

8th Berlin Forum for Progressive Muslims, April 19 – 20, 2013

**The Resurgence of Political Islam in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring:
Developments – Challenges – Perspectives**

Convened at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Hiroshimastraße 17, 10785 Berlin

Preliminary remark: The following text summarizes many of the crucial arguments and debating points aired during this international conference of specialists. It generally follows the order of presentations and discussions outlined in the official program. The text is not, nor was it ever intended to be, a complete account of the proceedings. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation extends its gratitude to all the presenters as well as participants in the discussion for their engagement and contributions.



Introduction

When the first free elections were held after the collapse of the old regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, various parties with ties to political Islam emerged victorious. In Syria, jihadists are fighting, among other foes, the Assad regime. What does this renaissance of political Islam mean in the wake of the Arab Spring? Can the Islamists really count on majority support, or do their electoral successes merely reflect the ephemeral favor of the times? What strains of political Islam can be identified? Which groupings are hostile to democracy and liberty? Are there factions with which secular-minded Westerners could come to terms? Could Turkey be a model for the region and, if so, in what

ways? Finally: how should German policy deal with political Islam in countries that have experienced the Arab Spring?

These are just some of the questions that served as foci for the eighth meeting of the conference series, “Berlin Forum for Progressive Muslims,” arranged by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

The Arab Spring and Political Islam

The Syrian philosopher **Sadik Al Azm** opened the meeting with an analysis of the Arab Spring and Syria’s special role in it. He then elaborated on these observations, distinguishing three forms of political Islam: petrodollar Islam, the Islam of excommunication, and business Islam.



“Al Azm is perhaps the most important living thinker in the avant-garde of liberalism; he is an Enlightenment figure who fights against authoritarian rule and the Arabs’ self-victimization.” (Jörg Lau, Zeit-Online)

The Arab Spring, he noted, was the “return of politics to human beings and the return of human beings to politics.” The return of politics to the people was most strikingly symbolized by the “experience of Tahrir

Square." Al Azm compared this experience to a popular festival. Women, small children, boys, and girls all took part, while creative talents found new outlets in music, singing, dancing, and graffiti. The carnival atmosphere in the square swept away the last vestiges of authority that the regime still possessed.

This experience was shared by people in Cairo, Tunis, and Benghazi, but not in Syria. Instead, in that country there were several hotspots in which "Assad's henchmen wore themselves out." Al Azm explained that "Assad's troops rushed from Dara'a to the Turkish border, then back to the center of the country without ever managing to douse any of those hotspots."

By now Western political debates have begun to take a considerably more skeptical view of the Arab Spring and especially of events in Syria. Al Azm disagreed sharply with that trend, pointing out that it was a mistake to talk about a civil war. In Syria, he continued, the chief actor is the regime. "The regime's extremism is not comparable to the extremism that at times culminates in a revolution." It is also unfair to say that Syrian Sunnis are lashing out at the country's minorities: the Kurds, Christians, Druse, Ismailites, and Alawites. "Sunnis don't want to dislocate their own limbs." A third mistake is to present the conflict as a game played by the great powers, or—to use the regime's own rhetoric—as a conspiracy against the Syria-people. Because political Islam is gaining strength, some people have even begun to talk about an "Arab Autumn" or "Arab Winter."

Al Azm drew a rough distinction among three forms of political Islam: the first of these is the Islam of the petrodollar in the Gulf States and Iran; the second is the jihadists' version of Islam, which Al Azm calls the "Islam of excommunication." The latter is characterized by nihilism and has no program beyond carrying out terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, one must distinguish between Al Qaeda and groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Certainly, there are commonalities among them; still, Hezbollah and Hamas are remnants of the liberation movement in the Arab world. "They fight for achievable goals and have a mass base." Yet they have reached "rock bottom" in the sense that terror strikes are the "last method they have left." In any case they could never constitute a true liberation movement, "since it does not occur to them to think of their country as belonging to each and every citizen." To gain that insight, one must attain some distance from religion.

Things look very different when one considers the third strain of political Islam: that of the middle class, businessmen, the bazaars, and the banks. This form of Islam has an interest in stability and strives to insure

tolerance for all. The best example of it is the AKP, which combines social programs with free trade. As Al Azm sees it, this brand of Islam will generate many new trends in the twenty-first century. Turkish Islam has great influence on the Arab world. In Tunisia and Egypt newly installed leaders are attempting to emulate the AKP's policies. Yet for all that, the Tunisian Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are not in an enviable position, since they must navigate between petrodollar Islam and the advocates of excommunication.

According to Al Azm, business Islam has some influence upon Syria as well. He was confident that, after a period of chaos, the segments of the populace that wanted an accommodation would get their way. Syria capital and the Syrian bourgeoisie would lead the country's reconstruction. In this way, he argued, business Islam would win out against radical Islam.

The Origins of Political Islam and its Recent Electoral Victories

Alison Pargeter, a British expert on Islamism, devoted her presentation to the moderate political Islam typified by the Muslim Brotherhood and Tunisia's Ennahda. She attributed the problems of this current of Islam to several factors: their historical role as opposition parties; their ambivalent attitude toward power, and their lack of ideological development.



Pargeter began by analyzing the reasons why moderate Islamists were able to do so well in elections in Egypt and Tunisia; why they are well represented in the ranks of Syria's opposition; and why they play a lesser role in Libya. In Egypt, she explained, they had benefited from the brevity of the campaign period leading up to the country's first elections. They were well known as regime opponents and perceived by ordinary citizens as a clean, noncorrupt alternative to the system. Their values and pledges of Islamic authenticity allegedly found wide acceptance among the

rank-and-file, who “felt that the elites were westernizing them.” Moreover, the Muslim Brothers deliberately equated religion and party. During the election campaign they claimed that anyone who did not vote for them was against Islam.

