



Islamism and the Arab Spring: A Social Movement Approach

Teije Hidde Donker

Ph.D. thesis defence on 17 October 2013

Abstract

The thesis explores the contemporary Islamist project - constituted by those that mobilize to restructure public life according to Islamic norms - in the context of the 2011-2013 "Arab Spring". It has two interrelated aims. First, it aims to empirically explore changing interactions between Islamist mobilization in politics and in society, and examine the position state institutions have within these changes. Second, it aims to apply insights of studies on social movements and contentious mobilization in the analysis of these interactions. It is argued that, first, in their practice Islamist movements face a dilemma in how to react to a context that is ever more strictly divided between a social and political arena: either mobilization is aimed at societal change through organizing as social associations, or it is aimed at maximizing political influence through organizing as political parties. Irrespective of what their ideology is, all movements face the dilemma of how to reconcile a vision of a complete Islamic system with day-to-day realities. Second, it is argued that common strategies addressing the perceived "secularity" of state bureaucracies and public institutions can be the basis of a shared goal for mobilization and thereby ensure the unity of the Islamist project.

The candidate substantiates these claims through a paired comparison between Syria and Tunisia. The comparison builds on, first, extensive fieldwork over the course of four years in the Arab world (mainly Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and Jordan) in which around 180 individuals have been interviewed. Second, it draws on a content analysis of primary sources from Islamist associations, state institutions, and individual autobiographies of (Islamist) actors; third, it uses secondary sources from local, Arab and international newspapers as the empirical basis for the analysis

Jury:



Prof Farhad Khosrokhavar (EHESS), Prof Olivier Roy (EUI, co-supervisor), Prof Donatella della Porta (EUI, supervisor), Teije Hidde Donker (candidate), Prof Sidney Tarrow (Cornell University – by videoconference)

Bio

Teije Hidde Donker (Zwijndrecht, 1983) received his Msc. in Political Science from the University of Amsterdam. During and after his studies he worked at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael in the Hague, held a research position at the University of Amsterdam and was a visiting student at the Near Eastern Studies department at Princeton University. He has worked and lived in Syria, Egypt and Tunisia for over two years and speaks fluent Arabic.

Teije Hidde's research interests lie at the intersection of Middle East area studies, social movements studies and the sociology of Islam. He studies mobilization strategies of Islamist movements in Arab regimes affected by the Arab Spring, specifically focusing on mobilization aimed at state bureaucracies and public organizations. His thesis builds on a paired-comparison between Syria and Tunisia, using Egypt, Libya and Yemen as shadow cases.