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DEMOCRACY WITHOUT DEMOCRATS?

The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World

Edited by

Ghassan Salamé

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Introduction: Where are the Democrats?

GHASSAN SALAMÉ

With the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the USSR and the declining appeal of left-wing ideas in the past few years, the hopes of a further expansion of representative democracy have, without any doubt, increased. Western countries have witnessed not only the collapse of a strategic counterweight to their influence in the world, but also the undisputed failure of a rival model of voluntary and authoritarian modernization which in the recent past has inspired, in variable measure, many a Third World experiment in state building. A new wave of universalism has filled the void: if democratization was feasible in Eastern Europe it might also take root in other regions. The ideological *caesura* demarcated by the Cold War is no longer a *summa divisio* and societies which have already borrowed the European model of the modern state might be expected to embrace democracy unhampered by the political alignments of superpowers or leftist condemnations of 'bourgeois' political practice. Representative democracy has quite suddenly become a kind of 'common good of humanity' or, at least, a mode of government widely considered as normatively superior.

Contemporary events in the Arab-Islamic region have meanwhile reinforced a contrary but widespread idea according to which that part of the world has been too slow in adjusting to this trend, somewhat resistant to a rapid democratization process. While Southern Europe and, later, large parts of Eastern Europe and Latin America were increasingly adopting forms of democratic government, the region stretching 'from Tehran to Marrakesh' has witnessed the uninterrupted rule of authoritarian leaders. While the limits to experimentation with representative democracy are tested and becoming obvious in most newly democratic countries, the islamic region in general and the Arab world in particular has not, it seems, even had the opportunity to experience this process. Elected governments have been toppled (Sudan), elections brutally stopped (Algeria), and when an authoritarian regime has been threatened, the fear of utter chaos (Somalia), of partition (Iraq) or of civil war (almost everywhere else) has been too common to be brushed aside.

The idea of an Arab and/or Islamic 'exceptionalism' has thus re-emerged among both western proponents of universal democracy and established orientalists, and this in turn has encouraged a great many local apologists of 'cultural authenticity' in their rejection of western models of government. Illusions con-

cerning the rapid fall of some regimes have been reinforced by fears triggered by the undemocratic nature of most opposition groups as well as by the revival of clichés about deeply rooted cultural obstacles to democratization in this part of the world. Calls for democracy have remained too muted, too superficial, too dispersed to convince any observer that a push towards political participation is really sought in these societies.

It is precisely this presumed 'exceptionalism' that this book intends to question. Drawing upon a large number of national cases, the authors have engaged in a discussion of social change, of institutional evolution and of the prevailing political discourse. In doing so they have produced a complex picture. They do not refute exceptionalism out of hand: its existence as much as its causes are widely discussed (see in particular the chapters by Leca and Waterbury). Beneath the surface of continuity, societies have changed greatly during the past two or three decades and while leaders may remain in power, the nature of their power has been altered by incessant adjustments both to domestic, regional and international constraints. When accepted as a fact, the Arab/Islamic exception still has to be explained, and the reasons for its existence may not be the ones which are most frequently suggested: (in religion, as suggested by many), in culture, in a specific combination of socio-historical factors (Sharabi 1988) or in the permanence of intractable conflicts (and the ensuing militarization). Emerging from the discussion in this book is a clear idea that forms of political participation are there, though there are no compelling unifying factors triggering a unilateral political evolution towards democracy. More importantly, while calls for democratization may indeed be muted, and while the political discourse dealing with democratization may be only partly convincing, forms of political opening are increasingly viewed by the leaders themselves, if not by the society, as a precious instrument through which a rapid deterioration of law and order, if not of the collapse of the whole state apparatus, might be avoided or at least delayed.

'Pacts' on limited forms of political participation are in these situations negotiated between the ruling group and significant sectors of the civil society. O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986) have already suggested that such pacts could prove to be crucial to the survival not only of nascent experimentations with democracy but also of the state itself and have since been followed by many others, most notably Przeworski (1988; 1991). Where the Middle East is concerned, the idea, though alluded to by Lisa Anderson, writing on Tunisia, and Rémy Leveau on the Maghreb, needed further discussion. In some countries this 'pact' has been rather explicit as a para-constitutional *mithaq* (Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, Lebanon, Tunisia), while elsewhere it is implicit (Morocco) though in all pacts, the informal part (as on the autonomy of the armed forces during the transitional phase, or the political impunity of royal families) is often crucial. The absence of such an understanding has sometimes proven fatal to a new experiment: the Algerian case is there to demonstrate that the electoral ... reversible when viewed as irremediably detrimental to some

significant social or political factor such as the armed forces. If pacts have proved to be useful for a gradual, non-aggressive political opening, they are, of course, no guarantee for the success of the experimentation.

In this sense, democracy could be judged less by the attachment to its principles by some actor or the other, than by its common use as a means to avoid civil war or institutional chaos. Thus, forms of political participation are being sought by regimes which have come to believe that their old-style authoritarianism may be difficult to maintain or is becoming counterproductive. Others have arrived at the same conclusion because of their inability to adopt an IMF-inspired austerity programme without help from representative sectors of civil society. Still others have concluded that this is, after all, the only way to make a segmented society live together. Those who have engaged in the process may well be intolerant, repressive, dictatorial. The programme of some opposition groups may well be simply to replace an existing authoritarianism by one of their own. In all such cases, forms of democracy are defined and judged less by the identity of those who made them happen than by their efficacy in phases of transition. Democrats may not exist at all, or they may not exist in great numbers. Yet democracy can still be sought as an instrument of civil peace and hopefully, gradually, inadvertently, produce its own defenders.