In contrast to Egypt under Mubarak, Tunisia under Ben Ali showed no tolerance whatsoever for Islamists. However, the leadership of Ennahda, driven into exile, did manage to set up some dissident networks inside Tunisia. The situation in Syria resembled that in Tunisia, in that the Muslim Brotherhood was banned there as well. But, she added, of all the opposition parties they were the best organized and financed.

In Libya, on the other hand, the entire inner circle of leaders had been jailed. Thus, Pargeter argued, they could never have run an effective political campaign in the short interval – officially just 18 days – that remained before elections were to be held. She also suggested that the Libyan electoral law was designed to prevent a victory by the Muslim Brotherhood. Nevertheless, the Muslim Brotherhood might still have been able to win a number of seats for independent candidates, thereby demonstrating greater electoral strength than one might have expected.



Right now the Muslim Brotherhood seems to be in a paradoxical position. As Pargeter pointed out, they are not ready to govern: “They have always emphasized that they do not want to govern, but instead want to compel those who do govern to create an Islamic state.” As a party that has been in opposition for decades, they have shown themselves to be pragmatic and flexible. Thus, for example, the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood fled to Iraq, where they received support from the incumbent Baathist regime. In Libya they engaged in a debate with Gaddafi’s son, Saif al Islam: “The Muslim Brotherhood was always out to get a big piece of the pie for itself.”

Its program, she continued, is extremely flexible: “The Muslim Brotherhood tries to be all things to all peo-

ple,” she asserted. For that reason it is difficult to pin down the movement’s political positions. On many questions of principle – for example, their attitudes toward democracy and the role and rights of women – those positions are deliberately fuzzy. But the weaknesses of their program are due partially to the fact that they have ostracized some of their leading thinkers, such as Hassan al Turabi. In Pargeter’s opinion there has not been an outstanding thinker inside the Muslim Brotherhood since the days of Said Qutb (1906-1966).

Once the party achieves a position of power, its desire to be “all things to all people” becomes problematic. Pargeter compared the Brotherhood’s behavior to that of a “trampling elephant.” Moreover, the party is trying to navigate across terrain in which it has never really believed. They never wanted democracy; they always wanted an Islamic state. It is an open question whether the Muslim Brotherhood could even create democratic structures within its own party, since decisions have always been made at the top: “The Muslim Brotherhood appears to think that democracy is only about elections; they don’t see it as a special kind of culture with rights and liberties for the individual.”

Now faced with the challenge of assuming governmental responsibility, the Muslim Brothers presumably will have to move away from their old slogans and demands for Islamic banks and Sharia law. The principal challenge for the future is whether they will be able to secularize without losing the support of their voters. If they cannot, they may seal their own demise.

The Evolution of and within Political Parties since the Onset of the Arab Spring

Nevine Mossaad, an Egyptian professor of politics, sketched out developments in Egypt touching on the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists. Hoping to answer the question of why the Muslim Brothers fail when it comes to governing, she especially emphasized the political problems that arise when society is divided along ethnic and sectarian lines.

At the beginning of her presentation Mossaad asked: “How can we explain the fact that the Muslim Brothers may indeed hold the reins of power, but cannot manage to govern?” One reason for this failure, she suggested, was the poor cooperation between the Muslim Brotherhood in its dual roles as a movement and as a party. The Brotherhood as a movement, she said, is much more extensive than the party and leads it. Yet it has priorities that do not match the party’s practical needs. Another reason she cited for the Brotherhood’s difficulties in governance dovetailed

with that offered by Pargeter: an unrealistic ideological orientation. They have always “clung to the idea of a caliphate,” she noted. Furthermore, the organization has been consistently Pan-Arab and thus not attuned to national issues.



The entry of Islamist parties into the political arena has brought about one significant change: politics has become more focused on ethnic and religious cleavage. Egypt’s earlier president, Anwar As Sadat, used the Muslim Brothers against the left, while under Mubarak attacks on Christian churches began to occur. The state legitimized such crimes, Mossaad noted, by saying that Christians had brought it on themselves. Since the Islamists have come to power, the perpetrators are no longer being brought to justice.

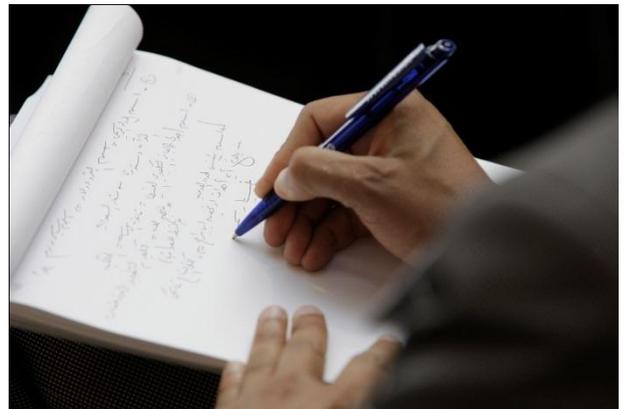
Meanwhile, Shiites have also become targets for attacks. When Ahmadinejad visited Egypt, a shoe was thrown at him. Salafists protested against the presence of Iranian tourists, saying that the latter should not be allowed to come to Cairo to visit Shiite holy places, but should stay at the beaches. In her view the rise of Islamist militias is also a dangerous development. For these reasons Mossaad is generally less optimistic than Al Azm.



Discussion

The Egyptian political sociologist and journalist **Ammar Aly Hassan** criticized Sadik Al Azm’s optimistic interpretation. The Muslim Brothers have undoubtedly evolved. Today they speak the language of Said Qutb rather than that of Al Banna. The only positive thing he saw was that the Muslim Brothers had frittered away the good image they once had: “In the past people protected the Muslim Brothers on the street. Today they can no longer be protected.” That is why he thinks that Egypt will defeat the Muslim Brothers: “I expect the world not to regard the revolution as over. It is going to continue.”

Zainab Al Suwajj, President of the Islamic-American Congress, pointed out that the situation in Egypt and Tunisia is quite different from that in Syria. She directed the following question to Al Azm: “What makes you come to the conclusion that this business Islam in Syria will be able to establish a civil state?”



