



**MEC SEMINAR**  
TRINITY TERM 2019

*Rethinking Democratization  
in the Wake of the Arab Spring*



Image credit: [MWC news](#)

**Tuesday, 30 April at 5pm**

Investcorp Auditorium, St Antony's College

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Developments in the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring underscore the fact that the legacies of authoritarian rule are difficult to unravel. With the lone exception of Tunisia, democratization in the region has stalled, and in the view of many observers, the “Arab Spring” has morphed into an “Arab Winter”. Yet this portrait of the Arab world risks flattening out and homogenizing a more complex reality. I propose that democratization can be understood as a multivalent process extending beyond the domain of formal politics to encompass changes at the level of society, culture and the individual psyche. This enables us to discern trajectories of change that studies focused solely on macro-level structures and relations of power tend to miss. In particular, we become alert to numerous instances of social experimentation occurring now, in real time, in which a diverse mix of state and non-state actors are working to strengthen “civic” or “humanist” norms and values under existing institutional constraints. Under the radar of the daily news cycle, Arab citizens engaged in the “art of the possible” are quietly transforming public habits of mind and behavior and sowing the seeds for wider culture-shifts in society at large. In so doing, they demonstrate that the mobilization of hope and resilience can alter the region’s future.



**ALL WELCOME**

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