Islamism and democracy

This is all the more true in the present situation in the region where old-type authoritarianisms are facing opposition groups gathered around a religious banner. Culturalists (those who think that a specific culture and/or religion could in itself be an obstacle to experimentation with democracy) generally concentrate their 'exceptionalist' views on Islam which they think of as organically different from all other religions. Since the Prophet revealed a religion and founded a state at the same time, his successors are unable to isolate these two elements without betraying his message. This view has of course its own weakness: a democrat, at least in the tradition opened up by the French revolution, can hardly accept a de-universalization of democracy without questioning the very essence of human rights and citizenship. He might be able to adapt his democratic expectations to the evolution of different societies at different tempos, admitting that access to democracy could not be achieved at the same time everywhere, but he could not accept a geographical, human or allegedly transcendental limit to the extension of democratic values. (Hence western governments' negative reaction, during the 1993 Vienna UN conference on Human Rights to calls for 'regional' charters of human rights: non-universally acceptable human rights simply cease to be 'human'). On the other hand, a Muslim would have difficulty in accepting that his religion legitimizes nothing but authoritarianism, even if he admits that Islam has in effect been taken as an obligatory point of reference by innumerable non-democratic regimes and par-

ties throughout history. Someone who is both a good Muslim and a good democrat is not an aberration.

Culturalists may be on a more solid ground on other points which are susceptible of historical explanation. The first is that in western thinking, as Norberto Bobbio among others has remarked, dictatorship is viewed as a temporary and exceptional phenomenon, even in the face of historical evidence that is, to say the least, ambiguous. In the Roman tradition, the dictator was the magistrate to whom exceptional powers were legally entrusted, as a temporary measure, to deal with a foreign invasion or sedition; dictatorship was never taken to be a normal form of political organization. This could not be as clearly induced from islamic thought, in which, as Ridwan As-Sayyid, Charles Butterworth and Abdallah Laroui have demonstrated, authoritarian power is generally assumed to be the norm and democracy the exception, supposing that democracy is actually envisaged as a possible form of government, which is not the case for most authors of the islamic tradition (Salamé 1987a). Taking a trans-historical view, traditional islamic thought thus appears more realistic than its western counterpart, in that autocratic and more generally non-democratic regimes have been more numerous and more durable in world history, from China to Latin America, not forgetting Europe, and from classical antiquity to our own days. One needs to remember that authoritarian regimes, of various persuasions, have been the norm in world history and democracy has been and remains exceptional. Hence the basic intellectual effort should be to explain why democracy has flowered in certain countries at certain times rather than, as is usually the case, to try and discover the reason for its absence from most countries most of the time.

In the islamic tradition, more specifically, the opposition between order and chaos, state authority and civil war is stated vividly and continuously, as if there could not be an interstice between these two extremes. Who does not recall Ibn Taymiyyah's preference for a tyrant for a year rather than a single night without a ruler? What internal fragility in islamic societies has kept its thinkers on the alert in this way, triggering a continuous confusion between an understandable need for public authority and the mere surrender to authoritarianism? The answers given by students of islamic thought differ: some have noted an obsession with keeping the *umma* united, at any price; others insist on the confusion between political opposition and religious secession, itself triggered by the ambivalent nature of leadership in the caliphate; still others oppose islamic teachings to dynastic realities, or expose the wide Sassanian and Byzantine influences on the definition of islamic power during its formative years. Whatever the answer might be, the question remains: supposing that the sediment deposited by a long tradition really is such, what is the actual verifiable effect of that tradition on political behaviour today? Is written tradition being given a contemporary relevance which it does not normally have and for what purpose? Are we not exaggerating the impact of this tradition only because it is more familiar and in many ways more accessible to us than the actual evolution

of Muslim societies? Are we not taking at face value the incantation of 'the Fathers of the islamic tradition' by today's islamists? What is the real political efficiency of that tradition?

To these questions different answers have been proposed; the idea that tradition is being reinvented remains the most convincing. But reinventing tradition is a project implemented by contemporary Muslims with contemporary objectives in mind, which of course explains the permanent selectivity with which the tradition is generally approached, usually dictated by political expediency. This does not prevent most islamists and many orientalists from maintaining the view that Islam as such informs political behaviour, or could or should do it to levels social scientists can hardly accept. In mainstream orientalism, the idea that democracy, human rights, political participation, ought to be understood according to each culture's values, or even entirely ignored in the study of some cultures, is quite prevalent. The opposition was already vivid, a few decades ago, between missionaries trying to export the West's values, customs (and religion) to the rest of the world and orientalists who considered this endeavour as sheer folly. A similar debate is perceptible nowadays in many a western society: while diplomats, NGO militants and pro-democracy institutions are actively trying to spread western values, 'experts' and 'analysts', not to mention revived orientalists, are insisting on some old clichés such as 'Islam is Islam and the East is the East'. This permanent tension in western culture between universalism and alienation from the world is well mirrored on the other side by the deepening cleavage now opposing old-style nationalists who adopt the West's models yet fight against its domination and islamists who seek to reject the West's model and influence altogether.

The 'culturalists' may be on even shakier ground when democratization is explicitly linked to secularization. Generalizations are common here, despite the fact that Muslims, supposed to be given to confusing *din* (religion) with *dawlah* (government), do not systematically confuse the two themselves, while societies ruled by democratic regimes have many clear cases of such confusion. Laroui has shown how historically political *fiqh* (jurisprudence) very quickly became part of an exercise in the idealization of islamic power, being content, in the context of the whole, to be subject to authoritarian power in the name of emergency or defence of national unity, reciting, like al-Mawardi among others, the qualities of a 'good' islamic power while knowing perfectly well that such a recital constitutes an incantation linked to the function of a *faqih* rather than an immediate exigency which could be opposed to the governing power (Laroui 1984). In fact it is difficult to think of the policy of the *fuqaha* as fundamentally opposed to the historical powers the islamic world has seen. It is more of a utopian representation, repeated, embellished or given slight differences of meaning, but not necessarily something whose practical incarnation was vigorously sought.