Alison Pargeter chimed in that she did not see such an obvious influence of the Turkish AKP on the Arab world as Al Azm had claimed: “In Tunisia and Egypt the Islamists said ‘No, that’s too secular for us.’”

The Tunisian professor of gender and Islamic studies, **Amel Grami**, was also far less sanguine than al Azm: “It is true that we have popular Islam, radical Islam, and business Islam. But what conditions would have to be met so that business Islam could take over the revolution?” The Tunisian party Ennahda did refer positively to the Turkish AKP, but only before the elections: “The message was sent to the West that Ennahda has nothing against modernity. A second message was sent to secular forces in Tunisia. It was suggested that women and secular people could go on living as they pleased. Thus, even secular-minded people voted for the Ennahda.” After the visit of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan, the Ennahda’s party leader, Rachid

Ghannouchi, declared that his party would take its bearings more from Malaysia than from Turkey.

A participant from Sudan remarked that we should learn from the experiences of her country. Unfortunately, scholars frequently seemed to overlook this precedent. In her view the Turkish case could only be judged in the context of Kemalism, especially in matters that involve the role of women.

Al Azm stressed that he was not confusing the Turkish model with Egypt or Tunisia: “But the question is: can the Turkish model exert some influence upon the Arab world?” The Muslim Brothers would have to rethink their positions. They could see a way out in the Turkish model, although not one that they could implement in its entirety.

On the issue of business Islam in Syria, he elaborated by pointing out that the trading class had been present and strong in that country for a long time. Furthermore, 40% of the population there consists of minorities. Also, even within the Sunni majority there were quite a few people who wanted a civil state. In light of those facts, it would be impossible for political Islam to win a majority of the vote in a free election.



Forum 1. Politics, Society, and Religion in the Maghreb Two Years after the Onset of the Arab Spring

In her talk **Amel Grami**, professor of Islamic and gender studies, depicted the debate concerning Islam and Tunisian identity as the crucial issue for Tunisia's development. She noted that the polarization of political parties and the retreat of ordinary citizens from political debates posed a particular danger for the country's future.

Grami said that religion as a historical, social, and cultural phenomenon has been subject to constant change. Thus, as expected, there have been intense debates about the role of religion in Tunisia in the wake of the changes wrought by the Arab Spring. In the course of the protracted process leading to the drafting of a new constitution, the gaps between Islamists on one side and liberal or secular citizens on the other should become readily apparent.



During the rule of Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali, the religious sphere was subject to tight control by the state. However, since he was overthrown one can observe a clear upsurge in the signs of overt religiosity. Grami noted that "new discourses, new practices, new looks have emerged, as well as religious kindergartens, associations, and book stores." In addition, a flood of preachers has come into the country from Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. To some extent they have been spreading a version of Islamic practice alien to Tunisia (and the Maghreb as a whole), up to and including advocating female genital mutilation, the veiling of girls, and the struggle against secularists. For months the central issue of political discourse has been how Tunisia's Islamic identity might be displayed.

There are voices demanding that Sharia should become the basis of Tunisian law, which, if it happened, would turn the country from a secular into a religious state. Grami observed that these voices emanated

primarily from certain Salafist groups, but definitely could also be heard within the Ennahda itself. They found expression in mass demonstrations in front of the National Assembly calling for, among other things, a prohibition on the sale of alcohol and the curtailment of women's rights in family law.

Although Ennahda's program aims at the re-Islamization of Tunisia, its relationship to Sharia remains as ambiguous as its attitude towards democracy, according to Grami. Many members of the opposition parties have expressed their concern that the draft constitution neglects the secular aspects of the state. On March 20, 2012, the anniversary of Tunisian independence in 1956, several thousand Tunisians demonstrated in favor of a modern, democratic state that would respect human rights. Such discontent unnerved the Ennahda. Subsequently, its leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, declared that Sharia would not be a part of the law, and that the first article of Tunisia's constitution would remain unchanged: "Tunisia is a free, sovereign, and independent state. Its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic, and its form of government is a republic."

Nevertheless, in May of 2012 the Ennahda gave legal status as a political party to the so-called "reform front" (*Jabhat al-Islah*), one of the most important Salafist groups. It also supported the work of other Salafist organizations. Thus, for the first time, groups that openly advocate the primacy of Islamic law are participating in the political decision-making process.

The debate about the role of religion in the draft constitution has had a powerful influence on the transformation process and political development of Tunisia. While Islamic and secular political forces did succeed in forming a governing coalition, they still have had to face numerous conflict-laden issues. As Grami explains, partisans of a more thorough Islamization of the country, as well as advocates of a strict separation of church and state, are digging in their heels to defend their respective positions. As a result it is becoming more difficult to reach compromises. Moreover, the Gulf States and the West have encouraged the formation of political blocs by giving financial subsidies to their chosen counterparts.

Grami also observed that the polarized political scene, the fragmenting of civil society, and the difficulty in agreeing on common goals have all conspired to weaken the position and influence of civil forces. Hence, Tunisians today are asking themselves:

- Why is Ennahda putting the achievements of the Bourguiba era and even Tunisian identity itself on the agenda of unresolved issues?

- Why do religion and the constitution always appear in a dialectic between modernity and conservatism?
- Will the country manage to establish a civil and democratic state and thus possibly become a model for the region?

Summarizing her remarks, Grami noted that there is great need for a thoroughgoing national conversation about state-building, economic development, and the creation of a social order that would meet human needs. However, dissatisfaction with the new government has instead led to a retreat from that debate. She predicted that, “when citizens don’t believe that their voices can change anything, they will increasingly shun elections and public discourse.”



In the subsequent discussion, Grami’s observations initially were characterized as being too negative. Several participants emphasized the openness that has accompanied Tunisia’s process of change as well as developments in the region generally.

