The Middle East has also become the transfer station for migrants from Africa, and a source of waves of refugees towards Europe. There is a wealthy Kingdom bankrolling expensive wars who is the prime client of the US arms industry.

This is not a region where you want a democratic process with uncertain outcomes.

Already in the 1990s people at the base of the pyramid were calling for democracy. In Algeria, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, these were people at the very bottom of society, the have-nots who had little hope. They abided by the Western system of voting, in the hope that this would change their lives. Such is the promise of the West: if you vote like we do, you will live in peace and affluence.

The cases of Algeria, the Gaza strip and Syria

“We taught the Algerians that they could play with democracy, cheat democracy ... We were first-rate professors of anti-democracy”. Dr Rey-Goldzeiger, French historian. ² (Fisk, 2005)

In Algeria in 1990, people voted with an overwhelming majority for the Islamic opposition, the FIS. Foreign observers admitted that the victory of the FIS was justified. Albeit some minor infringements from both sides, the elections were fair and free.

They were abolished overnight. The actual regime in cooperation with France, flew in Mohamed Boudiaf, former FLN leader, who was famous in the times of the struggle for independence. However, he had been abroad for a decade. The younger generations hardly knew him, and more importantly: they DID NOT VOTE for him. They voted for the FIS to represent them. The result was an atrocious civil war that lasted a decade, in which not only the FIS committed war crimes, but also the FLN, and in which the West was involved in fighting the democratically elected FIS and preventing them taking up their rightful seats in the Parliament.

“You need 15 children: 5 die as toddlers, 5 die in the struggle with Israel and 5 remain to take care of you when you are old”. – A mother in Rafah, Gaza Strip

The Gaza Strip was a desolate place to live way before the first Intifada. When I visited it in the early 80s, it was a barren strip of sand, a kind of extended beach, overcrowded by people trying to make a living. And lots, lots and lots of children. There was no irony in the quote above, it was a mere a fact of life.

Our fellow-students at the Bir Zeit University from the West Bank described the students from the Gaza strip as more volatile, uncompromising and more prone to fundamentalism, due to their extreme living environment.

To give you a taste: population density in the Gaza Strip is 5,154 people per square km (PCBS reports, 2016), which makes it one of the most densely populated areas in the world, comparable to Hong Kong. Average wage in Gaza Strip totals €400 a month. 63% of Gaza residents live on less than €2 a day. The poverty rate in Gaza is higher than in Rwanda (Goldstein, 2007). These are people living on the brink of survival.

While the Oslo Accords in 1993 may have been positive to the West Bank (whose leader was Yasser Arafat) and Israel, it bereaved the people in the Gaza Strip of the very little means left for survival. For one thing: they could no longer travel freely, only to Jericho and back (assuming they were allowed to pass the Israeli border stations). (Fisk, 2005)

² Note: for a full account of Algeria and the Gaza Strip, I refer to Robert Fisk. It would not fit in this article to go over the full story of Algeria and the Gaza Strip. I am greatly indebted to Robert Fisk, war correspondent for decades in the Middle East, who refused to be embedded and lived up to his mission as a journalist: to show the world what is really happening, unpolished and uncompromising in exposing the truth. His “The great war for civilization, the conquest of the Middle East” is a must-read for anyone who wants to look further than the PR campaigns of politicians and governments.

The first time Hamas participated in the national elections, in 2006, they achieved a sweeping victory and obtained the majority in the Palestinian Authority. Again, international observers declared the elections valid with few infringements. Yet the results were rejected and Hamas was boycotted.

Yossi Klein Halevi remarks in the New York Times of May 4, 2018: “After all, only two years earlier [in 2000], Israel had offered to withdraw from virtually the entire West Bank and Gaza. In return, it received the worst wave of terrorism in its history.” (Halevi, 2018). This is a view shared throughout the Israeli community inside Israel and outside of it, yet Yossi Klein Halevi may not have been aware of the situation and living conditions on the ground in the Gaza Strip. These are people with nothing to lose and a youth with no future. They felt betrayed and bereaved of their democratic rights. Hamas is ruling the Gaza dictatorially and there are no more elections, no more freedom of religion or expression (Freedom in the World 2019, n.d.).

Nominally, the areas under command of the Palestinian Authority are sovereign. In reality they are not. The Palestinian Authority does not control its own borders, foreign trade, defense, police nor even health care and education systems.

Democracy in Gaza is further away than ever and radical measures need to be enforced to allow even the beginning of a democratic process. To start with: apply the Rule of Law to both the Israelis and the Palestinians. There should not be a difference between Israelis and Palestinians when it comes to enforcing the law and granting civil rights. Secondly, no nation can develop a viable democracy or good governance if it is not sovereign. This discussion goes beyond the scope of this paper, but cannot be ignored. Thirdly, a huge effort should be made to raise education and employment in the Gaza Strip in order to lower Power Distance and dependence on power holders, including Hamas leaders.

The excuses for intervening in the elections of Hamas and the FIS have always been that these are undemocratic parties that will impose their fundamentalist will on moderate middle class and Christian minorities. The same discussion was held in the 1970s and 80s in Europe and the outcome in the 2000s was that we must allow such parties. If they abide by the democratic rules for voting, we cannot prevent them from taking seats in the parliament or taking up office as the prime minister or even president as they have done in some countries.

Syria: Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! (Owen, 1917)

One final, and more recent example where Arab citizens, and in this case, middle class citizens and students with a good outlook in life tried to bring about a democratic wind: Syria.

In 2010, some very brave people dared to openly ask for more democracy in Dar'a. The movement grew, and while the US and Europe publicly defended this call for democracy, the movement fell prey to geopolitical games. Russia could not afford to lose its only ally left in the Middle East, Assad. Same for Iran who had good ties with the Alawite - Shi'ite regime and through it, access to Lebanon. The Gulf States wanted to topple the Assad regime and the USA and EU, while genuine in their support for the protestors, did not do anything, afraid as they were to rock the boat with Russia. Turkey has its own agenda with the Kurds and Israel switched positions from Assad to democratic forces, and back again to Assad, because you know what you have, but never know the outcome of a revolutionary process. In this wobbling pyramidal construction, where Alawites, Sunni, Shiite, Armenians, Kurds, Druze, Catholics, Greek Orthodox Christians, Assyrians, Aramaics, and many more groups were already trying to find their middle ground amidst external forces, another force imposed itself: Daesh (also known as IS -Islamic State). Composed mainly of

Muslims who grew up outside the Arab world and hardly speak Arabic, they unlocked Pandora's Box and let loose all the evils on Syria and Iraq's citizens.

Syrian democracy never stood a chance.

The rebellious and the wise: a conclusion

We conclude with the question whether, taking the cultural make-up into account, democracy is possible in the Middle East. If we look at the influence of culture that has shaped both the values of citizens and leaders for the past centuries, the answer is that Arab cultures do not include the conditions for a Western type democracy and it doesn't look like these are going to appear in the foreseeable future. However, with increased education levels and hopefully less interference by external powers, the Arab world may find its own path to good governance and its own style of democracy.

By now most of us know that we cannot export management techniques or advertising campaigns without adapting them to local cultures. There is no indication that all-encompassing societal concepts as 'democratic politics' and 'good governance' can be transplanted to widely differing cultures. In other words, the Arabs should not copy-paste the Western model that doesn't fit their cultures.

A lot depends on the leaders, who more than in the West determine the living conditions and destiny of their people. Not just the leaders at the very top - the ones that are elected in whatever manner- but even more so, the local leaders, - the ones in the neighborhoods, villages, extended families, mosques and churches and the younger generation. They can make a difference to their peoples, by balancing that wobbling pyramid and caring with a personal touch for those who depend on them. Young people will grow up and hopefully take up political positions with a new outlook. They will demand a larger say in their future. But do not make the mistake that the democracy the Arab youth demands, is the same as youngsters in the West expect.

The Arab Spring did bring about positive changes in some countries. Things did change in Tunisia where now citizens are more daring in speaking up publicly. In the authors' opinion, Moroccan King Mohammed VI is genuine in his efforts to empower his citizens and be a benevolent and caring leader. The Iraqis, who formed long lines in the 2005 elections and were Larry Diamond's hope for democratic change, are picking up the shambles Daesh left and are determined to establish their own way of participative governance, without foreign intervention.

Such positive changes and initiatives may go largely unnoticed to Western political commentators, because it does not fit their Western mental image of democracy.

Some countries, including Israel, may feel threatened by the uncertain outcomes of Arab democracy, but the Arabs will never achieve their own way of good governance if outside forces try to construct the pyramid(s) each with their own objectives in mind.

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