The present establishment of the islamic law *(shari'a)*, therefore, raises the very interesting problem of the status of non-Muslim minorities. Those putting

the *shari'a* into practice have a reply which it would be wrong to reject immediately, namely that an islamic regime ruled by the *shari'a* easily admits the principle of plural legislations, particularly in the matter of personal status (covering a field wider than in other legal traditions), to the advantage of non-Muslims. We are, of course, faced here with a direct attack on the modern national principle of one law for all citizens. But for many minorities, it seems more acceptable to deny that principle than to relinquish the right to their own law. In fact it would be easier to get an islamist to exclude those who do not share his faith from the application of the *shari'a* than to make him admit western political principles of the protection of political minorities. In other words, if society really seeks a re-imposition of religious tradition, it might be easier to establish religious (and consequently legal) pluralism than political pluralism. This is a serious obstacle to efforts for democratization, since it presupposes that adherents of the islamic majority would be deprived of the right to withdraw from application of the *shari'a* (a god-defined and therefore un-amendable legislation), while members of non-Muslim minorities would have the advantage of being able to avoid it. But in such a system members of those minorities would be as much victims as members of the islamic majority, since they would be deprived of the support of a neutral and secular state against the possible excesses and inevitable closure of their own community law.

What then can be done to ensure that the islamic religion (of the majority) and the other religions and/or sects (of the minorities) play a part not only in the legitimation of political power but also in limiting and even contesting it? Put like this, the problem obscures the fact that militant islamism is in some ways playing that oppositional role today, even in Iran. We should therefore think instead of a path for islamists to take which would not entail their passing from absolute opposition to the power of others to absolute legitimation of their own. Rather than a ruthless shift such as occurred in Algeria at the beginning of 1992 which saw the islamic revolutions in Iran 'devour' a number of its moderate children, or which was forcibly installed in the Sudan with the military regime of General al-Bashir, it would be more relevant to seek a process of mutual accommodation that would operate both before and after a possible acquisition of power by the islamists. One of the most attractive ideas is that of pre-electoral pacts between the regime in office and the various component parts of the opposition, including the islamists, pacts which would clarify the nature of the shift in power, the function of the first elections to be held and those that followed, and offer guarantees of both the quality of the polls and a preservation of the electoral practice in future. It need hardly be said that such pacts fostering the gradual adoption of representative democracy would be possible only if the islamists agreed to consider the decisions they made once in power as democratically reversible, and their policies open to legitimate contestation. If on the other hand they saw themselves as carrying out meta-political, transcendental values and policies, immune to any possible later revision by other political and social forces, such pacts would become unthinkable, if not actually perverse.

Beyond the case of Islam itself, the relationship between religion and democratized politics remains problematical, to say the least. It is interesting to note that Alain Touraine, among others, readily puts islamism into the category of dictatorships, while seeing the Solidarity movement in Poland as an almost unique case of the triumph of a democratic movement in our time. His theory of 'subjectivation' is even more problematical in that democracy is defined both in terms of its opposition to the religious element, and then, on the contrary, in terms of the subject's capacity to counterpose a meta-policy, which might be religious in nature, to the state and the free market. Touraine thus wants 'subjectivation', i.e. the dissociation of the man from the citizen and the non-subsumption of the former in the latter, to be brought about by recourse to tradition 'for the individual separated from all tradition is merely a consumer of material and symbolic goods, unable to resist the pressures and persuasions manipulated by those in power' (Touraine 1992, 403). Yes, indeed, but then what is there to say that this 'subjectivation' by recourse to tradition will not be to the advantage of religion and the religious? Nothing, says Touraine, adding that 'subjectivation' appears where political and social power is actively limited by 'the religious or more widely speaking spiritual appeal'. The problem, then, is whether and how far the islamist movements correspond to this profile. In other words, we must determine whether the islamist trends of today are political movements like those against which they are struggling or whether, on the contrary, they aim to form an absolute or at least absolutist meta-political structure.

There is a widespread and predominant notion that the question is primarily one of political actors, parties and groups seeking to take power. All the ambiguity of islamism today may perhaps arise from its political nature on the one hand (being a sort of islamism without Islam) and, on the other hand, from its meta-political discourse – that permanent, opportunist and disturbing balancing act between its political nature and its religious discourse. But matters are not much simpler on the secularist side. In a work of luminous clarity, Aziz Al-Azmeh has shown that the modern state in the Arab world was secular to begin with, but that for reasons of political opportunism it progressively accommodated the islamist sectors of the population becoming an instrument of islamization itself, in a perverse process which led it to adopt the programmes of its critics (Al-Azmeh 1992a). Olivier Carré had already come to this conclusion through his study of school textbooks bearing the distinct stamp of religion, albeit in a country wearing the secularist badge of Nasser's Egypt (Carré 1982). Al-Azmeh shows that in Egypt this process of change was hastened under Sadat, and furthermore that such a renunciation by the modern state of its twin liberal and secular origins has been seen throughout the Arab world as a whole, notably in Iraq and to a lesser extent in Syria (and he might have added even more obviously the Algeria of the FLN). He also notes with sadness the resignation of the secularizing intelligentsias to the victory of islamism even before it has come about.

If that is the case, we can see that the Islam of the islamists may be nothing

but a discourse, and the secularism of the modern state only a remnant already sacrificed on the altar of survival. But such a conclusion badly blurs our view of the two principal actors in current conflicts, and severely devalues the place of the spiritual factor in its links with politics. For the religious element no longer appears as a meta-political point of reference which may perhaps exert some control over authoritarianism, but as an instrument of discourse in an ordinary struggle for power between forces which at bottom resemble each other more than they would care to admit in their contempt for both democracy and religion. This would make the islamists different simply in their more systematic and politically more efficient use of a frame of reference to which regimes in office, and even supposedly secularist oppositions, do not hesitate to have recourse when they feel the need. It has been, for example, convincingly suggested that the opposition between the FLN and FIS in Algeria was not between two different ideologies but between two different networks and two different generations within the Algerian nationalist nebula. If this is the case, we should stop putting the question of the alleged uniqueness of Islam (whose similarity to eastern Christianity on the social and ritual level has often been observed), and ask a completely different one: why is the reference to religion politically useful? Such a question would bear less on theology or political thinking (not to mention religious sociology), than on analysis of the discourse and its effects. The beginnings of a reply to this (practical) question may perhaps be sought in the organic illegitimacy (and poor achievements) of dictatorial powers and consequently the fact that their nationalist discourse is no longer effective, and above all in a centuries-old segmentation of societies which turns the religious reference into a sublimated appeal to unity around the state, and to the state's advantage.