In response, Grami offered some more practical examples of the advance of the Islamists and their growing influence on politics and society. She mentioned that she herself had already found out, through attacks on her own person, what happens to those who take dissenting positions. Several participants in the discussion, especially women, supported Grami’s assessment. Eventually it became clear that male and female Tunisians had differing perceptions concerning the “Islamization of the country.” Women have experienced the pressure of radical Islamists in everyday life more strongly than men, when they are told to dress more “modestly” or to dress in a more “Islamic” style.

During the ensuing give-and-take, fierce debates erupted over the issue of whether intensive religiosity and the secular state were incompatible with one another, or whether they could be reconciled. Amel Grami responded hesitantly to a question about the role of the West – and especially of Germany – in Tun-

sia’s transformation process. Understandably, the Tunisian people would reject any sort of tutelage. Development aid, on the other hand, was sorely needed. It would surely be difficult, she thought, for German and other foreign politicians to strike the right tone and find the proper measure of political influence.

Forum 2. Lebanon and Jordan between Accommodation and Resistance

The Jordanian political scientist **Mohammad Abu Rumman** described the increasing Islamization now occurring in Lebanon, Jordan, and especially Syria.

Since 1982, the year in which the residents of the city of Hama were massacred following an uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood, there allegedly has been no tolerance for Islamic movements. The only ones that could coexist with the regime were the Sufis. The Kuf-taru family furnishes one example of that point, since its members include both the former Mufti of Syria and his brother-in-law, a parliamentary deputy. But limits were set even upon the activities of the Kuf-taru.



By contrast, the Muslim Brothers were arrested by the thousands or have fled the country. Residing in Jordan alone are some ten thousand Syrian members of the Muslim Brotherhood. For that reason it is impossible to estimate how many supporters the Brotherhood currently has in Syria. But in the course of the conflict now taking place in that country, open borders with Turkey have helped the Muslim Brotherhood to return to Syria and form armed militias. Among the brigades now fighting, the one that stands closest to the Brotherhood is the “Islamic Liberation Front.”

In addition there is the Salafist movement, which has split into three factions. The movement may be subdivided into political and religious-conservative schools of Salafism, one influenced mainly by Saudi Arabia, and the other remaining politically passive. The third

school of Salafism, Abu Rumman notes, consists of violence-prone jihadists. The Salafist movement has great influence in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but it has also been gaining adherents recently in Syria as well, because many Syrian Salafists have received training in the Gulf region. Since this school of Islam at first did not advocate any particular set of political ideas, Syrian authorities mostly left it alone. According to Abu Rumman, it is well represented today in rural areas as well as in the towns of Aleppo, Deir az-Zur and Dara'a.

When the revolution against the Assad regime began, the Salafists set about creating militias without delay. Some adherents of the movement were in favor of political work, while others were against it. But all concurred that the Syrian leadership was blasphemous, and that the revolution was an uprising of Muslims against infidels. Its most effective fighting unit is the "Islamic Front" (*Achrar Al Sham*). The jihadist movement mentioned earlier as one faction of the Salafists is concentrated mainly in the Jabat al-Nusra organization, and consists of volunteers from various countries. According to its own estimates, it has about 7,000 fighters. Even the leadership of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) admits that the jihadists are the most effective and courageous fighters in the field. Supposedly, they have won widespread sympathy among the Syrian people, because they are not corrupt. As Abu Rumman put it, "they are organized, they don't steal, and they are willing to make sacrifices." The second reason for the backing enjoyed by Al Nusra stems from its religious orientation as a Sunni movement. The argument that the whole world is conspiring against Sunni Muslims in Syria is certainly widely believed.

Yet the recognition of Ayman Al Zawahiri as leader of both Al Qaeda and Al Nusra has led to tensions with the FSA. "For the first time we are hearing angry voices being raised by the Syrian revolution against Al Qaeda," noted Abu Rumman. He predicted that something similar would occur in Syria as happened in Iraq in 2007 when Al Qaeda came into conflict with other Sunni groups. In his view, that would become an especially acute problem in areas controlled by the rebels.

In Lebanon, he continued, there are two contending Islamic forces: the Shiite Hezbollah, which is dominant, and the Jemaah Al Islamiyah, the largest movement among the Sunnis. In the wake of the revolution in Syria, the Salafists have also become visible in Lebanon, above all in the cities of Saida and Tripoli. The politically influential Sunni Hariri family, to which several of the country's political leaders have belonged, has not been able to control either of these factions. To the contrary, the Salafists have hundreds of followers in Tripoli, where they have challenged Hezbollah and regard the Hariri-backed Future Movement as

"cowards." In addition to the jihadist factions already mentioned, one should also include the Fatah Al-Islam, which consists mostly of Palestinian forces and is battling Alawites in Tripoli.

According to Abu Rumman, the image of Hezbollah has been seriously damaged. It won great popularity as the party of resistance against Israel. But now that Hezbollah is supporting the Syrian regime, public perceptions are changing. Opinion polls confirm that its popularity has waned considerably. This, says Abu Rumman, is a matter for concern when one looks ahead to potential intra-faith conflicts.

Abu Rumman thinks that the Salafists are on a roll even in Jordan. Influenced by the Arab Spring, they have begun to demand an Islamic state at demonstrations. Up until now their protests in Jordan have been peaceful. However, the Jordanian state rejected their demands and arrested some Salafists, whereupon quite a few left for Syria in order to fight there. Their efforts to start a Salafist party were baffled.

During the discussion that followed Abu Rumman's presentation, the criticism was raised that the role of Lebanon's Future Movement, led by Hariri, had been portrayed incorrectly. According to the critics, that movement was not a secular party; rather, it has used religious rhetoric and did allow the Salafist Tawid party to operate in Tripoli even though the latter rejects the state. To this objection Abu Rumman replied that the Future Movement had undoubtedly aided the Salafists and given a home to the Jemaah. However, his talk was concerned with political Islam, and right now none of Lebanon's major parties wanted to establish an Islamic state in that country.

