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Post-Islamism and fields of contention after the Arab Spring: feminism, Salafism and the revolutionary youth

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, conflicts in Egypt and Tunisia over the authority to rule and the role of religion in society raised questions about these societies' capacity for reconciling differences. In retrospect, the conflicts also raise questions about the theoretical tools used to analyse regional developments. In particular, the 'post-Islamism' thesis has significantly changed the debates on 'Islam and democracy' by bringing to light the changing opportunity structures, and changed goals, of Islamist movements. However, this paper argues that the theory underestimates differences within post-Islamist societies. Drawing on field theory, the paper shows how the actual content of post-Islamism is contingent on political struggle. It focuses on three fields whose political roles have been underestimated or misrepresented by post-Islamist theorists: Islamic feminism, Salafist-jihadism and the revolutionary youth. Their respective forms of capital – sources of legitimacy and social recognition – give important clues for understanding the stakes of the conflicts after the Arab Spring.

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Post-Islamism has been a popular term among scholars seeking to understand the goals of Islamist movements and the social conditions and opportunity structures they face.¹ Post-Islamist theorists, including Asef Bayat and Olivier Roy, have suggested that Islamism has gradually lost credibility and that in its place we find a new discourse of exploration and contention over the role of Islam in politics. At the time of the Arab Spring uprisings, scholars approaching 'Islamism' from various perspectives found that the political discourses of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ennahda and other 'Islamist' movements and parties had significantly departed from the original Islamist project of establishing an Islamic state,² or that the meaning of 'Islamic State' had evolved in ways favourable to democracy.³ In the new political landscapes of the post-Arab Spring societies, politics had gained primacy over religion, in the sense that the former determined the role of the latter, and the 'failure of political Islam' was now a condition to which all political actors had to adjust their strategies and actions. As Roy put it, 'Islamists have changed, or at least they have understood that the world has changed'.⁴

The post-Islamism thesis does not suggest a decline in religiosity; neither does it necessarily suggest that religiosity becomes any less politically relevant. It suggests, correctly, that

politics in Muslim-majority countries is not simply about Islamism vs. secularism, but about the relevance and *meaning* of Muslim identity in the political sphere. The argument opens up questions that for long were overshadowed in scholarly debates about the political role of religiosity in Muslim-majority countries, debates that used to be more narrowly focused on the ideology and strategies of Islamists. This paper generally agrees with the arguments made by post-Islamist theorists. Islamism has failed, in the sense Roy and Bayat have argued. However, I argue that the democratic potential of Muslim identity politics depends not only on Islamists' toleration of the democratic process and basic rights, but also on struggles for inclusion in post-Islamist public spheres. The tensions and conflicts in Tunisia and Egypt after the Arab Spring indicate a basic problem with the post-Islamist thesis, namely its insensitivity to differences within societies.

I begin this essay by examining the logic of the 'post-Islamism' thesis and highlight its limitations in understanding the conflicts after the fall of Ben-Ali and Mubarak. I then elaborate a perspective informed by field theory,⁵ which brings to the fore the various actors involved in struggles over the revolutions' legacies. The stakes of the controversies and conflicts of these societies can be better analysed by treating the content of 'the post-Islamist society' as contingent on political struggles. The focus is thus turned to the practices of actors seeking to advance their own positions in the public sphere. I focus on three fields that have not been accurately portrayed by post-Islamist theorists: the Islamic feminist field, the Salafist-jihadist field and the revolutionary youth field. The field-theoretical analysis highlights the stakes of different groups involved in the conflicts after the Arab Spring. Because the post-Islamism thesis, in its current form, underestimates the differences within societies, it has little to say about these societies' tendencies towards polarisation and fragmentation, which pose significant challenges to democratic development. Field theory, by contrast, helps us see what is at stake for the different engaging fields. Rather than being altogether outside post-Islamist development of societies, as has been claimed in the case of Islamic feminism and in the case of Salafist-jihadism,⁶ or reducible to a narrow role in contentions over the place of Islam in politics, as has been claimed of the revolutionary youth movement, each of these fields has been constructed through practices of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, all three fields played important roles in shaping politics in the years after the fall of Ben-Ali and Mubarak. The tensions and conflicts between contending fields did not fade away due to post-Islamist conditions. Instead, these cases show that the stability and democratic development of post-Islamist societies depend on their ways of handling tensions and conflicts between different social fields through social inclusion.

1. The post-Islamist thesis and the Arab Spring revolts

The strengths of the post-Islamism thesis may be indicated by the fact that it continues to generate theoretical contributions and case studies.⁷ In Olivier Roy's influential formulation, post-Islamism signifies 'the precedence of politics over religion'.⁸ Roy's contention is that 'Islamism' no longer is about establishing an Islamic state, as it was for Mawdudi, Qutb and Khomeini. Likewise, for Asef Bayat, who originally used the term to describe changes of social practice and discourse in Iran in the 1990s, 'post-Islamism' means 'a condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, symbols and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted, even among its once-ardent supporters'.⁹ Part of the problem with Islamism, according to these theorists, is that it is founded on a conceptual error. Islamists