With the rapid spread of islamist contestation this work could not avoid such questions. Jean Leca rightly reminds us that the presumed Arab 'exceptionalism' is generally linked to that of Islam, but the connection is not unique: it may be, as Gellner notes, that the Arab world is exceptional (in a negative sense) in its relation with democracy because of historical factors that are unique but not necessarily instigated by the predominance of the islamic faith. But is 'eternal Islam' to be interrogated on this point, or the islamists of today? John Waterbury observes a genuine 'analytical dilemma', suggesting that democratization would gain more from circumventing that factor than using it in a more or a less opportunist way. Gudrun Krämer describes both the discourse and the practice of the islamists in the face of a policy of reaction on the part of governments in office which is made up of both accommodation and exclusion. The outcome remains uncertain and ambiguous, as though the time to draw up a balance sheet has not yet come. Aziz Al-Azmeh lays emphasis on the totalizing nature of an islamist discourse obsessed, to an overwhelming degree, by the uniqueness of history and a quasi-automatic correspondence between history, Islam, society and the power to be established, islamist 'democratization' actually being a means of translating an ideal of societal corporatism into the reality

of a state corporatism. The latter, of course, repudiates all political pluralism of the western kind, retaining only confessional pluralism or that of 'world civilizations'. (Incidentally, a militant islamist would confirm (and be greatly comforted by) Samuel Huntington's more than debatable views on an imminent 'clash of civilizations' – Huntington 1993.) Other national cases are cited in this volume; Jean-François Bayart observes a revival of Turkish Islam which, in his view, may not endanger democracy at all but on the contrary encourage it to take root, just as parties owing allegiance to Roman Catholicism have done, almost despite themselves, in a number of South European countries.

Democracy, the prisoner of the asabiyyat*?*

If the non-discursive reality of politicized religion presents problems that it would doubtless be premature to settle out of hand, that is not so much the case with the organized *asabiyyat*, whose continued existence or new development should help to explain the prevalence of religious discourse as a supra-segmentary if not unitarian frame of reference, as well as delays in democratization. In such an investigation, we cannot remain within purely traditional parameters. Although a Khaldunian interpretation of the societies studied here is useful, it is impossible to ignore the limitations of such an interpretation at the end of the twentieth century: the *asabiyyat* exist, but they are as urban as they are rural and, even more important, they are more frequently constructed than inherited. The 'nations' created by Stalinist planning are as present in the landscape of Central Asian identity as the secular ethnic groups; the heterogenous Third Estate of the big cities can be identified as easily as the traditional ethnic, confessional or linguistic groups. Any simple reading of these societies is bound to become simplistic, for it seems that the ravages of modernity are found as inevitably as the remnants of identity from a more distant past. An un-statist interpretation of Syria in the manner of Michel Seurat should be complemented by another which sets out from and returns to the state, as Volker Perthes has done in his contribution to this book: the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, but complementary and mutually enlightening.

The question of the continued existence of some *asabiyyat* and the rise of others actually presents a much more serious problem, i.e. the contemporaneity of, and to some degree the collusion between, the two concepts of the nation and of democracy in pioneering experiences such as those of France or the United States of America. The idea of the nation in fact derives from that of the individual who is its constituent element, and who acquires, through the democratization of the political regime, the right to contribute to the future of the whole. This triplet, nation/individual/democracy, constitutes a problem in those societies where one might look for democracy while the first two elements remain vulnerable, superficial and threatened and, more importantly, reversible. Those regimes which say that democratization could lead them not only to lose their

authoritarian ascendancy but to destabilize the entire state should be taken a little more seriously. This is not just propaganda: from the moment the dominated *asabiyyat* decide that any sign of the opening up of authoritarian regimes actually signals weakness on the part of the hegemonic *asabiyya*, it is difficult for them to avoid slipping towards centrifugal tendencies, from a simple questioning of the dictatorial regime to questioning the very existence of the state which marks its geographical limits and provides its legal justification for existence.

If this question appears particularly acute in most islamic societies, it is less because they are 'mosaics' (on many levels Europe looks far more of a mosaic than the Arab world, which has a clear religious, confessional and linguistic majority within it), but because the persistence of the ancient tribal, confessional and ethnic *asabiyyat* and the existence of a social and political environment favourable to the constitution of new ones (most notably because of the prevalence of neo-patrimonialism) have been factors militating against the emergence of the triplet mentioned above. The 'nation' has suffered from the legitimacy of these *asabiyyat*, recognized to a greater or lesser degree, throughout early Islamic, Byzantine, Persian and Ottoman history, and the 'individual' has suffered even more. This is why the most interesting western democratic models for this part of the world are not so much those founded on nation/individual/democracy as those where a certain degree of community organization is seen to be legitimate.

For this reason, the democrats of the islamic world cannot easily avoid a preliminary consideration of the place of the individual in their societies. This consideration is rendered yet more urgent by the mythologization of the demographic factor, for democratization must also be regarded as a competition between equals in an already largely post-patriarchal society, as indicated by Philippe Fargues in a very original hypothesis presented in this volume. When western sociology invites democrats to denounce extreme individualism along with their more traditional struggle against authoritarianism, the South can take that invitation up only circumspectly. There are two fronts here; one is the (common) struggle against dictatorships, and the other is the necessity of keeping communities from confining individuals within them. The search for democracy thus becomes a four-pronged procedure beginning with the state rather than the nation, going on to recognize communities, then to re-evaluating the individual, and ending in some experience of democracy. The task is arduous precisely because one must think of democracy as both the defence of ascriptive groups and the defence of the individual confronting the twin and rival authorities of those groups themselves and of the state. In this authoritarian climate the emergence of the modern state appears both a blessing and a curse. While it has allowed the individual, in imitation of the western model of the modern state, to define himself outside the *asabiyya*, it has also shown him that in future individuals will have to suffer the double constraint of their *asabiyya* (even if the state impels them to ignore or surpass or extract themselves from it) and of the state to which they now belong. Individual liberty, when it is possible, is often the fruit of a balancing act individually conceived and realized between these two constraints, in which each acts as a counterweight to the other. Individual liberty therefore means an ability to use the new state to relax the hold of the *asabiyya* so as to emerge from its system of values, to rebel against its established powers, while still parading the original *asabiyya* in an attempt to limit the growing ascendancy, authoritarian if not arbitrary, of the state apparatus in the process of being established.