In respect to Sadik Al Azm's thesis concerning business Islam, Abu Rumman pointed out: "Existing studies show that the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, Syria, and Egypt constitutes the religious middle class. Most of them are engineers, doctors, and businessmen." But all indications are that the Salafists in Jordan, Palestine, and the refugee camps in Lebanon tend to attract primarily the lower classes and the unemployed. In Amman, for example, Al Qaeda is supposedly most popular among residents of the city's slums.

Another conferee objected that the issue of political participation had not been raised, nor had its influence on the Islamists' political practice. Abu Rumman responded that the Salafists' extremist behavior was both a reaction to the repressive state and a reflection of their own ideology. That could also be said of the Muslim Brotherhood. By the same token, he was convinced that, if democracy prevailed more fully and more extensive liberties were granted, extremism

would be unable to flourish. At the same time, however, it would be necessary to allow the movements of political Islam to participate rather than trying to suppress them. In the case of Jordan, for example, the lesson would be that, as long as the Islamists have to operate underground, extremists will become entrenched there.

Forum 3. The Gulf Region: Upheaval in the Shadow of Public Attention

The session was introduced by Professor **Katja Niethammer**, who gave a talk on the topic: "The Arab Spring and the Uprising in Bahrain." She structured her talk around three common suppositions about why monarchies have not been as seriously challenged during the so-called Arab Spring as the autocratic one-party states. In brief, the suppositions may be addressed as follows:

- Monarchies are in a better position to liberalize laws, and the monarchs' status as heads of state is not challenged by reform.
- Monarchs enjoy greater freedom to build alliances with diverse groups within their societies since they have fewer ideological ties.
- Monarchs have more traditional legitimacy.



During the talk, Niethammer deconstructed these suppositions using Bahrain as a case study, and showed why they were based on faulty analysis. The audience was presented with facts about the size and structure of the ruling Al Khalifa family and about the history of Bahraini protests against the rule promoting constitutional reform, dating all the way back to the 1920s, with major incidents also occurring in the 1950s, 1970s, 1990s and during the last decade. Discontent was focused on the lack of political influence and the radically uneven distribution of wealth, not least stemming from the natural resources (mainly oil) of the country.

Niethammer made it clear that, contrary to the first supposition, Gulf monarchs evidently did have wide-ranging legitimacy problems. Again taking Bahrain as an example, she showed how its attempts at liberalization had not led to restored confidence in the monarchy. It is rather the amount of external support for either the ruling elite or the opposition that really matters. She called for a much closer examination of external support for the outcome of protest than had been done to date.

Regarding the second point, it became increasingly clear during the talk that, even though a monarch might forge alliances and make unexpected friends, the very structure of the Bahraini monarch's rule rendered it nearly impossible for him to make concessions to the opposition. If he were to cede power to elected bodies, they would eventually raise the crucial issue of Bahrain's economy. The king's unrestricted access to Bahraini state finances is the one issue concerning which the royal family will not back down. Niethammer drew an improbable but striking parallel with the Baath Party in Syria, rather than with the royal family of Jordan. In both Syria and Bahrain the ruling family had monopolized the economy and occupied all the key positions in the country. Thus, loyalty stemming from traditional authority was not very strong in Bahrain; instead loyalty was clan-based and purchased with money.

During the discussion it became increasingly clear that not only European and U.S. media but also Arab satellite channels filed fewer reports from Bahrain than from other states in the region where uprisings took place. The importance of Bahraini stability probably accounts for the lack of media coverage by Gulf-based news agencies. The paucity of reports from the so-called Western media is slightly more difficult to explain. It may result from ignorance or power alliances, or it may be that stories from Bahrain were overshadowed by competing events during the same weeks, such as the nuclear crisis at Fukushima, Japan.

Furthermore, most other countries have been cautious in their comments about the violence against and imprisonment of the Bahraini opposition. They have mainly offered advice and recommendations rather than making demands or threats. Those responses again raise the question of external support as one of the key factors that may help explain the failure of the opposition movement in Bahrain to gain traction.

Forum 4. Egypt – Key to Trends in the Arab States?

In his presentation the Egyptian political sociologist **Ammar Aly Hassan** clarified the special significance of Egypt for the evolution of the Arab world. During the discussion he focused mainly on the arguments presented by Sadik Al Azm in the keynote address and on the future direction of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.



Egypt is a crucial country both because it is the Arab world's most populous nation and because of its location. On the geostrategic level, it occupies a key position on account of its ownership of the Suez Canal and its proximity to Israel. In a cultural sense it is also vital on account of the role of its media, which are heard and read all over the Arab world. In 2004 George W. Bush asked for reforms in Egypt, because he assumed that, if Egypt were to change, so would the rest of the Arab world.

When he encountered criticism of his depiction of Egypt's role during the discussion, Aly Hassan emphasized that the revolution in Tunisia had deeply impressed the Egyptians. That had been the spark. But it was only when that spark arced over to Egypt that the revolutionary movement reached the rest of the Arab world.

The presenter expressed skepticism toward the claim that Turkey might be a model for the Arab states. Referring to Sadik Al Azm's thesis that "business Islam" as embodied in the Turkish AKP might set an example for Arab Islamists and inaugurate a transition to a democratic society, Aly Hassan wondered whether Arab Islamists would have any interest at all in following Turkey's path.

During the discussion it was pointed out that the influence of Islamists on society in Egypt is much stronger than it is in Turkey. One expression of this divergence is the head scarf, which has been a dominant image in

the streets of Egypt since the 1980s. Although wearing the scarf is a matter partly of tradition and partly of fashion, and does not necessarily indicate a person's political sympathies, it is nonetheless interpreted as a token of the Islamists' success. Moreover, another major difference between Egypt and Turkey in this regard concerns attitudes toward secularism. The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, has expressed positive views about Kemalism and is committed to the secular state, while the representatives of political Islam in Egypt would reject both. Hence, the AKP could at most be a model for secular Arabs.