have claimed that 'Islam is the solution', but when entering the political arena they have failed to offer any distinctly 'Islamic' solutions.¹⁰ Instead, the political battles, within political Islam as well as outside and between Islamists and non-Islamists, tend to be defined along familiar lines of Left vs. Right, capitalism vs. anti-imperialism, individual liberty vs. conservatism and so on. Post-Islamism, says Bayat, 'is expressed in the idea that Islam does not have answers to all societies' social, political, and economic problems'.¹¹ Moreover, this 'failure of political Islam' has gradually sunken in among the Islamists themselves, through their own experiences in the political arena. 'The Islamists', writes Roy, 'have not established a true "Islamic state", and nor will they, due not only to the inaccuracy of their conceptual framework, but also to the way their own political praxis and experiences have changed their perception of politics'.¹² Note that this argument is not necessarily undermined by the emergence of strong Islamist armed groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. According to Roy, their project, as far as they seek to establish an Islamic State, where religion dominates over politics, will inevitably fail in the end, as it failed for their predecessors. The final, Islamic solution is a myth, because Islam does not provide definite answers to most of the issues that are important to Muslims today. Whenever Islamists become politically influential, they must therefore reinterpret the relationship between religion and politics. 'The Islamist myth', Roy writes, 'was that of the unification of the religious and the political; post-Islamism means that both spheres are autonomous, despite the wishes of the actors concerned (the fundamentalists and the secularists)'.¹³

Bayat takes the argument a few steps further as he claims that post-Islamism refers not only to these conditions but also to a project of acting on these conditions by merging Islamic discourse on duties, responsibilities and prohibitions with liberal notions of rights and freedoms.¹⁴ Post-Islamism, he claims, means a step forward for democratic politics.¹⁵ In the 'post-Islamist society' the role of religion in politics can continue to be debated, but that debate is preconditioned by secular constraints. Post-Islamism is a development towards acceptance of pluralism and democratic politics. It is both a condition and a project.¹⁶ It is from this perspective that Bayat sees the Arab Spring uprisings' calls for justice and democracy as representing a 'critique of Islamism from within and without', a manifestation of the 'post-Islamist society', which 'wants to transcend Islamist politics by emphasising people's rights rather than just their obligations'.¹⁷ For Bayat, the failure of Islamism seems to lead straight towards liberal democracy. 'Post-Islamism hopes to mix religiosity and rights, faith and freedom (with varied degrees), Islam and democracy. It seeks to establish an electoral democracy, a secular/civil state, while promoting a pious society'.¹⁸ Also, Roy seems to think that post-Islamism means that structural changes prepare the road for democratic development.¹⁹

A fuller review of post-Islamist arguments could elaborate on the details of these authors' claims about the post-Islamist era, and discuss the differences between the two.²⁰ In this article I wish instead to specifically draw attention to the problem they share, namely that the broad brush strokes cannot do justice to the differences and tensions that exist within the societies that have, according to these theorists, undergone large-scale post-Islamist shifts. Like the modernisation theory, which predicts democratic development on the basis of a society's economic performance,²¹ 'the coming of the Post-Islamist Society' seems to unfold quite independently of the views and actions of people living in these societies. Whatever the differences and grievances between the actors of the Arab Spring uprisings, these events were 'post-Islamist revolutions' according to Bayat.²² They demonstrated that

democratic movements could ‘push Islamism into the “post-Islamist” course, paving the way for a democratic change in which an inclusive Islam may play a significant role’.²³ Thus, complex political struggles on many different fronts are seen as a matter of the place of Islam in society and its relation to politics.²⁴ Actors who do not identify with the post-Islamist project as described by Bayat and who do not, hence, adjust to the new post-Islamist conditions, as defined by either Bayat or Roy, are treated as irrelevant. For example, the Salafist movement which seeks primarily to Islamise society and which has not, therefore, been very concerned with political Islam as conventionally understood, is, even after its success in the Egyptian parliamentary elections of 2011 and its widely reported rise in Tunisia, treated as a marginal phenomenon.²⁵ Whatever its ‘neofundamentalist’ ideology, it will be forced by the new conditions to follow the post-Islamist path and ‘become reluctant agents of democratisation’.²⁶ For Bayat, Salafism is a cause of concern, but not enough to treat it as more than an exception to the otherwise ‘post-Islamist’ character of the Arab Spring events.²⁷ For Roy, Salafism as an ideology is quite irrelevant, because Salafists as political actors are subject to the same constraints as everyone else in the political arena. ‘The Salafists know that without a parliamentary presence, they would lose their influence’.²⁸ As for the jihadist Salafists who reject democracy and political participation as meaningless to their project of societal transformation, Roy finds them irrelevant too. ‘The uprooted global jihadist is no longer a model for young activists and fails to find many takers when he seeks to enlist local militants for the global cause’.²⁹ More recent developments, such as the extraordinarily effective recruitment to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, cast serious doubt as to the validity of this statement, and indeed Roy’s more recent writings in fact suggest that the global jihadist is very much an ideal that young radical activists find attractive.³⁰ Moreover, the issue is not only a matter of misrepresenting a current development in the region; it is that the error is consistent with the theoretical perspective and therefore reveals an important weakness, namely that it systematically underestimates differences, interests and conflicts within ‘post-Islamist’ societies. Instead of dismissing global jihadism as a marginal contradiction in the larger post-Islamist development, this could have been an occasion for reflecting critically on the assumptions of the theory.

The limitations of the post-Islamism lens also appear in Bayat’s treatment of what he calls ‘post-Islamist feminism’. Characteristic of that trend, in his view, is the articulation of a ‘blend of piety and choice, religiosity and rights’. Post-Islamist feminists see ‘Islam in its totality as a system that could accommodate women’s rights only if it [is] seen through the feminist lens’.³¹ Cases of women’s activism that fall outside the Western-feminism-applied-in-the-Muslim-context are irrelevant from this perspective. Equally problematic is the treatment of the revolutionary youth movement. Both Bayat and Roy see the post-Arab Spring conflicts as concerning issues about religion’s role in politics, without considering other important stakes in the revolts such as the concerns of the young revolutionaries that started the uprisings. According to Roy, ‘the main issue’ for post-Arab Spring politics ‘will be to redefine the role of Islam in politics’.³² Bayat, for his part, suggests that in the ‘post-revolution’ setting young activists will have little (if any) role to play; ‘it is political society and the state that rule the day’.³³ Both Bayat and Roy thereby underestimate the challenges posed by the differences within these societies that, once the dictators had fallen, caused deep conflicts over what a post-Islamist society should be like.

2. The fields of post-Islamist struggles

One way of approaching these conflicts is to think of social actors as invested in different *social fields*, to use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology.³⁴ A social field consists of groups of individuals who share a certain commonsense understanding of everyday interactions and of social practices that confirm such understandings. Each field has its own internal stakes and sense of legitimacy. Moreover, what goes on internally in a field has direct relevance for its relationship to the outside world. In order to defend a privileged position in the political arena or the public sphere more generally, or, alternatively, to challenge marginalisation, actors must insist on their fields' specific values and norms. Business leaders insist that their entrepreneurial spirit is what makes the society thrive; priests capitalise on their sense of morality or fear of God; and researchers build their public recognition on the idea of objectivity. It is my intention to elaborate, around the concepts of *field*, *investment* and *capital*, a perspective fruitful for understanding the struggles of Egypt and Tunisia after the Arab Spring. According to Bourdieu, social fields are constructed around shared understandings and practices that are fashioned over time by the members of the field, who at the same time create and reproduce the norms and symbols of the field and make them their own. Plato, according to a popular story, hung a sign over the door to his school that read, 'Let no one enter who is not a geometer'. Likewise, I mean to suggest that although s/he needs no actual physical sign (nor an actual physical door), a Salafist activist knows the difference between a legitimate participant in her/his field and an intruder. The internal norms of the field create a sense of belonging, and not belonging, in the field. They also function so as to uphold a sense of hierarchy within the field: 'one joins the ranks of sheikhs', says a young Salafist jihadist, 'through a personal path of studying and deepening of religious knowledge'.³⁵ The norms serve to distance one's own field from other fields by emphasising and defending its distinct values: 'I am not interested in taking over power. This is the big difference between the others in the political scene and us. Our target is the people, not the state'.³⁶

The point of studying engagement in social fields from this perspective is to recognise that there are multiple forms of symbolic resources available to actors who wish to be recognised by others. Such symbolic resources – forms of capital, in Bourdieu's terms – might vary from education and vocabulary to physical appearance and to social networks, political connections and international recognition. The question is how members of a specific field utilise a field-specific form of capital in order to claim positions in the public sphere and how the public sphere is shaped by such struggles in ways that condition subsequent social and political action.³⁷

Actors that are excluded or marginalised in some social arenas might seek social recognition by investing in a field whose logic of recognition (form of capital) is different from, even reversed to, the fields in which they face domination or exclusion. Various subcultures can be described this way; for example, in Tunisia and Egypt the Salafist movement has attracted large portions of its members from the disenfranchised youth. Excluded from, or marginalised in, the labour market, and stigmatised on the basis of their background (poorer parts of the cities, or small towns in the countryside, and often lower levels of education), they might be drawn into social fields where the sources of recognition are more accessible to them. Similarly, women's groups in the Arab World may often not seek to construct their claims within a Western discourse of feminism, but instead within a more familiar cultural

framework that is also, at the same time, the relevant environment they act upon to change. The revolutionary youth groups in both Tunisia and Egypt, furthermore, seek to capitalise on their sense of embodying the revolutions. These are ways that actors struggle within their respective fields, and how the fields struggle in the wider public sphere.

Field analyses

On the remaining pages I explore three fields that have not been accurately represented by post-Islamist theory, and which have been important social and political arenas during and after the Arab Spring. I draw on previous research, analyses of the actors' own publications, news reports and videos posted online.³⁸ Together these fields demonstrate how the limits of the current understanding of post-Islamist developments can be overcome by recognising that the content of post-Islamism depends on the relative strengths of different fields.

More specifically, *the Islamic feminist field* demonstrates how Bayat, in particular, does not fully recognise how social change depends on actors that invest politically and socially in collective actions. According to Bayat, the 'post-Islamist feminists' he has studied were 'feminists first and foremost who utilised Islamic discourse to push for gender equality within the constraints of the Islamic Republic'.³⁹ Bayat, hence, distinguishes between Muslim activists who just 'happen to be women' and those real feminists who just 'happen to be' Muslims and find themselves in an Islamic context that forces them to instrumentally 'utilise' Islamic discourse to advance women's interests. His analysis thus favours a secular rationality operating 'within constraints' posed by an Islamic environment. One may ask, as does Egyptian scholar Rabab El-Mahdi,⁴⁰ why feminism must condition religiosity, why one of them must be 'first' and the other 'second'. Bayat's concept of post-Islamist feminism is too narrowly defined, and too focused on content, to be helpful for understanding the potential of these groups in actually advancing women's rights. According to Bayat, post-Islamist feminists were 'different from Islamist women activists such as the Egyptian Heba Rauf, who were primarily Islamist but happened to be women and raised women's issues'.⁴¹ But the critical question is not whether one is a woman first and Muslim second, or vice versa. The question is how actors may open up spaces for critical deliberation within the relevant cultural arenas. The field-theoretical analysis shows that activists like Heba Rauf have been misrepresented.

The Salafist-jihadist field shows that Salafism, contrary to the arguments of both Bayat and Roy, is not a marginal phenomenon but a powerful social movement. The strength of Salafism lies neither in its political programme nor its theology. Instead, Salafism offers a social arena that functions as a world reversed, a 'subaltern counterpublic', to use Nancy Fraser's term,⁴² in which the excluded form their own sense of legitimacy and social recognition. The assumption that Salafists' role in post-revolution societies depends on how successfully they transform into ordinary politicians actually misses precisely what makes Salafist activism meaningful in the first place.

Finally, *the revolutionary youth field* demonstrates far more political relevance than acknowledged by the post-Islamist thesis. The Arab Spring, as is well known, started as a youth movement uprising. However, this movement did not simply fade away or let the political elites take over from there. Instead, the revolutionary youths were a potential force outside of political power struggles, constructing a critical-rational public sphere that could remain independent of these and still mediate popular demands for transparency and citizen

rights. Without acknowledging this field's significance it is difficult to understand the actions taken by the post-Islamist governments of Egypt and Tunisia after the Arab Spring. It would also be difficult to make a plausible account of the coup against the Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi. The rise and collapse of the revolutionary youth field is indeed an important part of the Egyptian tragedy as well as the more hopeful Tunisian story.

3. Competing fields in the public spheres of post-Arab Spring societies

The Islamic feminist field: Islam as the way towards gender equality

The advancement of women's rights in Egypt has not followed a singular path (away from Islamism towards a 'post-Islamist feminism', in Bayat's sense, that merges Islam with liberalism). On the contrary, the advancement of women's rights has been driven by a plurality of actors, situated in different fields, all involved in their own struggles. The Islamic feminist field is thus situated in a network of different groups that promote gender equality from the various perspectives and opportunity structures. As El-Mahdi's ethnographic work has shown, the different groups have remained divided on issues related to organisation (professional Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) vs. political activism) and ideology (liberal vs. 'traditional', 'Egyptian' or 'Islamic' conceptions of women empowerment). In 2005, the short-lived project Women for Democracy sought to bridge differences among several women's groups. It failed partly because of different views of how to best promote the cause. Another issue was the previous investments made by the different participants in different social, political and professional fields that were in some ways rival. As one participant told El-Mahdi, participants seemed often 'more concerned with proving each other wrong than in thinking of what we should do next'.⁴³ At meetings of Women for Democracy, El-Mahdi observed that,

even though the participants were cordial to each other, at the first sign of disagreement the discussion turned sour, with insinuations of being 'reactionary' and 'conservative' (on the part of the secularists against the Islamists); being 'Westernized' (the Islamists' accusation against the seculars); 'working with the state' and being 'donor-driven' (an accusation of the activists against the NGO professionals); or 'being too radical with no sense of reality' (the NGO professionals against the activists).⁴⁴

In other words, the different actors brought with them different sources of recognition ('indigenity', 'tradition', or being conversant with Western-feminist discourse) and the competition between them was not only about the right form of 'feminism'; at stake was also the statuses of the participants. In Women for Democracy, secular women invested in the symbolic capital of professional NGOs were competitors over foreign funding. In addition, they now battled over leadership with new rivals, namely non-professional political activists, some of which were 'Islamists'.

Heba Raouf, who Bayat placed outside 'post-Islamist feminism', was one of the potential leaders of Women for Democracy. In her view, the main problem was that the group relied too much on a Western-feminist discourse and imported 'an agenda that is not ours'.⁴⁵ From the Islamic feminist field's perspective, women need not accept western feminism's view of 'religion as a male-made set of oppressive ideas, especially when it comes to women', but can instead 'work on issues like social equality and social justice in relation to the existing social bonds'. This means to work within the Islamic resurgence.⁴⁶ Islam should not be seen as an obstacle, but, on the contrary, the path for gender equality in Egypt.⁴⁷ This does not

mean that Islam comes 'first' and women's liberation 'second'. Neither Islam nor women's liberation is instrumental to the other. Rather, Islam is (potentially) liberating and, at the same time, while an 'Islamic feminism' would certainly confront 'the male, or to be more correct, the patriarchal interpretation of [religion]', it would also mean a greater recognition of women as 'guardians of the culture'.⁴⁸ Because the Islamic feminist field equates Islam with gender equality, it confuses and frustrates those feminists who work for gender equality *against* Islam. Countering accusations of conservatism or backwardness, this field rejects the idea of women as passive observers of religious piety, arguing that a true Islamic revival among women would not mean the domestication of women, but on the contrary 'a bigger participation in social life for the sake of social change toward Islam'.⁴⁹ Challenging the contingent male domination in the religious sphere means to challenge women's tendencies to disengage from debates on Islamic themes.

Viewed through the lens of field theory, hence, 'Islamic feminist capital' depends on the effective guarding and advancing of a certain position within a wider field of women's groups. At the same time women's activism may correct the 'errors' of 'patriarchal interpretations' and promote a self-serving, liberating counter-interpretation, one from which women may benefit and in which Islamic feminists may also be personally invested. These are two fronts of the struggle of Islamic feminists. Moreover, the two fronts seem connected, since the relative positions of 'Islamic' and 'Secular' feminism, as far as the former is perceived as less confrontational ('truer to tradition') than the latter, affects the relative positions between 'feminist' and 'patriarchal' interpretations of religious traditions too.

The Salafist-jihadi field: a subaltern counterpublic

Salafi groups in both Tunisia and Egypt emerged as significant social and political actors after the Arab Spring. Salafists have demanded a say in constitutional debates, as well as the wider debates over the place of religion and the character of society. A number of case studies classify Salafi groups in three categories:⁵⁰ 'scientific' or scripturalist Salafis who tend to reject involvement in politics as impious and pointless; the 'political Salafists' who participate in elections and seek support for a fundamentalist political agenda, exemplified by the Egyptian Nour party and Tunisia's Reform Front (*Jebah al-Islah*); and, finally, the Jihadist Salafis who see themselves as part of a global jihad, and which are generally more popular among youths.⁵¹ Salafisms range from activists joining al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (*Daesh*) to the Cairo-based 'Salafyo Costa' group ('Costa's Salafis') which communicates through Facebook and took the name from their favourite multinational coffee shop chain, that symbolises how their lifestyle contradicts the stereotypes figuring in the media.⁵²

The jihadist Salafists, which are the most fast-growing group of Salafists in Tunisia, do not necessarily define *jihad* in terms of armed struggle but more often in terms of internal striving.⁵³ This group, which consists largely of disenfranchised youth, rejects institutional politics of liberal democracy because of its inability to deliver the material and ethical goods they demand. It reacts against 'Westernisation', the modernisation project which they were largely left out of. As Merone and Cavatorta write, 'These young men, as they are overwhelmingly men, are generally poorly educated, come from lower classes and they have very rarely opportunities to enter the job market because they lack the necessary skills to compete'.⁵⁴

Salafists reverse the logic of dominant fields from which they are already excluded (middle-class, educated in French schools (in the Tunisian case) or appropriating American youth culture (especially in the Egyptian case), competing for jobs in the advanced service sector).

They create a field in which being 'westernised' has no currency at all. The Salafist-jihadist field is, in fact, not only anti-western, but also challenges other structures of domination by seeking to counter them in practice; these groups mobilise not only around a shared belief and a shared religious language, but also around ideals that are contrary to those they perceive to operate in institutional politics – hierarchy, exclusion, corruption.⁵⁵ Salafist activism 'provides a political dimension that allows the *mouhammishin* [i.e. the disenfranchised] to question the way in which the new Tunisian political authority is being constructed because, just as the previous one, it marginalises them and becomes therefore unjust'.⁵⁶ The Salafist-jihadist field functions as a 'subaltern counterpublic',⁵⁷ in the sense that it offers marginalised citizens a space, a social field, where to construct their own norms for inclusion, largely in opposition to the practices of the larger society. This allows the field to have a dual character of a space for 'withdrawal and regroupment' and, on the other hand, a base for engaging with the wider public sphere.⁵⁸

In a longer published interview by Fabio Merone⁵⁹ a young leader of the Salafist group Ansar al-Sharia tells the story of how, until the fall of the Ben Ali regime, the young Salafists had to hide their identity, 'not only out of fear of the police but also out of fear of people's judgment'. After the revolution they 'unveiled' their identity – 'We were Salafis'. They began to dress 'in an Afghan manner' and consciously signalled their support for al-Qaeda. The identity on which solidarity is based – the Salafi (meaning follower of the 'pious predecessors', *as-Salaf as-Saleh*) – goes beyond religious belief to the embodiment of values of inclusion and equality. 'We always do our preaching in the local dialect, far from the language of politicians. We are simple people and we address simple people in our sermons. ... During our sermons, people also had fun'. The Salafist-jihadist movement is constructed through oppositions, e.g. 'lightweight and decentralised', not 'a top-down organisation', not 'just another political party'. 'The goal is to reach Tunisian society, the society we live in'. By contrasting the pursuit of power to *dawa* (spreading God's message), the activist distances himself from elitist politics:

we insist on the fact that we are part of the people, which makes us the opposite of politicians. We are not, and nor do we want to be a detached elite. Furthermore, we do not have hierarchies. We have perfect equality in our movement. The simple person has the same right to express his opinion as the educated one. A young boy, even if he does not have the same experience as an elder, can still have a better idea when it comes to a specific issue. His age does not make a difference.⁶⁰

Salafists take pride in the movement's ability to include the otherwise excluded.⁶¹ The particular type of social recognition, or capital, that one might gain from 'following the forefathers' is opposed as much to the *political* capital of institutionalised parties as to the religious authority of senior scripturalist Salafists. In particular, it opposes their practices of exclusion and poses as an alternative an inclusive sphere of religious and political engagement for the disenfranchised youth. It offers them social recognition, solidarity and 'an adventure', by reversing the exclusionary norms of dominant groups. It also opposes ideals and practices associated with a Western-modernisation project that marginalises or excludes them. It thus constructs a social field through these oppositions, and, importantly, the values that are upheld through their practices are defended through sanctions – e.g. allegations of elitism – othering ('West', 'language of politicians', hierarchy), and symbols (dress code, beard, rituals). The legitimacy and the competitiveness of this social field in the public sphere are contingent

upon a successful defence of its values (inclusion, equality, piety), and the delegitimisation efforts directed at the other, competing fields.

The Revolutionary Youth field: the rise and fall of an independent public sphere

In the beginning of the Arab Spring, the youth movements that initiated the uprisings had the potential of creating a genuinely democratic force that could channel popular demands for transparency, rights and other public concerns. This potential was particularly clear in the case of the April 6 group, which early on demonstrated a self-reflective, critical stance in relation to the power struggles taking place. As the frustration and disillusion grew with exclusionary practices of the political elites, the youth movement became split. As some activists, most notably those associated with the Tamarod ('Rebel') group, allied themselves with the military against the Morsi government, it lost its identity as an independent pro-democratic force. In the end, the Tamarod movement contributed, along with many other factors, to the ending of the Arab Spring in Egypt. In Tunisia, the loud protests against Ennahda were more ambiguous; they may have helped to pressure the government not to include unpopular references to Islam in the constitution and may have forced Ennahda to show greater respect towards the opposition than did the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. At the same time, protestors, including Tunisia's Tamarod, threatened to use similar tactics to overthrow the elected government. The field illustrates the difficulties of maintaining a critical rational public sphere and keeping a distance from more particular interests of established elites for the sake of democracy.

Initially, youth movements such as April 6 in Egypt sought to defend the spirit of the revolution from the power struggles between the military and the main opposition group. April 6 mobilised protesters to be part of the uprisings and later continued to monitor the transition. While the larger Tahrir movement was divided over how to position itself towards the military council, and while the later Tamarod-initiated demonstrations that led to the ouster of President Morsi largely sided with the Army, the partial success of the April 6 movement, of initiating and defending the revolution, was consciously based on its non-partisan position. Continuously confronting the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), April 6 defended the elected parliament's legitimacy and protested against the announced candidacy of Omar Suleiman, former head of military intelligence, in the presidential election. One of April 6's leaders, Ahmad Maher, called Suleiman's candidacy an 'attempt to kill the revolution and halt it in its tracks'. This event demanded that they would 'return to Tahrir Square'.⁶² Some April 6 activists ran for parliament positions (two won seats), and some leaders of the movement publicly endorsed Morsi in the presidential election in order to defend the revolution against the candidate that they perceived to represent the interests of the old regime, Ahmed Shafik. But the general position was to support the political participation of Egyptian youth in principle, including in party politics, and to work pragmatically with various actors, while not lining up with any particular party or political leader. Demonstrating this conscious strategy of remaining independent, Ahmad Maher was against forming a political party based on April 6's platform, stating that 'it is not our mission' and 'we didn't finish our revolution and we must continue pressure to complete our mission ... to have a democratic country, freedom of speech, equality, social justice'.⁶³

The fall of the revolutionary youth field, which began with the later initiative of the Tamarod movement to collect 15 million signatures to call for early presidential elections, was similarly a call for defending the revolution. Originally stating its independence from

any political party, it soon became closely linked to the National Salvation Front, led by Mohamed ElBaradei. It also benefitted from cooperating with public figures that were political rivals of the Muslim Brotherhood, including billionaire Naguib Sawaris who offered free advertisement on his TV channel and daily newspaper *Al-Masry al-Youm*, and access to the offices of his party, the Free Egyptians. Being, as founder and spokesperson Mahmoud Badr says, 'part of the opposition', and even 'the grassroots force of the opposition groups'.⁶⁴ Tamarod's political role was clearly different, if also more ambiguous and less coherent, from that of April 6. Its position vis-à-vis the military was pragmatic. Leaders of the movement stated that the army's response to the protests 'crowned the movement',⁶⁵ and posed for photographers in front of the police forces present at the demonstrations.⁶⁶ It nevertheless subsequently criticised the constitutional declaration of interim President Adly Mansour as 'dictatorial' and a 'setback for the revolution' because it granted the president too much power.⁶⁷

Both April 6 and Tamarod emerged as important actors on the political scene by building their legitimacy on the image of the revolutionary youth, embodying the popular calls for political change. Tamarod, however, did not keep the critical distance from the particular interests of political parties and the army. This difference led to controversy within the broader field of the revolutionary youth, notably after representatives of both groups met with the interim government after Morsi's ouster to plan actions to affect international opinion. April 6 spokesperson Ahmed Maher tweeted: 'If we assume it's not a coup, and I tell people it's not a coup, when they screw us again like they did in 2011, what would I tell people?'.⁶⁸ Other youth activists held similar opinions, arguing that 'What happened on June 30 [the day of the coup] was a celebration of something that had been decided long beforehand, or it would never have been allowed to happen'.⁶⁹ The apparent conflicts within the revolutionary youth field deepened as activists of Tamarod justified the killing of Morsi supporters by the army (and armed collaborating civilians) while April 6 activists condemned them.

The capital of the revolutionary youth was based on independence and democracy for democracy's sake. When youth leaders began to ally themselves with particular political groups the field began to break down. In June 2013 Tunisia got its own Tamarod movement, determined to collect two million signatures to support a call for the dissolution of the National Constituent Assembly and the formation of a government of national unity. After the 'Jasmine Revolution', reports as well as research findings on youth participation in politics were largely about disillusionment and complaints about exclusion.⁷⁰ Tamarod's message responded to these widely shared feelings by demanding justice, democracy and effective measures to reduce poverty and social exclusion. Although some spokespersons did not hesitate to blend that message with complaints about an 'Islamisation' of society, Tunisia's Tamarod seemed to affirm the necessity of impartiality and defence of democracy. As for Egypt, the revolutionary youth field seems to have all but vanished. In an interview in August 2015, imprisoned leader of April 6 Ahmed Maher indicates that the field still exists, although it is significantly weaker.

Some groups that played a major role in the 25 January 2011 Revolution are coming together and they still do stand by the demands of that revolution, such as freedom, dignity and social justice. However, the past few years have caused changes, fissures and deep transformations in concepts and positions. I don't think that anyone who is calling for a religious state could join the revolutionary youth, nor could anyone who supports authoritarianism, military rule or who

dreams of a return of the oppressive Nasser regime join the revolutionary youth. The revolution was not launched for religious rule or authoritarian rule, and so there are a lot of deep divides that have emerged after all these events.⁷¹

As far as the prospect for a reemergence of a strong pro-democratic youth movement, what is hopeful in these lines is that the initial basis for the field, its original and unique form of capital – resting, in their eyes, on the values embedded in the revolution, ‘freedom, dignity and social justice’ – is still seen as the field’s condition of entry.

Conclusion

By treating the identity of ‘the post-Islamist society’ as an object of political struggle, this paper has offered an account of post-Islamism that centres on actors and fields. Practices of inclusion and exclusion have constituted social fields that impact on a society’s political and social development. In Tunisia and Egypt, such practices reveal the stakes of the conflicts that have posed important societal challenges after the Arab Spring. These challenges have been underestimated by proponents of the post-Islamism thesis, who do not see the full importance of groups and movements that do not fulfil the post-Islamist criteria. I have argued, by contrast, that the Islamic feminist field, the Salafist-jihadist field and the revolutionary youth field all take part in the shaping of the post-Islamist society.

The ways in which they do this can be fruitfully understood by complementing the post-Islamism perspective with field theory. The advantage of field theory is its capacity to bring to the fore the ways in which different forms of capital – different sources of motivation and social status – affect conflicts in heterogeneous societies. The degree to which an anticipated democratic society will turn out more inclusive towards the representation of women and women’s interests, in public discourse as well as in political institutions, will depend on the status of the different fields that promote gender equality. Without taking into account the fields in which these female activists act, and the relations of power of those fields, it is difficult to understand the specific form that ‘feminism’ takes in a given context and to assess the liberating potential of different movements and discourses. The Islamic feminist field may well turn out to possess precisely the kind of symbolic capital necessary to have a long-term social and political impact.

It is likewise a mistake to exclude Salafists from the definition of the post-Islamist project. The Salafist-jihadist field is constituted by practices of exclusion inside Tunisian and Egyptian societies. The tensions between this field and the secular/Westernised/middle-class/privileged fields will not go away thanks to the ‘coming of a post-Islamist society’. On the contrary, it is the often-narrow conception of what that society might be that reinforces the sense of exclusion that partly constitutes the fields of Salafism.

The post-Islamist perspective also does not grasp the full political relevance of the revolutionary youth movement, nor its democratic potential. The initial accomplishments of the revolutionary youth were clearly significant. One such accomplishment that deserves more acknowledgement is how it established a critical public sphere that was independent of the major political actors in the country. However, the field as such could maintain its particularity and force only to the extent that the values of the field were upheld by its members. Field theory turns our attention to the differences and conflicts that post-Islamist theorists tend to overlook, or dismiss as marginal phenomena. It helps us understand the stakes of different actors. Moreover, because each field is constituted by practices of inclusion and exclusion,

the tensions between different fields will not be overcome through the force of post-Islamisation. Instead, the democratic development and cohesion of post-Islamist societies depend instead on the societies' capacity to include contending fields in one cohesive public sphere, where their differences can be handled in peaceful deliberation.

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Notes

1. Bayat "Coming of a Post-Islamist Society"; Roy, *Globalised Islam*; Gómez García, "Post-Islamism"; Stein "Studying Islamism"; Chamkhi, "Neo-Islamism"; Cavatorta and Merone "Post-Islamism."
2. Lust, Soltan, and Wichmann, "After the Arab Spring"; Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition"; Bayat, "Arab Spring"; Roy, "Transformation of the Arab World."
3. Cavatorta and Merone "Post-Islamism."
4. Roy, "Transformation of the Arab World," 12.
5. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*; Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*.
6. See Bayat, "Women's Non-Movement," and Roy, "Transformation of the Arab World."
7. Gómez García, "Post-Islamism."
8. Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 4.
9. Bayat, "Coming of a Post-Islamist Society," 45; see also Bayat, *Post-Islamism*.
10. Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*.
11. Bayat, "Coming of a Post-Islamist Society," 45–46.
12. Roy, *Globalised Islam*, 61.
13. Ibid., 61.
14. Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 10–11.
15. Alfred Stepan has elaborated a similar, yet more theoretical, argument. Stepan argues that democratisation, in Tunisia in particular, is facilitated by 'twin tolerations'; the first being that of religious citizens towards the state, in particular toleration of democratic decision-making in which legitimacy derives from the self-governing people, not religion, and the second being that of the state towards religious citizens, which requires non-intervention from laws and officials in the practices of religious citizens, their expressions of views and values, their participation in politics and civil society, on equal terms – that is, their freedom of action which is to be restricted only with reference to the equal rights of other citizens. 'In a democracy,'

he writes, 'religion need not be "off the agenda", and indeed, to force it off would violate the second toleration'. Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition," 90.

16. Bayat, "Arab Spring and its Surprises."
17. Ibid., 592.
18. Ibid., 592–593.
19. See especially Roy, "Transformation of the Arab World."
20. There are important differences with regard to the imagined content of the post-Islamist condition. For example, where Roy makes his case in primarily negative terms and mainly seeks to predict what will *not* happen after the 'failure' of political Islam, Bayat believes that post-Islamism means a victory for liberal rights and disqualifies actors that are not liberal enough as irrelevant to the development of the post-Islamist society. See Roy, *Globalised Islam*; and Bayat, "Coming of a Post-Islamist Society."
21. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites."
22. Bayat, "Arab Spring."
23. Bayat, "Post-Islamist Revolutions."
24. Gómez García, "Post-Islamism."
25. Bayat, "Arab Spring," 593–594.
26. Roy, "Transformation of the Arab World," 8.
27. Bayat, "Arab Spring."
28. Roy, "Transformation of the Arab World," 12.
29. Ibid., 9.
30. See Roy, "What Is the Driving Force."
31. Bayat, "Women's Non-Movement," 165.
32. Roy, "Transformation of the Arab World," 16.
33. Bayat, "Arab Spring," 594–595.
34. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*; Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*.
35. Salafist activist quoted in Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia."
36. Ibid.
37. Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 98–99.
38. The sources are all in English, due to the author's limited knowledge of Arabic. All of the material was available online at the time of writing, which hopefully makes it possible to discuss alternative interpretations.
39. Bayat, "Women's Non-Movement," 165.
40. El-Mahdi, "Does Political Islam Impede," 395.
41. Bayat, "Women's Non-Movement," 165. In another analysis, Bayat dismisses Heba Raouf Ezzat's views, along with those of other 'Islamic feminists', as being anti-feminist. Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 157.
42. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."
43. El-Mahdi, "Does Political Islam Impede," 392.
44. Ibid., 391.
45. Ibid., 388.
46. Raouf Ezzat, "Rethinking Secularism ... Rethinking Feminism."
47. Qureshi and Raouf Ezzat, "Are Sharia Laws."
48. Raouf Ezzat, "Rethinking Secularism ... Rethinking Feminism."
49. Heba Raouf Ezzat quoted in Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 52
50. Marks, "Youth Politics"; Merone and Cavatorta, "Salafist Mouvance," 6; Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement."
51. Merone and Cavatorta, "Salafist Mouvance," 6.
52. Sami, "Salafism and Coffee."
53. Merone and Cavatorta, "Salafist Mouvance," 6.
54. Ibid., 7.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 7.
57. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."

58. Ibid., 68.
59. Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia."
60. Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia."
61. See Merone and Cavatorta, "Salafist Mouvance," 8.
62. Quoted in Cole, "Egypt's New Left," 502.
63. "Interview with Ahmed Maher."
64. Abdel-Baky, "Something Big."
65. "Tamarod: Army Response."
66. "Mohamed Abdelaziz."
67. "Egypt's Tamarod."
68. Kirkpatrick, "Egyptian Liberals."
69. Human rights activist Wael Abbas quoted in Van Langendonck, "In Egypt."
70. Honwana, "Youth and Revolution in Tunisia"; Collins, "Voices of a Revolution."
71. "In Translation: April 6's Ahmed Maher."

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