That is why getting a process of democratization going from the starting point of an identification of the nation with democracy is a Sisyphean task. The nation, here, is basically an intellectual construct representing a plurality of groupings, and is in any case only precariously rooted. The word nation has been used for too many local human groups, large or small, well or not so well organized, for it to retain its lustre as a unique, exclusive or at least predominant reference. We must thus think about democratization without previously settling the question of national identity. A good Jacobin would say it is impossible to skip such a crucial stage: first must come the nation, then its democratization. However, decades after the establishment of present-day states, we are obliged to recognize that democratization cannot be indefinitely conditioned by a prior outpouring of nationalitarian and/or nationalist fervour, a fervour adding itself to the real existence of states claiming to be national, of machinery engaged in the construction (in Foucault's sense and not that of nation building), if not the voluntary formation of a nation which would embody the state and be the expression of its autonomous politicization to the people. Such is the dilemma which invites all observers to define democratization even more clearly by its instrumental virtues. It should not be a natural complement to the development of the individual/nation couplet, but a compensation for the inability, in practice, of bringing the two together with the rival but complementary reality of the state apparatus and the *asabiyyat*.

It is necessary to introduce another term into the equation – namely social classes. Here again, Touraine's propositions are problematic: 'Where class conflict has been strong,' he writes, 'democracy has been strong as well.... Democracy assumes a firmly structured civil society, associated with an integrated political society, both as independent as possible of the state defined as the power acting in the name of the nation' (Touraine 1992, 382). The prerequisite of a civil society has become the parrot cry of Middle Eastern (as well as eastern European) discourse on the subject of democracy in the immediate post Cold War era, the favourite catchphrase of anyone who wants to see, beyond the collapse of immense authoritarian machines, the password of politically timid intelligentsias calling on democracy without daring to name it. The correlation between the strength of the class conflict and the quality of democracy is a more original idea, notably because it opposes the partiality of social claims to the nation's bent for political arbitration which, because it has the means to transcend social divisions, becomes increasingly independent of the social factor.

However, what does civil society mean in the islamic cultural area? Let us

note first that the population is not really what it is commonly thought to be, and is developing rapidly but not along the lines generally supposed (Fargues). Next, where are the classes whom one would like to see in struggle, so as to cast even more light on the role of the state as the personification of the nation, or at least as the mouthpiece of its 'interests'? A clear response, in the form of another question, is provided by Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri when he asks: 'Is it possible to see democracy unfolding in a society which is not "civil"; is it possible to see a civil society emerge by non-democratic ways?' (al-Jabiri 1993). This double question is based, of course, on a double denial: of 'civil' society and of democratic practice. Noting what I have described elsewhere as 'the first moment of liberalism' in the region (Salamé 1988), al-Jabiri attributes its failure, early and indisputable, to the fact that the 'democratic experience of the time was a state experiment being made on society with a view to controlling it, not an instrument whereby society could control the state'. This experiment would be followed by the military state, a state which would 'devour' civil society by forbidding the emergence of autonomous institutions. This kind of state would be even more authoritarian than its Soviet model, since the USSR was at least based on a party which gave rise to a state and an army, while in the Middle Eastern case the army creates both its state and its party. Returning to an explanation that I developed in my work *State and Society in the Mashriq* (1987b), al-Jabiri attributes the weakness of civil society to the vulnerability of the Arab and islamic *civis* confronting the stranglehold of 'rural and Bedouin society, with its institutions, values, customs and conduct'. Al-Jabiri closes with a normative conclusion affirming the therapeutic virtue of democracy; observing that local elites thought little of its advent, he calls for it to be introduced because it must be available as a 'remedy' even if the invalid has not really become aware of the gravity of his disease, a conclusion all the more interesting for our purpose in this volume in that the author has actually become famous on account of his search for theological, or at least jurisprudential foundations for political phenomena.

This is an elegant exit from a set of questions which are far from being solved by the prescription of the democratic 'remedy'. For whatever definition of civil society is adopted, it continues to present a problem once it is exported to islamic societies (and no doubt in its countries of origin too). If, following Hegel, we view civil society as primarily a factor in the process of state formation, how do we adjust that definition to situations where the state has indeed been 'imported', in the terms used by al-Jabiri and Bertrand Badie (Badie 1992) and when in any case that state has seen its bureaucratic apparatus set up even before civil society in its hegelian sense has come into being? Should we then follow certain hegelian and islamicist sociologists in distinguishing two civil societies, the traditional one which did in fact give rise to innumerable traditional states, and the modern one, dependent, westernized, brought into being by the modern state and born with the original sin of its colonial parentage? Can we really speak of the co-existence, even the superimposition, of the rivalry or the

conflict of two societies, one 'authentic', the other artificially created? Falling back on Marx is no help, since he saw civil society as the society which a particular actor, the bourgeoisie, historically produced. Looking for the Arab or Persian bourgeoisie at the origin of established states would not be a very useful exercise – from the perspective of Marx himself, if not of his local interpreters.

The state and its doubles

It is clear from the preceding remarks that the key element on the road that may lead to democracy is the state, rather than the individual, the community, the nation, class or the market; and moreover it preceded these other elements too. Political logic remains favourable to the state, the authoritarian state, and more precisely to those forces which have inherited the bureaucratic legacy of French or British colonialism or that of the former USSR. This will continue to be the case in so far as the national question remains open, and culture (for which Waterbury cannot find a convincing definition), frustrated of its blossoming as a whole, is still defined principally by its opposition to the adversary in nationalist or religious terms and, more commonly, in some mixture of the two. The seizure by the ex-communist *asabiyyat* in central Asia of the apparatus of the new states born, as if despite themselves, of the decomposition of the USSR (see the essay by Olivier Roy) is curiously reminiscent of the seizure of power in Iraq by Ottoman-trained officers on the eve of the 1914–18 war. It is in the very heart of decomposing empires that forces capable of making the transition from the imperial to the national are found; Ottoman officers yesterday, Brezhnev-trained apparatchiks today (re-islamicized military men tomorrow?). Once the transition has been made, the state, reinforced by the world tendency towards statism and the urgent need statist actors established in the West have felt to negotiate with their equals and peers, becomes both the crucial stake in the game between competing *asabiyyat* and the political actor par excellence.