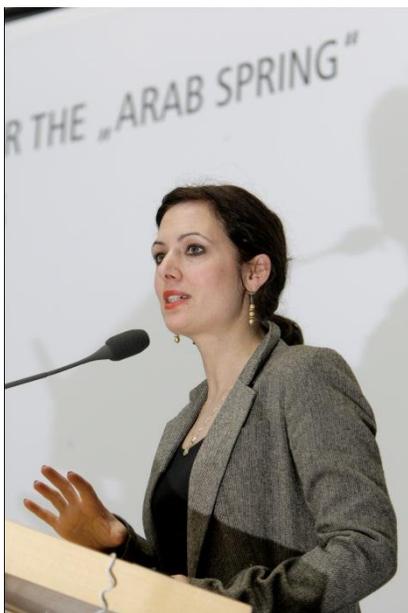
Several participants wondered whether the Muslim Brotherhood would be able to remain in power, whether they would be reelected, and whether they could manage to rein in the army's power. Also, the question was raised whether events in Egypt should count as a revolution or as a popular insurrection. In response, Aly Hassan noted that it is interesting that revolutions are always judged in light of the model of the French Revolution. No other models are considered, not even the American Revolution. Up until now, what has occurred in Egypt is clearly not yet a revolution in that narrow sense. But, he added, history does not record many instant revolutions. It always takes a few years before one can judge the results, and this is the case in Egypt too.



Muslim-German Lifeworlds against the Backdrop of the Arab Spring: Is Germany Home, or are German Muslims being Drawn Back to their Ancestral Allegiances?

Drawing on data from interviews with German youths having Muslim backgrounds, the political scientist and scholar of Islamic studies **Naika Foroutan** highlighted the interactions between discourses in the youths' respective countries of origin and in Germany. She ascertained that the wish for authenticity and rootedness frequently led them to identify with religion rather than with their country of origin.

To begin with, Foroutan described changes in the narrative about Islam in Europe. Back in the eighteenth century, Islam was still described in rather feminine and romantic terms as symbolized by the harem. Today, in contrast, Islam is seen as warlike, aggressive, and masculine. In Germany it carries few positive associations.



Foroutan's project, devoted to configurations of hybridity in immigration societies, featured interviews with 50 people who held German citizenship but had Muslim backgrounds. She established that the interviewees "fell back on what they assumed to be religious capital." The majority society attributes to them a superior knowledge of religion, even when that is not the case. That circumstance leads them to take a greater interest in religion, so that they can live up to the attribution.

Frequently, the interviewees no longer felt much of an attachment to their countries of origin. One can observe that many of them react aggressively to the

harmless question, "where are you from?" They see it as a problem that they are not "at home" in Germany, since national identity is taken for granted in the wider society. In this context religion offers a new way to feel rooted or at home: "I'm a Muslim; I don't have to decide anymore."

In cases such as these, ties to tradition are no longer concrete. For these young people, traditions play the exact same role as television or the Internet. The German majority society sees Muslim youth as authentically Arab or Turkish, even though they experience a European version of Islam in their everyday lives. At the same time, there are indeed reciprocal influences from their countries of origin and the Arab Spring. Thus, for example, the war in Syria has suddenly made relevant the issue of one's sectarian commitments, i.e., whether one is a Shiite or a Sunni Muslim.

The Implications of Trends in the Arab World for Politics and Society in Germany

When German Parliamentary Deputy **Günter Gloser** visited Morocco in 1995, it was his first trip outside Europe. This was the same year in which the European Union's Barcelona Process was inaugurated. The goals of this initiative, which promised cooperation among the countries on both shores of the Mediterranean, sounded good: peace, stability, and prosperity, the advancement of shared values, economic integration, and the strengthening of cultural and political relations.



Gloser recalled that visit in his address and drew some sobering conclusions: "On the tenth anniversary of the initiative, we noticed how little of it had been put into effect. There were some nice things in it, which were signed by many people, including Mr. Ben Ali." At the time a Moroccan journalist said to him: "Now I know what you want. We are your front yard and you want it to look nice."

In 2008 the “Union of the Mediterranean Region” was established. In Germany little notice was taken of the Union, because people there could not see the point of it. Generally speaking, Germany has not been very interested in it. Gloser reminded the audience that, when one is a deputy in parliament, one has to worry about things like pensions and kindergarten places. Furthermore, German media are not well represented in the region. Reporting is done by a few newspapers and the correspondents are mostly based in Madrid or Paris. When the Tunisian revolution broke out, there was not one correspondent on the spot to report for the German network ZDF’s popular TV show “heute.” The only available person was the Friedrich Ebert Foundation’s project director in Tunis. “That is how the infrastructure was.”

The Arab Spring brought about some changes. Since then Gloser has had numerous conversations with people at home about his engagement in the Arab world, though these are always accompanied by questions like: “So what comes next?”; “What kind of people are they?”; and “Why did they do that?”



Germany has attempted to support the process of transformation. People think: “What can we do to shore up democracy? Maybe we could do something like training journalists or promoting the professions.” The list is long, but of course it is not long enough, as Gloser explained by citing a host of other urgent needs.

A kind of Marshall Plan is required: “We have to ask: what needs to be done so that we can offer something to young people?” In light of demographic trends, Europe, with its population of around 500 million, should be in a position to provide young people with vocational training or enable them to accumulate job experience for a certain amount of time. “It has to be more than a program for 15 people, which is what we have right now in the educational partnership department.”

Addressing the issue of refugee policies is also a crucial step. Tunisia has taken in a million refugees from Libya, “while the EU is quarreling with Mr. Berlusconi about 15,000 of them.” When we look at how many refugees Lebanon has accepted from Syria, we realize that the EU would have to take in three million to do as much in proportion to its own population as Lebanon has done given its small size. Gloser criticized the way in which the German federal government has narrowed the terms of the debate about Syrian war refugees by talking only about Christian refugees. He praised the two major churches in Germany for saying that this was a matter touching all refugees, not just Christians.

