The Categorical Revolution: Democratic Uprising in the Middle East

IRFAN AHMAD

The protests over the past year across the “Middle East” are perhaps saying that the region first and foremost belongs to its people and that the categories of “oil-rich”, “oil-less” and “main route” are at best exciting materials for a historian’s archive. While unfolding this “categorical revolution”, this article explodes two key myths: (1) that of the terminology of the Middle East, and (2) Islam’s incompatibility with democracy.

Why ‘The Categorical Revolution’?

In the French revolution of 1789, less than 2% of the population participated (Kurzman 2004: viii; cf, Milani 2010: 26). In the Egyptian revolution of 2011, the percentage of population participating in the revolution was surely far greater. Symbolic of the recent convulsions in the Middle East (first Tunisia and later Libya), the Egyptian revolution is thus historic and momentous. Recently, a democratic storm has swept one Muslim country after another. Clearly, we do not know the outcome of these convulsions in different places – diverse as they are – because as phenomena they are far from over. Indeed, one might say that these momentous changes are mere beginnings, the future of which remain as much open as unpredictable. Furthermore, the future will depend not just on local, but more importantly, the global actors, in particular, the United States (us), Britain, France and the European Union which have their century-long geostrategic interests in the region.

This article is not precisely about the future of the Middle East. My attempt here is to understand the unfolding of the dramatic change in the region since Mohammad Bouazizi, a young street vendor of Tunisia, publicly committed suicide in front of the municipal office on 17 December 2010 to protest against the routine humiliation meted out by the police (Al-Jazeera 2011).

Can we give this dramatic change, set in motion by the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi, a name? I have chosen to call it “the categorical revolution”. Let me explain what I mean by this phrase.

I use “categorical” in a double sense. First, as an adjective of “category” by which I mean the conceptual category, the notions and tools with which we think, rather have been verily forced to think with. Intellectual categories are not formed overnight. Nor do they disappear over a fine weekend. In the case of the Middle East, many important categories have been dominant for over a century; at least they have been dominant since the second world war. I shall discuss these categories more fully later; let me quickly mention here one such hegemonic category; namely, Islam and democracy are by definition opposed to each other. The recent events in the Middle East have substantially destabilised, if not nullified, this conceptual category. They have uprooted several other established myths and lies, hitherto often packaged and paraded as truth.

Second, the recent events are also categorical in the sense that they are not conditional. They are “unqualified, direct, explicit” (Oxford English Dictionary). By this I mean the recent events are categorical enough to question the universal view – dominant on tv, internet and newspapers as well as in the syllabi of the universities across the globe – that Islam and democracy are antithetical: that Muslims cannot have democracy on their own; they badly need benign external promoters such as the US or European Union. Barack Obama’s reluctant and belated appropriation of the “Arab Spring” notwithstanding, it needs to be noted that it happened in spite of, and indeed, as a critique of the West in general and the us in particular. The recent events are also categorical in that they cry for a redefinition of democracy, a democracy that questions the universal language of “national interests”, and “geopolitics”. Against the ruthless pursuit of “national interest” and “geopolitics” – which is the supreme principle of global politics (Ahmad 2011) – the democratic uprising in the Muslim world perhaps gestures a different language of enacting politics – a politics of ethics and dignity.

In what follows, I interrogate two key myths the categorical revolution has nearly exploded. In the first section of this article, I examine the myth of the terminology of the Middle East that is used in the WEST for the Middle East. Many important categories have been dominant since the second world war. I shall discuss these categories more fully later; let me quickly mention here one such hegemonic category; namely, Islam and democracy are by definition opposed to each other. The recent events in the Middle East have substantially destabilised, if not nullified, this conceptual category. They have uprooted several other established myths and lies, hitherto often packaged and paraded as truth.

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Irfan Ahmad (Irfan.Ahmad@monash.edu) is with the School of Political and Social Inquiry Caulfield Campus, Monash University, Australia.
specific ways does the categorical revolution speak to the term “the Middle East”? In the second section, I discuss another key myth – Islam’s incompatibility with democracy. Contra the established wisdom, here I argue that far from being a benevolent patron to democracy in the Middle East, the West, in fact, consistently de-democratised the region. Clearly, this contention presupposes not merely the normative compatibility between Islam and democracy, but also the actual existence of democracy and then proceeds to ask how these democratic experiments were subverted. A key mechanism of this de-democratisation, championed, inter alia, by Fareed Zakaria (editor-at-large of Newsweek) has been the concerted efforts to promote constitutional liberalism, pre-sided over by a select elite subservient to the West, at the expense of political dem-cocracy. I discuss Zakaria at some length because he represents the mainstream western perspective and is considered important. In 1999, Esquire described him “the most influential foreign policy advis-er of his generation” and in 2010 Foreign Policy named him “one of the top 100 glo-bal thinkers”. In the third and final section, I cautiously predict if and to what extent the categorical revolution may inaugurate a new understanding of the the-ory as well as practice of democracy. Here I engage with Derrida’s notion of “democ-rcy to come”. Parenthetically, I also high-light the meaning of tahārīr –Taḥārīr Square being the symbol of the categorical revolu-tion – and its relationship with the role of intellectuals.