The abrupt introduction of that statist machine, whether Pahlavi, Kemalist or Arab, has marked a profound watershed in a development which might have favoured democracy more. Not only were the modern heirs to empires usually the military, not only did their 'states' risk being nothing but complements to their armies; in imposing their authority they also disrupted a process of statist modernization and democratic evolution, slower and more endogenous, but also better adapted to local time schemes, which had begun in the nineteenth century. 'Skipping stages' was only a way of taking a swift hold on societies, authoritatively defining their needs and aspirations and setting about the task of coming to their aid with a greater or lesser degree of success. Secularization too often meant the exclusion of those who, in the name of tradition, required this modern machine to be accountable. Nationalization was the reply to those who wanted to go on deriving some slight say from their comfortable economic situation. State nationalism meant the exclusion of all who were defined through sectoral

identities, or who intended to oppose the state monopoly of contact with foreign countries and their powers and ideas. The modern state has thus generally been constructed on a series of exclusions and ostracisms, the combined effect of which was to multiply the number of political orphans and orphans of politics, for politics henceforward was the state and nothing but the state. Outside the state, there was a situation of assumed exclusion (depoliticization) or rejection, and then one closer to that of 'national' treason than legitimate opposition. In this the modern state was reproducing a highly traditional model, that of the *khuruj*, departure from the state, which was commonly presented by the regimes as sedition or rebellion, and which consequently incurred punishment. Prison and exile became the natural homes of all questioning of current policy, which was worn right down by the state apparatus; to oppose was to leave, to leave was to betray.

If nation-building was also, or even primarily, a wide operation of exclusion, the question of representation, crucial to all democratic experience, was first practised as the co-opting of forces and individuals, one of its essential functions being to obscure the fact that the state sought first and foremost to create a political desert around it; rump parliaments, submissive syndicates, associations created by and for the state. Populism subsequently turned out to be an ideal complement to this political desert; it established a unilateral political link based on the active initiative of some emblematic figure, as much as on the passive support of the 'masses', sometimes ratified by plebiscite. Society suffered an increasingly serious lack of representatives, and populism had the added advantage of doing away, in an authoritative manner, with the need for representation by using the easy subterfuge of direct communication, first by radio and then by television, between power ultra-personified in one man and the masses increasingly relegated to formless anonymity. Suddenly these societies were frustrated not only by the lack of representation, but also by a plethora of fake representatives chosen by the state. These personal charismas will have to be eroded, through military defeats and the perverse effects of all long-term populism, before the call for genuine representation of the people can again make itself heard. That rulers have for decades conducted experiments with illusory forms of representation burdens all forms of representation with deeply rooted scepticism which explains the wish, often concealed, for a change of faces, leaving actual programmes untouched; such a wish being paradoxically accompanied by a deep suspicion of any new ruler even before he displays his power.

Oil revenues will play a prominent part in the consolidation of these powers (and subsequently their downfall). If one had to identify something specific to the Middle East, it would surely be the prevalence of the rentier economy. Revenues (particularly from oil, but also from foreign aid, rights of passage through the Suez Canal, revenues deriving from the strategic function of this or that country, or from political cover for some western military intervention), have in fact reinforced the external and superimposed position of the state in relation to societies at the most opportune moment. Lavish military expenditure,

rackets dexterously operated on oil-exporting countries by countries producing little or no oil, and bilateral security aid not entered in the national budget, have reinforced the autonomy of the state machinery, giving autocrats the means to modernize their instruments of control without burdening the population with duties and taxes. Oil has allowed these states to consolidate without making painful choices between expenditure on security, prestige and social services. Once a logic of allocation rather than production was firmly entrenched, oil generally assured the critical mass of financial inflow, permitting a postponement of questions about the financial system or any redefinition on the relationship between state and society with a view to better control of the latter over the effective expenditure of the former (see the essay by Luciani and the questions put by Waterbury in this volume). The present crisis of political regimes is therefore closely connected with the sudden fall in revenues and the inability of regimes to push through policies of adjustment to situations of new austerity.

Oil arrived like a *deus ex machina* in the political economy of societies that were not civil, or were inadequately so. Special attention should, therefore, be paid to the methods, particularly economic and financial, which allowed the authoritarian state (or its twin, the anarchic state) to last. Gangs, nepotistic privatizations, trafficking in influence, tolerance of drugs, militia, corruption, the so-called black or informal economy, and para-statist rackets have all been obstacles to democratization. But to remain at this level of ethical condemnation is inadequate precisely because these gangs are also the instruments of survival of groups marginalized by the state as well as forces maintaining those states; the FLN state in Algeria triggered the practice of *trabendo* (with the complicity of the Islamic Salvation Front FIS); the 'black boxes' of various regimes had their parallel in secret transfers of expatriates' savings, a black market in money, the so-called islamic investment companies, a sad reality for many ruined savers, and drug trafficking by militarized *asabiyyat*. Groups outside the state had a tendency to imitate 'the people of the state' in depending on trafficking outside the state in order to survive. Contraband, dealing in illegal substances, and similar practices were also ways of bringing modern adaptation to structures threatened by plunder, economic marginalization or excessive dependence on the redistributive system of a state often impotent and always unjust, or perceived as organically so.

Of course a genuinely national economy also developed in some of the more stable countries, less dependent on oil and where state authority was more firmly rooted, as in Turkey (see also the analysis of Syria by Perthes in this volume). But on the whole the 'national' economy is only the partial meeting place of political and social actors around a 'national' budget. Alongside their public budgets, regimes had at their disposal huge 'black boxes', and autonomous groups had 'informal' sources of revenue assuring their survival. Democracy as a mechanism for controlling expenditure, where taxation and representation arise together and mutually sustain each other, was obviously inadequate in this kind of political economy, where informal business ventures could do better

than the classic kind and trafficking was sometimes bigger business than exchange, and where racketeering rubbed shoulders with commerce (if they were not in fact entirely indistinguishable).

Democracy in the political arena

The title of this work might lead the reader to believe that democracy is based on 'chance and necessity'; on the idea, put forward in most of the contributions to this volume, that when democratization occurs it does so without political forces really making it a programme in and for itself (see in particular the contributions by Leca, Waterbury and Salamé). Democracy in the western style, orphaned, is the end product of complex social phenomena rather than of a struggle for democratization carried out by organized groups. It is often conceded by a power which does not have the means of establishing complete authoritarianism, or which, having exercised such authoritarianism over a long period, finds itself compelled to loosen its grip at a certain moment (as Owen sets out to demonstrate in the case of Egypt and Perthes in the case of Syria). We may say that there is nothing original about such findings, since democracy in Europe has historically been the daughter of crises in authoritarian regimes which are unable to sustain themselves. Some writers have already commented on that fact, particularly in eastern Europe, where 'the fall of authoritarian regimes is more frequently due to their internal decomposition than to the success of popular opposition movements. This leads to the almost passive victory of a democracy reduced to a free political choice, whose superficial character is quickly revealed by the weakness of popular participation' (Touraine 1992, 397). Certainly, but what was a 'natural' phenomenon two or three centuries ago occurs today in societies where it was thought that elites, well informed about the world, had already made it their programme.

Banal as it may be, the statement remains valid; the fundamental political split in the societies studied in these essays (although not in them alone) is not between opposing democratic forces but between forces which are often equally strangers to democracy (or equally uninterested in establishing democracy). There are, notably, islamists whom it would be unjust to consider less democratic than many other rival forces; for example, that 'islamist versus democratic' cleavage propounded by anti-islamist Algerians is founded, at best, on an ambiguity, and quite possibly on a fraud. If the adoption of democratic elections by the islamists is considered opportunist, reversible and insincere, the regime as well as many 'secularist' forces certainly do not produce any more convincing professions of democratic faith. As Al-Azmeh notes, this is more in the nature of a clash (some would say collusion followed by collision) between equally populist variants.

But if the crisis affecting regimes is more relevant than the appeal of democratic forces, is not military defeat the most effective factor in bringing about the collapse of a dictatorship? That factor was seen in Argentina after the defeat of the generals, the fall of the regime of the Greek colonels after their misadventure in Cyprus, or the shaking of Salazarism following the liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies of Africa. However, on the other side of the Mediterranean this rule does not seem to apply. Some would even say that military defeats have the effect of strengthening dictatorships rather than weakening or toppling them, more particularly in the Arab world – another kind of exceptionalism. Perhaps the reality is not such a clear-cut contrast, and the effects of a defeat here need more time to make themselves felt. Thus the overtures to democracy in Egypt in the mid-1970s can be linked to the military defeat in 1967; the fall of Siad Barré can be connected to his failure in the Ogaden a decade earlier; the Algerian crisis can be linked to the failure of Algeria in the Saharan crisis; and the spectacular defeat of Saddam Hussein cannot ultimately leave his power entirely unaffected. The error frequently consists of a desire to derive immediate advantage from the defeat of a dictator, which results in prolonging his reign. For the first effect of defeat could well be to arouse solidarity. For while the national question is still far from being settled, to have defied the West will often compensate for the failure that may follow the attempt. The popularity of the challenge to the adversary often sustains the defiant regime even amidst the opprobrium of defeat. Questioning may come later, 'cold', at the moment when external pressure in fact seems to have relaxed; memories of defeat then return in force to discredit an already defeated regime. This temporal factor operates very differently from the western electoral accounts system, as George Bush discovered to his cost when he tried to destabilize Saddam Hussein during the two years from the defeat of Iraq to the 1992 American presidential elections.

This is all the more true in that it becomes very difficult to think of democratization in this part of the world while ignoring development in the international arena. Here again, however, explanation of the effects of global on regional and above all local factors must be made with care, avoiding hasty generalizations about global trends and exceptions to them. However, we may put forward a number of premises. First, the 'wave' of democratization, begun in southern Europe and continued in Latin America and eastern Europe, has not left the intellectuals of the Arab world unmoved. However, to say they have reached the conclusion that a great wave of democracy is breaking, from which they are clearly drawing encouragement, would indubitably be an exaggeration, for these intellectuals remain to a great extent prisoners of a role they define for themselves in terms of the state to which they belong, while politicized culturalism, which they have tended to amplify and exaggerate, immunizes them against automatic emulation. The abrupt collapse of the Soviet empire, on the contrary, was of great importance to everyone interested in public events, for its effects were immediate even if their conclusions are far from being uniform. While the states of central Asia have suddenly found themselves orphaned, and the marxists of the region have seen their Muscovite Mecca turn away from itself even

more than from them, the islamists have shown an ambiguous reaction made up, on the one hand, of the fear of seeing the West, emerging victorious from the Cold War, extend and intensify its hegemony over their countries, and on the other hand, of the satisfaction of seeing the sudden collapse of the nationalist, secularizing or atheistic progressivism which, over several decades, had stolen their intellectual hegemony within their own societies. To the islamists, the fall of the Kremlin was translated into the fall and marginalization of their local ideological rivals whom the USSR more or less inspired or sustained.

These are events of universal importance whose indirect fallout and subsidiary effects upon these societies must be studied. However, the reactions and external policies more directly aimed at the Middle East itself call for study too. We should note here that in the region there is a prevalent idea, extending beyond all reason, that external forces have unlimited influence over internal affairs. Indeed the adversary, notably or even exclusively western, is credited with the means of causing local situations to develop in one direction or another, a notion which at the same time arouses opposition. The disclaimers of the western governments concerned, the genuine indifference of western public opinion to certain developments in the South, make no difference; think how many Algerians accused France of being behind the coup of 11 January 1992, after accusing Paris of being the mainstay of the FIS, or of all the explanations one has read and heard of ex-President Bush's desire to maintain Saddam Hussein in power, or on the contrary his desire to destabilize him. An extreme sensitivity to what the adversary in the West says or does about regional and local situations prevails. It functions as a useful way of obscuring the inability of local people to change their own situation, and also shows a kind of resignation to the will of the strongest, which paradoxically goes hand in hand with a nationalist anti-imperialism nowadays degenerating into chauvinism and xenophobia.

In fact the outside world has more effect on the evolution of this region than it likes to admit, which reminds us of the point already made by Hicham Djaït, that Europe and the islamic world are too close to each other, so relations are tense and impassioned. There is here another source of specificity if we are still looking for one; geographical proximity, centuries of commerce, exchange, alliances, struggles and conquests both one way and another give rise to a particular sensitivity in the relations of the Arab-Islamic area to a West which is at once too close and too different, too familiar and too strange. Ambient islamism may be a reaction to this particular situation, which links Europe and the islamic world while differentiating them. People cling to the absolute difference, the difference of faith, at the very moment when they feel especially weak confronting a neighbour who has become over-powerful. Adoption of the western model in the organization of power, with the ideology of human rights (not to mention the many 'rights to intervene' which the West has defined for itself since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in relation to other most frequently islamic countries), is bound to suffer because it is hard to dissociate it from the emotional charge aroused by this mixture of fascination and repulsion, proximity and otherness.

Other cultures which have less impassioned relations with the West are no doubt better able to make such a dissociation, separating the democratic model from the real or supposed ambition to dominate of the powers which are brandishing it.

The aim of this present volume is to take another look at the problems of democratization, linking them as far as possible to the social changes that have taken place during the last two or three decades. The balance sheet is not hopelessly pessimistic. We may indeed think that democratization had more chance of coming into being a few years ago when demography was still 'manageable' (the essay by Fargues in this volume relativizes the impact of this so-called 'bomb'), when chaotic urbanization had not yet created big cities that could not be properly policed, when opposition parties with secularist ideas had not yet been marginalized. But that moment has now passed; population growth has accelerated, governments have on the whole shown an inability to deliver the services and social protection promised by all authoritarian states in the 1950s and 1960s, and opposition groups have been worn down by exile or corruption, leaving the islamists firmly in the driving seat in most cities of the region.

In dealing with the Middle East in its widest sense, this book does not aim to produce the impression that the area as a whole, containing several hundred million people, will follow the same course. On the contrary, the dominant idea is that the countries considered here are not necessarily engulfed in a wave of islamization, democratization, or anything else, and might well pursue very different political paths during the years to come. Different levels of democracy may well take root, different attitudes to human rights may be seen, different kinds of authoritarian regimes may be maintained or established, and so-called 'islamist mobility' may even end up giving birth to political regimes with very different relations to democracy. At the end of the day, even if social constraints, inspirations and external pressures are similar, even if ideological orientations can be located from one country to another, real people, united in real associations and institutions, will have to make concrete decisions, and these will hardly be uniform. They never have been.

Above all, we must not trust appearances, that is to say, principally, the dominant discourse, whether the discourse of politicians or the better informed comments of innumerable 'observers' of the scene. Authors contributing to this work will invite the reader to cease thinking of Turkey as less islamic than Iran, of anti-stalinist ethnic groups as more powerful than the nations created by the 'little father of the peoples', to give up the idea that the alleged exceptionalism of Arab societies is a matter of verified fact, that peoples will fall back into their old *asabiyyat*, or that the regimes in power have lost all ability to make their hold on society last, even to reproduce themselves in some new avatar. None of these simple, 'obvious' ideas has seemed to us immune from criticism. That is why we offer the reader a work full of questions rather than a collection of statements above critical question. From chapter to chapter, questions multiply and complement each other; they are not the same, they are not presented in the

same way, and no attempt has been made to transform this work of critical interrogation into a uniform account of the 'state of societies in the islamic world', still less a manual of democratization for formerly authoritarian societies.

One of the recurring themes in these studies as a whole (notably in the essays by Owen, Krämer, Perthes and Hermassi) is the attitude and conduct of regimes supposedly in crisis. That factor is to a great degree what permits the development, slowing down or burying of experimentation with electoral democracy. The outcome of the crisis may be peaceful or bloody, durable or temporary, effective or superficial, depending on the regime's ability to adapt to a radically different demographic, economic, fiscal and social situation, the evolution of oil prices, its responses to new internal and external challenges, the success or failure of its policies of austerity, the choice of its electoral law, the credibility it manages to re-create for itself by opening out rather than becoming exclusive, its mastery, effective or otherwise, of the political climate, and more generally the personal and visionary courage of its leaders. Objective situations can be elucidated, but concrete decisions in the face of concrete challenges frequently make all the difference between emergence from the crisis and plunging deeper into it.

There remains the role – central in principle, marginal in fact – of the intelligentsia. The *asabiyyat* may be modern or old, inherited or 'constructed', supporters or critics of the regime, but they can prove equally sterile; western sociology invites students of democratization to take less notice of social forces than cultural forces, the latter having shown their attachment to democratization, even their efficiency, better than the former. Who can forget that Chinese student trying to stop a column of armoured cars? Who can forget that the 'velvet revolution' was the work of Václav Havel and the dissidents? The question becomes a penetrating one: what are the intelligentsias of the islamic world interested in, if not throwing off the yokes that burden the political and social life of their societies? The intellectuals of this part of the world often have matters other than democratization on their minds, another sign that they too are products of the modern state, the state which excludes rather than innovates, the state of legitimation rather than vision. These intelligentsias often seem caught in a sterile, debilitating choice between the maintenance of states from which they came and the restoration of states whose memory they have childishly embellished. Democratization, however, will not rise from nostalgia for a reconstructed past or attachment to a jaded present. But if that is the choice, the 'cultural forces' of democratization are still a hope for the future rather than a reality in the present.

PART I

HYPOTHESES