Gloser thought it was a positive development that one can now talk to a variety of actors, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Previously it had been taboo to speak with representatives of Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood. He suggested that, in a broader sense, the Arab Spring had revealed the weak points in Europe’s foreign policy. What was needed, he thought, was a unified foreign and security policy. We should also be discussing the issue of arms exports: “I can’t meet with [former Egyptian president] Morsi, and then turn around and supply weapons to somebody who is waging a proxy war.”



Discussion

The discussion turned mainly on the topics of integrating Muslim immigrants and the ascription of identities.

One participant claimed to have determined that over 30% of Lebanese immigrants in Australia could not speak English. He also observed that here in Berlin there were immigrant families that could not speak any German.

Foroutan responded that studies of linguistic competence in Germany have turned out noticeably better than those in Australia. 70% of Muslim immigrants

supposedly had good to very good knowledge of German. However, language courses available here are said to be overbooked by 116%. The public is not really aware of the progress being made in integrating immigrants, even though integration researchers have been seeing it for years.

Günter Gloser cited the program called “Mama is learning German.” In recent years a bipartisan consensus has emerged about the deficiencies in this area. By now language courses have been set up even for asylum seekers.

Addressing Foroutan’s argument that in Europe, especially, identities are shifting from the national to the religious plane, one participant objected that surveys at Cairo University taken in 2010 showed that the majority of respondents there also identified as Muslims first and Egyptians second.

Foroutan asked the critic whether the survey questions had offered an Arab identity as an alternative. In her estimation what is on the rise everywhere is affiliation with a higher-order identity. In ascending order there is first an Egyptian identity, then an Arab identity, and finally one as a Muslim. Thus, she would have expected the Arab identity to be the more important one in Egypt.

Is Turkey a Model for the Countries of the Arab Spring?

The director of the Al Sharq Research Center for Regional and Strategic Studies, **Mustafa Al Labbad**, devoted his talk to the ambivalent relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Turkish AKP, pointing out the structural and ideological differences between the two organizations.



Prior to the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood had taken a positive stance toward the Turkish model. In its

struggle with the Mubarak regime, the Brotherhood pointed to the economic success achieved by Turkey as well as its felicitous integration of political parties. They had also admired Recep Erdoğan for his conduct in Davos and for sponsoring the peace fleet to Gaza. The Turkish premier had caused a stir in Davos in 2009 when the moderator of a panel discussion refused to let him give a lengthy answer to remarks by Shimon Peres, the Israeli president, whereupon Erdoğan simply left the panel.

However, as Al Labbad explained, once the Muslim Brotherhood took over the reins of government, they hastened to distance themselves from the AKP. The intellectual icons of the movement now looked for inspiration to “the deserts of the [Arabian] peninsula and not to Anatolia, where Sufis played a role.” For them the Turkish model was insufficiently Islamic and excessively oriented toward the West.



Al Labbad stressed that the intellectual foundations of the AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood are distinct. To be sure, there are some similarities between Turkey and Egypt, such as the military’s prominent role in each country. Also, both parties represent the “center” of Islam and in international politics they have been closely aligned. Neither of them really questions the international economic order.

Yet on the other hand, Kemalism has brought about a different balance of social forces. In Turkey there is a broad political and social movement, which Egypt has never had, at least in that form. In Turkey there are two big parties, while in Egypt there is only one. The AKP crystallized within the conservative parties over a long period of time, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood

never had the opportunity to go into action. Another difference lies in the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood is a pan-national movement, while the AKP has no fraternal parties. The AKP concentrates on political activities, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood vacillates between political and religious activities. The AKP is open to all citizens and all sects of Islam, while the Muslim Brotherhood accepts only Sunnis.

The AKP is actually supported by businessmen, so the term preferred by Sadik Al Azm, "business Islam," fits the facts. By contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood relies primarily on the Gulf States for financial support.

The AKP is not merely an Islamist party; it is a specifically Turkish phenomenon with great political and cultural influence. It is carrying the project of reform from Anatolia into Western Turkey. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, in contrast, has gone hand in hand with the ascendancy of the Gulf States and the profits they have been earning from oil exports since the seventies.

Al Labbad concluded by saying that, despite his earlier arguments, he would not want to rule out the possibility that the Turkish model could serve as a guideline for the Arab world. On the contrary: according to this Egyptian scholar the newly prominent elites in his own country should be judged in light of that model. Still, he worried that the reference to Turkey might be a sort of tranquilizer to calm some people's anxieties about the Arab Spring.

Discourses on Peace and Violence in the Islamist Movement

Christine Schirrmacher, a scholar of Islamic Studies at the University of Erfurt, gave a talk that elaborated on the differences and similarities between Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood. Her conclusion was that, although their approaches might differ, their ideological foundations did not.



She initially examined the growing violence in the countries of the Arab Spring, which has been directed primarily against women, but also against secularists and religious minorities. She wanted to know what factors might explain why all the violence is happening and why the perpetrators are not being prosecuted. The victims of violent attacks have regularly reported knowing the perpetrators, and wondered why they were never prosecuted. "Are these just growing pains?" she asked. She expressed the concern that "things could turn out worse than we expected."

From a historical point of view, Salafists and Muslim Brothers have some common origins. The Brotherhood was founded 85 years ago by Hassan Al Banna, building on the Salafiya movement that had already emerged in Egypt toward the end of the nineteenth century.

Al Banna himself already evinced a strong commitment to jihad. The Brotherhood's leading thinker, Said Qutb, reinforced that tendency, calling for jihad against society itself, which he saw as infidel. Dissenters such as Jews and Christians were regarded as inferior, according to Schirrmacher. To this very day the commitment to jihad has never been revoked.

The influential TV preacher and Muslim Brother, Yusuf Al Qaradawi, clearly does not rule out violence. He has proposed applying the corporal punishments laid down in Sharia law within the next five years in Egypt. He calls for the death of apostates and defends suicide attacks even against women and children in Israel.