1 The Middle East – The Very Term
In the last 100 years or so, several catego ries have ruled the Middle East. One such important category has been the term Middle East itself. Anthropologically speak-ing, it is an etic, external (in contra-distinction to emic) term. People of the Middle East themselves did not coin this term. Even today there are not many in the Middle East who actually use it. Out-side too it does not have a global currency. For instance, Indians do not use the term Middle East; they usually call it West Asia. So, when I hear this term I often ask my-self: middle between which two points or locations? And yes, East of what? Clearly, it is a geographical designation which puts the West and Europe at the centre of the world. Historically, the term emerged in the late 19th century. Alfred Mahan, an American navy officer, invented the term Middle East and used it in his book The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1600-1783. Later on, Halford Mackinder, a liberal imperialist of Britain, invested this term with some popularity that subse-quently only increased and became sedi-mented (Khalidi 2003: 170).

Ever since its coinage, the western power elite (in the sense used by Mills 2000) has seldom used the term Middle East to proper-ly refer to its human population in its entirety with its diverse, rich, social-cul-tural textures. Rather the Middle East has often been used to mean an object “out there”. For the western power elite, it invariably has two interconnected referents. First, it refers to a land or area of multiple resources and strategic interests. This is probably best illustrated by Robert W Stookey’s description of the Middle East. A prominent member of the US foreign service (with postings in the Middle East and a doctorate in political science), in 1984, he published an edited book from Stanford University’s Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace. The books published from Hoover Institution (Stookey 1984: iv) were “concerned with the us involvement in world and regional poli-tics”. Stookey (1984: xii, italics added) began the book’s introduction as follows: “Considering the economic and strategic significance for our national interests, the Arabian peninsula is not well known to the general public”. And this is how, within the framework of the us national interest, he made the Middle East “known” to his American and European audience. Saudi Arabia, he noted, had the “possession of one-fourth of the non-communist world’s oil reserves”.

Given the logic of the cold war preva-lent at the time of the book’s publication, the word “non-communist” is clearly im-portant. A more crisp description is of-fered soon after the passage cited above. He described Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as “oil-rich” states. In contrast, he called the then two Yemens as “oil-less” (Stookey 1984: xvi, xviii, xix). It is evident how the Middle East made any sense to the West only in relation to whether it was “oil-rich” or “oil-less”.

Stookey’s description of the Middle East was in perfect consonance with the earlier imperial description, particularly by the Anglo-French alliance. Long before the advent of the language of oil-rich or oil-less Middle East, it was Egypt’s water and land, not her humanity, which rendered Egypt important to the European powers. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (marked by an international pompous party at which the chief guest was France’s empress, Eugenie) generated a fervent response from the literati of Victorian Britain. British writers called it “brilliant”; the canal epitomised “progress”. “Brilliant!” Fine. “Progress”! Ok. But for whom? Clear-ly, it was for the British population. Egypt’s people did not matter at all. In fact, they were not regarded as even human; they were mere beasts. Only 20 years earlier, the Suez Canal had been thrown open to the enhancement of Europe’s ruthless com-mercial greed, Florence Nightingale, who had briefly lived in Egypt in 1849, de-scribed Egyptians as “a race of lizards, scrambling over the broken monuments”.

William George Hamley (d 1893), a colonel in the Corps of Royal Engineers and a novelist to boot, spoke of the im-mense benefits flowing (to England and Europe) from the “piercing of Isthmus [of Suez]” (both cited in Haddad: 2005: 366, 385). That 1,20,000 Egyptian labourers (almost slaves) died during the canal’s construction over a period of 10 years (Ogen 2008: 527) was of no consequence. Ultimately, what mattered to the western power elite was that because of the Suez Canal, Egypt became a “main route” (Lewis 1995: 298) between Europe and Asia, particularly India. So, Egypt itself and all the humanity that inhabited it merely signified the canal as a bare route to India. Egypt mattered insofar as the Suez Canal provided the shortest sea route between western Europe and Asia, includ-ing the Far East and Australia; it reduced the distance (formerly crossed via Cape of Good Hope) between western Europe and Asia by more than 3,000 kilometres (Ogen 2008: 529). Not surprisingly, when Egyp-tian President Gamal Abdul Nasser, in 1956, nationalised the Suez Canal, the French press screamed that Nasser was a
new Hitler (Shepherd Jr 1956: 6). In British opinion too he was dubbed as “another Mussolini”, “another Hitler” and “a mad dog” (Hitchens and Rostow 1986: 102).

My point about the West’s conceptualisation of the Middle East as a land of multiple resources with geostrategic salience will become clearer if we look at Afghanistan. Technically, Afghanistan is not part of the Middle East. However, after 9/11, many university presses in the US included even books on Pakistan (not to mention Afghanistan) in their catalogues on the Middle East rather than South Asia. Ever since the 19th century, the West has often viewed Afghanistan as no more than a mass of land and thus dispossessed Afghanistan of, what to the West was, her only possession, her geostrategic significance. In itself it had barely any value; it was important to the extent that it became the fulcrum of what is known as the Great Game between the imperial Britain and the tsarist Russia to exercise control over Central Asia and India. Curzon, later to become India’s viceroy, exemplified such a geostrategic conceptualisation of Afghanistan:

Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia – to many these words breathe only a sense of utter remoteness, or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me, I confess they are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the domination of the world (cited in Rashid 2001: 145).

Once viewed as no more than an area of multiple resources with strategic significance, logically it follows that the Middle East must be maintained as “stable” to continually serve the national interests of different western powers. Political (in)stability was the second meaning, to the West, of the Middle East. The key tool in order to contain this political instability was the policy of recurring intervention and control. In the eyes of the West, the Middle East thus needed to be “managed”. It did not have any agency of its own – it was passive. Indeed, the masculine thinking of the West saw the Middle East as a passive bride crying for the attention of a western man. Recalling the impression of his first visit to the Middle East, Bernard Lewis, a noted scholar of the region based at Princeton University, told The Atlantic: “On my first landing I was filled with emotion, like an eastern bridegroom about to lift the veil of his ...unseen bride” (cited in Naim 1999:203). Such is the technology of masculine de-humanisation!

The people’s protests across the Middle East contest such a western masculine thinking. The democratic uprisings are perhaps the strongest voice crying out that the Middle East is first of all its people and that the categories of “oil-rich”, “oil-less” and “main route” are at best exciting materials for a historian’s archive.

2 The Myth of Islam’s Hostility to Democracy

Let me discuss another category dominant for decades in western academia. This category is the so-called incompatibility between Islam and democracy. Though much older, this debate got intensified in the wake of “Democracy’s Third Wave” ending in 1990. During this wave, which Huntington called a “Catholic wave”, 30 countries made the transition to democracy. In contrast, between 1980 and 1991, of the world’s 37 Muslim-majority countries only two were democratic (Huntington 1991: 28). By 2005, of the undemocratic regimes across the globe, Muslim countries constituted a total of 55% (Fattah: 2006:1). This absence of democracy in the “Muslim world” has generated many explanations. Following the third wave, Huntington wrote:

Huntington, indeed, averred that there was an inverse relationship: more Muslims = less democracy. Read this: “Once Muslims became a majority in Lebanon ... Lebanese democracy collapsed” (1991:22, 28). In his theorisation of democracy in America, Tocqueville accorded much significance to the role Christianity played in fashioning civil society. However, like Huntington, he too held that the Quránic emphasis on faith rather than splendid deeds made Islam fanatical and inhospitable to democracy. The first two are also hostile because “in Islam ... there is from the beginning interpenetration of ... religion and the state” (Lewis 1996: 54, 61). Bernard Lewis, in fact, remarked that, like Christianity, Islam is not a religion. “Islam from its inception”, he declared, “is a religion of power” (1986: 82). Curiously enough, Islam’s equation with power was advanced precisely at a moment when the Middle East stood disempowered at the hands of the West. The lack of democracy in the Middle East was attributed primarily to the
distinctiveness of Islam as a religion. If such an understanding is valid, how do we explain the democratic upsurge in the Middle East? Logically, it will mean that the people marching in the street and chanting for democracy, even sacrificing their lives for it – were not Muslims. That is, their struggle for democracy has no relations whatsoever to Islam. Indeed, this seems to be the case. Now that the Middle East has risen for democracy, most commentators have changed their explanatory paradigm.

The democratic storm in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen is now explained not in terms of Islam, but in terms of technology, Facebook, youth, the rate of unemployment, and so on and so forth. Newsweek (21 February, 2011; also see The Economist, 19-25 February 2011) ran a story titled “Facebook Freedom Fighter”. One commentator seemed to psychologise the issue in that he attributed the fall of the regime of Mubarak less to the massive demonstrations and more to the loss of the grandchild of the octogenarian President Mubarak. After the sudden death of “old man’s [Mubarak’s] great joy of life”, the 12 year-old Mohammad, Dickey (2011: 29) wrote in Newsweek, “the spark behind his eyes was gone”. It is clear how the standard of explanation has changed – the absence of democracy is because of Islam; the presence of democracy is in spite of Islam. This notion persists despite the fact that many protestors chanted, inter alia, “Allah o Akbar” (Keane 2011: 3) and their leaflets and badges carried verses from the Qur'an. Before I might get misunderstood, let me quickly add that I am not saying that religion was the leitmotif of the categorical revolution. Nor is it my point that the ideological framework of all actors in the revolution was uniform and singular: agnostics, Marxists, ex-Marxists, atheists as well as non-Muslims too took part in it.

My simple point is that contra the established myth that Islam is hostile to democracy many also participated in the revolution because they were inspired by Islam’s message of democracy and human dignity. Returning to the shift in the explanation for the absence and presence of democracy, one might say that it shows the double standards used by the western commentators. But the logic of double standard is not a sufficient explanation because what we see is not just the double but rather a series of multiple standards. Conceptual robbery is probably an appropriate term to construe such a sudden shift in the very terms of contrasting, even contradicting, explanations for the absence and presence of democracy.

The democratic storm swept across the Middle East not only because of the availability of Facebook, youth unrest, and so on; it was, in fact, a continuation of yearnings for democracy the history of which is much older than what most commentators would have us believe. People in the Middle East have been desiring democracy for long; it was the western power which continually subverted and derailed it. In light of the argument, I propose here the important question is not if Islam is compatible with democracy for it was a bogus question from the beginning (for details, see Ahmad 2011), but how the West de-democratised the Middle East. To pursue my argument, consider two examples.

Coup against Mosaddeq
First, the 1953 coup against the elected prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddeq. Mosaddeq enjoyed the approval of Iran’s parliament for his nationalisation programme. As we know, the US-UK alliance organised a coup against Mosaddeq and toppled him. Justifying Iran’s subversion of democracy, the then American ambassador to Iran said:

- Only a coup d’état can save the situation.
- Mosaddeq [Iran’s Premier] has so flattered the mob as the sources of his powers that he had, I fear, made it impossible for a successor to oust him by normal constitutional methods (cited in Abrahamian 2008: 120).

It is clear how Iran’s democracy was sacrificed to serve the national interests of the US-UK alliance. This is a classic illustration of de-democratisation I put for consideration to the readers. Another example is Bahrain’s de-democratisation from 1974 to 2002. Bahrain was a British protectorate. In 1971, Bahrain became independent. In 1973 the first elections were held and an elected parliament formed. That parliament challenged the unbridled authority of Al-Khalifa, the family which has ruled Bahrain since 1783. A major challenge to the Al-Khalifa family came in the form of parliament’s demand for the eviction of the US navy base from Bahrain. It is important to mention here that the American military presence in Bahrain dates to 1949. After the withdrawal of British forces, American presence sharply increased subsequently. Legally, Bahrain’s parliament was right in asking for the eviction of the US navy. But the ruling Al-Khalifa dissolved parliament in 1975. Since then there has been no democratic institution until 2002. Various vibrant institutions of civil society such as trade unions were all crushed. So, what mattered to the US was not the voice of the Bahraini people, but America’s national interest, which was to keep the American navy base in Bahrain. Again, this is a classic example of how the West de-democratised the Middle East (for details, see Ahmad 2011).

It is for this pursuit of national interest by the West that, intellectuals such as Fareed Zakaria recently began to advocate constitutional liberalism at the cost of political democracy. In 1997, he wrote an article in Foreign Affairs. In it, his main contention was that electoral democracy is not coterminous with democracy per se for constitutionalism – individual liberty, rights, checks against the abuse of power (by the state, church or society), and so on – are equally, rather more, important for democracy. In itself, this is a valid point and I tend to agree with him. However, Zakaria drew a different conclusion from it – a conclusion which at once legitimised the authoritarian status quo and stigmatised the oppositional forces in the Middle East. Below is the relevant passage:

In the Islamic world, from the Palestinian Authority to Iran to Pakistan, democratisation has led to an increasing role for theocratic politics, eroding long-standing traditions of secularism and tolerance. In many parts of that world, such as Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and some of the Gulf States, were elections to be held tomorrow, the resulting regimes would almost certainly be more illiberal than the ones now in place.

In the Foreign Affairs article, Zakaria’s focus was not the Middle East. However, his subsequent writings deal specifically with the Middle East. In the wake of 9/11, in Newsweek, he wrote a long article with a messianic title “How to Save the Arab World”. Outlining the US policy towards...
the Middle East, he wrote:

Oil, strategic ties, history will endure our ongoing involvement. We will continue to aid the Egyptian regime, we will continue to protect the Saudi monarchy... The question really is, should not we ask for something in return? By not pushing these regimes, the United States would be making a conscious decision to let things stay as they are – to once again opt for ‘stability’...We don’t seek democracy in the Middle East – at least not yet. We seek first...what I have called ‘constitutional liberalism’ – the rule of law, individual rights, private property...the separation of Church and state.

As the reader will recall, Zakaria’s variety of conceptualisation of the Middle East is precisely what I have been critiquing (see Section I). Consistent with his line of reasoning this is how he, in 2004, justified the above policy:

The Arab rulers of the Middle East are autocratic, corrupt and heavy-handed. But they are still more liberal, tolerant and pluralistic than those who would likely replace them (Zakaria 2004: 2).

The contradiction in Zakaria’s argument here comes to its full glare as it undermines his own earlier argument (made in 1997) that constitutionalism should not be sacrificed to the shallow logic of electoral democracy. It is too well-known to repeat that “the Arab rulers” like Mubarak repeatedly organised sham elections and showed little, if any, respect to individual liberty, rights or constitutionalism of any kind. In fact, the regime of Mubarak was highly skilled in the business of illegal detention, torture and killings of scores of opposition activists (Hafez 2003). Yet, liberals like Zakaria have no qualms in justifying the brutal, anti-democratic regimes (continually violating the constitutional provisions) such as Mubarak’s or Salih’s in Yemen on the lame pretext that “Islamists” and “fundamentalists” might take over the reign of power. Right in the thick of the Arab Spring or what I call the categorical revolution, the Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali (now a resident fellow at American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC) did exactly what Zakaria had prescribed much earlier. In The Wall Street Journal (21 February 2011), she warned of the takeover of Egypt by the “fundamentalist” Muslim brotherhood.

To summarise, my argument in this section has been that the notion of Islam’s incompatibility with democracy is both theoretically and historically flawed. Contrary to the all-pervasive myth, I showed how the West, on the contrary, de-democratised the Middle East from the early 1950s onwards. To this end, I offered the examples of West’s de-democratisation of Bahrain and Iran. I conclude this section by showing how the liberal position such as Fareed Zakaria’s that constitutionalism, not democracy, should be promoted in the Arab world is, in fact, a new mechanism to continue the old western policy of de-democratising the Middle East.

3 Conclusions: ‘Democracy to Come’ and Tahrir Square

When asked what he thought about the impact of the French revolution, Chairman Mao Zedong said that it was too early to say (Osborne 2006: 2). If it is too early for an event of 1789, it is definitely earlier for an event of 2011 which, in some ways, is still in the making. However, it is my hope that it is not the kind of democracy we have seen in the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century; from the US to Australia, democracy also has a dark history of subjugation and utter violence (Ahmad 2009: 233-36). The categorical revolution, I hope and hypothesise, contextually exemplifies some elements of what Jacques Derrida termed “democracy to come”.

Though present in earlier writings (e.g., 1994, 2004), his posthumous publication, Rouges: Two Essays on Reason, offers a fuller treatment of “democracy to come”. In preface to Rouges, Derrida cites a fable from La Fontaine (a 17th century French fabulist), Titled The Wolf and the Lamb, it shows how a blood-thirsty wolf, having decided in advance to kill an innocent lamb, enacts the justification to kill her. The wolf accuses the lamb of dirtying the water to which she protests saying she is 20 feet downstream from the wolf, and therefore, could in no way muddy the wolf’s water. In violent disregard to the lamb’s plea based on evidence, the wolf persists in his allegation: “you are muddying it”. More allegations follow; the poor lamb continues to present her defence and evidence. But to no avail! The wolf always wins. The passage ends: “The Wolf dragged and ate his mid-day snack/so trial and judgment stood”. This fable typifies the ideology and practice that the sovereign decides well before the legal procedures unfold; judgment is delivered prior to trial and irrespective of evidence. The lesson of the fable is succinctly contained in the opening lines: “The strong are always best at proving they are right/witness the case we are now going to cite” (2005: x).

Derrida takes the figures of wolf and lamb to institute a deconstruction of the contemporary and past forms of democracy. The key to his “militant and interminable critique” is the notion of “democracy to come”, which at one place in the otherwise dense text he defines as a protest “against all naïveté and every political ideology and practice that the sovereign facto democracy, what remains inadequate to the democratic demand...” (ibid: 86). One such inadequacy he identifies is how democracy continues to be hostage to the violent logic of nation and its self-fulfilling interests. He, thus, issues a plea for installing a democratic global order of democracy for the existing international arrangements remain so distant from his conceptualisation of “democracy to come”. Describing the binding and enforceable power of the Security Council as “monstrosity”, Derrida observes:

To put it in the most cut and dried terms, I would say that the fate of the democracy to come, in relation to world order, depends on what will become of this strange and supposedly all-powerful institution called the Security Council (2005: 98).

Returning to Derrida’s fable, the democratic storm in the Middle East shows one how to gallantly confront the wolf (the sovereign) and secure dignity and justice. By enacting his individual sacrificial death, Mohammad Bouazizi, it seems, succeeded in lighting the hopes and aspiration of millions for securing the collective life of
 justice itself. Though anchored in the nation state spaces, voices like Bouazizi’s and scores of those who followed him in other modes of resistance across the Middle East were not, as Keane (2011: 5) fittingly notes, fired by the credo of nationalistic gusto. They are probably vital infrastructure to inaugurate a global order of justice and dignity. They exemplify a promise and its renewability which is basic to “democracy to come”.

Before I conclude, let me say a word about the meaning of Taḥrīr square, the centre of the democratic uprising in Cairo. Taḥrīr etymologically means liberation, freedom and deliverance. In Arabic and Urdu, taḥrīr also means writing and the written product – letter, note, message, dispatch and document (Al-Mawrid Modern English-Arabic Dictionary 1997: 285-286). The purpose of writing is thus to liberate: not just personally, but also collectively; not nationally, but humanly. The aim of writings by the scholars, intellectuals, not to speak of most pundits in the mainstream media – both in the so-called West and the East – seems to enslave rather than liberate our minds. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the prevalence and power of categories that dominate the media and the consciousness thereby enforced on us. The Middle East, Islam’s incompatibility with democracy, constitutional separation but not democracy, and the demonisation of the Muslim brotherhood are examples of such categories. Scholars and public intellectuals whose ideas this article has critiqued are engaged in producing and circulating these categories.

The democratic storm in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and elsewhere seem to dethrone the categories and language of thoughts dominant for over half a century. This is why I call the democratic storm in the Middle East “the categorical revolution”.9

Notes
2 In his review of George W Bush’s autobiography, Decision Points, Alexander Downer (2011: 49), the Australian foreign minister, went to the extent of suggesting that the Arab Spring was indeed the “message” of Bush’s “freedom agenda”.
4 On carbon, climate and politics, see Mitchell’s (2009) fine and novel analysis.
5 I owe this information to Ravi Arvind Palat, State University of New York at Binghamton, who mentioned this in an exchange (on list serve H-ASIA, dated 26 August 2009; the author subscribes to this list) on “Is Afghanistan Part of S Asia? Academic Boundaries and Geographical Regions”. Also available at http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/ logbrowse.pl?tx=xvlist=hh-asia_month=0908 &week=dkmph5=sokijty110gzz23mpnNO&ku ser=rwp=Accessed 10 July 2011.
6 These badges are in author’s possession; I thank Linda Herrera (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) for gifting them to me.
7 Given that Islam has no church, is not Zakaria’s call to separate church and state in the Middle East not only eurocentric but also absurd?

References
Stookesy, Robert W (1984): “Introduction” in Robert W Stookesy (ed.), Colonialism, Capitalism, and Scores of those who followed him in other modes of resistance across the Middle East were not, as Keane (2011: 5) fittingly notes, fired by the credo of nationalistic gusto. They are probably vital infrastructure to inaugurate a global order of justice and dignity. They exemplify a promise and its renewability which is basic to “democracy to come”.

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