According to the speaker, the Muslim Brotherhood's program is to carry on politics in the name of Islam, even though the group concentrated its efforts on social work during the eighties and nineties. Salafism, by contrast, did not even engage in politics originally, and certainly not in foreign policy. It was a movement to encourage private piety. The Salafists are a movement of theologians, whereas the Muslim Brothers do not have many theologians in their ranks and are not experts in the exegesis of Islam.

There is a clear difference in their respective assessments of the role of women. Whereas the Salafists would like to confine women to the home, the Muslim Brotherhood has no objections to a good education for or activism by women. Moreover, the Salafists attach great importance to moral issues such as rules of dress. As a political movement, the Muslim Brotherhood aims to reshape society. It wants to introduce Sharia only after a transitional phase, because it fears "that people would not adhere to it now."

Both movements share an idealization of the Islamic past as well as a commitment to apply the Koran and the Sunna more strictly. Consequently, it would be a mistake to expect either one to advocate pluralism. Piety always harbors a totalitarian viewpoint. It is true that the Muslim Brothers do not advocate violence. Still, one has to ask how they could be in favor of liberal rights, when they have never yet deviated from their illiberal principles.



Discussion

The Egyptian political scientist **Nevine Mossaad** pointed out that the Salafists were not a homogeneous bloc. There were some who avoided politics, while others took part in it. Some of them were willing to countenance the participation of women up to a point, while others rejected any form of female participation.

The Tunisian professor **Amel Grami**, who had been attacked by Salafists at her university, wanted to learn more about the Salafists' stance on violence: "We have a terrible situation in our kindergartens, where, for example, girls are beaten. We see violations of graves. These are attacks on our national culture."



According to **Alison Pargeter**, some elements of the movement had abjured violence. In general, the resort to violence is a problem throughout the entire region, for example in Libya, where secular militias commit violent acts.

A Sudanese participant favored the interpretation that sees violence as an aspect of Islamic ideology. In Sudan, she claimed, hands are chopped off in the name and people are flogged in the name of Islam. Jihad is directed against non-Muslims. Thus, for example, signs were put up in Khartoum that called upon residents to avoid Christians during the Christmas holidays.

Al Labbad stressed that the Muslim Brotherhood was not moving in the direction of the Turkish model. He noted that young Muslim Brothers in Ankara had recently refused to visit Atatürk's tomb. In fact, we should not think of the Muslim Brotherhood as a party but as the political arm of the movement. There are very few members of the Party who are not simultaneously members of the Brotherhood.



Two questions were aired concerning the position of Christians and Sufis in the Muslim Brotherhood. The Sufis, at least, had been at one time fairly close to Al Banna, but according to Al Labbad, the Sufi component of the movement has noticeably diminished. At this point, the Brotherhood is led by the school of thought associated with Qutb. The Coptic Christian Rafif Habib is the only token Christian.

One participant declared: "We don't want to incorporate any American or Turkish experiences. In Egypt we want to find a path that really suits our own nature."

Jakob Rosenow posed the question of why the Turkish case is even being considered as a possible model, and offered an answer to his own question: "Because it was successful, and not only in an economic sense. One has to ask whether this model, which—like Turkey's economy—grew up on Turkish soil, is even trans-

ferable to Egypt. And if that is not the case, how much sense does it make to compare the two?”

Ammar Aly Hassan pointed to the Orientalism in many studies. In the Koran, he claimed, women are equal to men. Also, there is violence against women in the Bible and the Torah.

To this comment **Schirmacher** replied that Europe had endured totalitarianism. That experience, she argued, provided the basis for the investigation of such ideologies.

Al Labbad emphasized that Turkey had an interest in talk about the Turkish model, since it made the country more attractive to the EU: “Look, we can do what you cannot. We can influence the Muslim Brotherhood.” This has been the implicit message of Turkish contributions to the debate. For the Muslim Brotherhood the Turkish model is a bridge to the West; for the West it is a tranquilizer.

Schirmacher was asked whether her insights into the meaning of violence in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood had found a hearing in German policy-making circles, for example in the Foreign Office. **Petra Becker** from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs replied that political consulting, in which her institute specializes, had come to grips with political Islam, for example in the project “New Elites in the Arab World.” However, in her view one should not think of all this in black and white terms. These societies are in the process of reinventing themselves. There is an intense debate going on about how to reconcile Islam with modern societies. In this context it is necessary to maintain a dialogue, even with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Al Labbad added that Germany, constrained by Realpolitik, could not simply wall itself off from Islamic parties and governments. On the other hand he worried that Germany’s image at the local level in Arab countries could suffer, much as has happened to the image of the United States under President Obama. In the eyes of the Arab world, Germany has acquired the image of a country that cares only about export markets, the economics of energy, and Israel.

The Arab Spring and Europe: Discussions about the Principal Outcomes of the Conference and Further Work of the Forum

The concluding discussion of the “Berlin Forum for Progressive Muslims” invited participants to suggest future topics for the event series and offer feedback from this year’s Forum.

Ammar Aly Hassan proposed a comparative study of the place of religion in society among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. There are other societies that are proud of their religions. The question is how religion can be interpreted so as to make it compatible with a modern state.

Participants generated a long wish list for the next conference. They proposed topics that would lead beyond what had already been said, including constitutions, the role of the army, pluralism, ecology, gender equality, art and the limits of art, sectarianism, and Germany’s image in the Arab world.



Furthermore, many participants expressed the wish that representatives of political Islam would also be invited. Likewise, they wanted to hear more from Western and/or German partners as well as to broaden the circle of participants to include representatives from more countries, including (among others) Yemen, Sudan, Algeria, Iran, and Indonesia.

In a concluding announcement, **Dietmar Molthagen** of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation reminded everyone that the next “Berlin Forum for Progressive Muslims” would be held in the fall of 2014.

Imprint:
Author:
Hannah Wettig

Editors:
Dr. Beyhan Sentürk
Dr. Dietmar Molthagen
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung