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DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE ARAB-MUSLIM WORLD

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A preliminary remark to our reflection on "Democratization in the Arab-Muslim World" is related to our activity here at this Halki seminar¹. Most of us here are (1) diplomats or politicians in charge of their state's foreign policy or members of international organizations concerned with collective foreign policy, (2) journalists or (3) scientific researchers. This triad constitutes what the British "critical" geopolitician Klaus-John Dodds calls "the state's privileged story tellers"². He means that, on a geopolitical point of view, this triad - diplomats or politicians, the media and research workers in the field - is the main group constructing the dominant representations of the "other", of the "foreign" in foreign policy decision-making. We think this seminar partakes in this process and the representations of the "other" in the Southern part of the Mediterranean we will produce or reproduce and which will confirm or invalidate our previous world views on the subject may influence the attitudes we all will adopt towards the region in our respective fields of activity, in this case with this paper on "Democratization in the Arab-Muslim World". So, as members of this community of the "state's privileged story tellers", what is - with all due modesty - our story about?

Beyond the culturalist-essentialist approach to "Islam and democracy"

First, there are widespread representations in the West according to which democracy is inconceivable in Arab-Muslim societies. This vision mainly derives from the presupposed assumption that Islam and democracy are in essence incompatible. This type of approach is called essentialist or culturalist and is in fact disconnected from the context in which a culture or a religion is lived, in particular places and at particular times. From this point

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²Klaus J. DODDS, "Geopolitics, Experts and the Making of Foreign Policy", *Area*, 25 (1993) 1, p. 73.

of view, Islam, far from following a proper dynamics, is submitted to the contexts in which it is lived³.

So, asserting for instance that, in Islam, "democracy cannot be pluralistic because it cannot contradict aspiration for unity"⁴ is, from this point of view, nonsense. A caricatured and stereotyped example of asserting essentialist viewpoints about Islamic societies is the literal use of Koranic passages which reinforce the representations in question. But one could also refer to other Koranic passages which would quite easily invert the presupposed assumptions and, in this way, be useful for amending them. But, as we will see, that is not the point. In fact, on sociological and political points of view, philological or similar non-contextual approaches should rather be dismissed in order to give way to the social sciences - sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, geography, history etc., as it is usually the case in similar studies for instance on Latin-American or East-European societies.

In the present problematic, we should clearly avoid considering Islam as "irremediably linked to any kind of theocracy which, in the guise of its latest misadventure, islamism, would prove unable to open to the pluralistic universe and its democratic corollary"⁵.

The rise of civil society - islamism as one of the driving forces of political transition

On the contrary. Indeed, a more and more widely held thesis among specialists in Middle East studies is that islamism, as an expression of political opposition to the post-colonial authoritarian regimes, along with feminist movements, Human Rights' organizations and other political or professional forces - all what constitutes the so-called rising "civil society" -, is one of the driving forces of political transition in this area, sometimes in democratic terms. As the problematic is so wide, we have opted to focus on one particular theme : Islam, islamism or - more correctly - Muslim societies and democracy. But naturally the whole problematic should not be reduced to this aspect. We nevertheless chose this because it is one of the most worrying and misunderstood aspects in Western decision-making circles.

The crisis of legitimacy of post-colonial Arab states

The rise of civil society goes hand in hand with the deep crisis of legitimacy post-colonial Arab states are going through for (1) political-ideological, (2) socioeconomic and

³Clifford GEERTZ, in Jean-Noël FERRIE, "Paradoxes de la réislamisation en Egypte", *Monde Arabe / Maghreb Machrek*, n°151, janvier-mars 1996, pp. 4-5.

⁴Bertrand BADIE, *Culture et politique*, Paris, Economica, 1993, pp. 99-100.

⁵Baudouin DUPRET, "Politique, religion et droit dans le monde arabe", *Les Cahiers du Monde arabe*, Louvain-la-Neuve, CERMAC, n°116, 1995, p. 4.

demographic and (3) cultural-ideological reasons. Some of these states have adopted what we could call a "survival strategy"⁶ consisting in the opening up of the political spectrum, yet in a controlled way, as we will see, which led to the arrival of - among other forces - islamist forces on the legal political scene.

In fact, the socioeconomic factor played a major role in leading authoritarian regimes to open up the political spectrum during the eighties, following popular protest namely in the so-called "bread riots", which were not necessarily linked to islamist initiatives. But this opening led to the emergence of islamist forces - among other forces - on the legal political scene and to their reinforcing presence on the political scene in general.

But first, let us analyse what kind of crisis of legitimacy Arab regimes are going through. As we said, we can distinguish three aspects in the question : these are (1) the political-ideological, (2) the socioeconomic and demographic and (3) the cultural-ideological.

(1) *On the political-ideological level*, the post-colonial Arab state, which based its legitimacy on nationalism, reached a "social contract" - a "negative consensus"⁷ - with its citizens "under the terms of which [it] was to effect development, ensure social justice, satisfy the basic needs of its citizens, consolidate political independence, and achieve other national aspirations (e.g., Arab unity, the liberation of Palestine). In return, citizens were to forego, at least for a while, the quest for liberal participatory politics"⁸. So, authoritarian political regimes settled, with their one-party or dominant party systems. But, as we will see at the point about the cultural-ideological aspects of the question, such an authoritarian domination on the society could not persist with the erosion of the legitimacy capital of the nationalist ideology.

(2) *On the socioeconomic and demographic levels*, post-colonial Arab states have been less and less able to face the challenge of satisfying the needs of their steadily growing population. During the last fifty years, the Arab population grew from 80 to 250 million people, 60% of whom are less than twenty years old. At the same time, during the last two decades, Arab states went through a financial crisis, namely due to the erosion of a whole series of rents :

⁶Bichara KHADER, "Etat, société civile et démocratie dans le monde arabo-musulman", Paper presented at the conference on "Governance in the Euro-Mediterranean Region" organized by the Dutch government and the Dutch Presidency of the European Union, 1997, March 17-18, p. 14

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸Saad Eddin IBRAHIM, "Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: An Overview", in Rex BRYNEN, Bahgat KORANY & Paul NOBLE, (eds.), *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World (Vol. 1 - Theoretical Perspectives)*, Boulder / London, Lynne Rienner, 1995, p. 36.

- the strategic rent (due to the end of the bipolar system),
- the oil rent (due to the 1985-86 reverse shock and the reduction of the energy demand),
- the inter-Arab solidarity rent (as a consequence of the Gulf War),
- the tourist sector rent (characterized by uncertainty and linked to security performance),
- the remittances (due to the gradual definitive installation of Maghreb's immigrants in Europe and the forced return of Egyptian and Palestinian immigrants from the Gulf);
- the international aid rent (linked to political positions).

Consequently, during the eighties and the nineties, Arab states have been financially less and less able to perform their modernizing projects such as infrastructure, job creation (particularly in the public sector) and supply with social services. Simultaneously, they could not reduce unemployment by resorting to the emigration of a part of their non-working population. In such conditions, no wonder the unemployment rates are high, namely among the youth. The labour market cannot absorb all those who are leaving school: while Arab countries should create 2.5 million jobs each year, they can only create one fifth of those. This leads to much frustration among the youth - frustration which fosters radical protest against the regimes.

(3) *On the cultural-ideological level*, the crisis of legitimacy can be seen as follows : such a contemporary phenomenon as islamism can be understood as "a political ideology which, by resorting to a religious referent, finds a means to break the universalist claim of Western political thinking and to make a reconnection with a pre-colonial past felt as authentic"⁹, during the third step of the decolonization process - a third step which is cultural -, after its political step (independence) and its economic step (nationalizations)¹⁰. This naturally goes hand in hand with the generational change, with a youth that has not lived through the national struggle for independence, which could build for a time the nationalist legitimacy of the fathers of the Nation and their successors. The claim here is not aimed at the global rejection of Western values (imported nationalism in its liberal or socialist versions, developmentism), but at the rejection of them as a monopoly: this is a demand aiming at contributing on an equal footing to the production of sense in world society.

Islamism and democracy

So the legitimacy capital of nationalism is eroded, as well as the authoritarian character which regimes had adopted in its name. As such, "for some, namely François Burgat (...), nowadays islamism is the force which represents civil society and the democratic

⁹Baudouin DUPRET, "L'Islam et l'islamisme dans notre miroir", *Adapi-Lv*, n°15, 1994, p. 8.

¹⁰This third-step thesis is held by François BURGAT, *L'islamisme au Maghreb : la voix du Sud (Tunisie, Algérie, Libye, Maroc)*, Paris, Karthala (Coll. "Les Afriques"), 1988.

claim against repressive, corrupted and basically conservative states"¹¹. This is undoubtedly a too finely cut general assertion. But what we no doubt are of the opinion is that islamism constitutes one - and again not the only one - driving force of political change in the Arab-Muslim region, in some cases maybe in democratic terms. In some cases, because there are lots of different ideological trends in the islamist wave and situations differ a lot from country to country and even within a same country, in place and time. We can look into this latter problematique in two steps: first, how does the islamist wave lead some authoritarian regimes to the opening up of their political spectrum? Second, once the political spectrum is opened to the islamist forces, do these constitute democratic forces in themselves?

Inclusion strategy: how does islamism lead in some cases to political opening?

Arab regimes have adopted three types of attitude towards the rising force of islamist movements: eradication, selective cooptation and inclusion. We will particularly focus on the inclusion strategy, which offers the most interesting material to observe how islamist forces do react when they are put to the test of democratic participation. Inclusion is the process which leads to the parliamentary opening up of the political spectrum and which is adopted by regimes in a "survival strategy"¹² as "an experimentation of the state on the society in order to control it and not as a control instrument of the society on the state"¹³. This does not mean that it cannot lead to this in the future, even if this was not intended so at the beginning. Here, regimes try to contain the islamist forces by integrating their protagonists in the basic political scene in opening their parliament to them.

Once the polity opened through inclusion strategy, do islamists constitute democratic forces in themselves?

The second question is: once the political spectrum is opened to the islamist forces, do these constitute democratic forces in themselves? In other words, do they play the democratic game in a tactical or in a strategic way? Some have argued that, with islamism, electors would be granted a "one man, one vote ... one time" process. Such an assumption derives from the essentialist vision which considers, as we have seen, Islam

¹¹Olivier ROY, *Généalogie de l'islamisme*, s.l., Hachette Livre, 1995, p.125. The author refers to François BURGAT, *Face à l'islamisme*, La Découverte, 1995

¹²Bichara KHADER, *op.cit.*, p. 14

¹³Muhammad 'Abid AL-JABIRI, quoted by Ghassan SALAME, "Introduction - Où sont donc les démocrates ?", in Ghassan SALAME (ed.), *Démocraties sans démocrates - Politiques d'ouverture dans le monde arabe et islamique*, s.l., Fayard, 1995, p.20. Al-Jabiri refers to the failure of what Salamé has called the "first liberal moment" in the region, but it is a still relevant topical reflection.

(and thus also islamism) and democracy as incompatible. Moreover, it has to be noted that islamist leaders in general have taken a long time to give up the dogmatic refusal of democracy put forward by the first islamist theoreticians, who considered it incompatible with the ulemas' monopoly and a threat to the unity of the Muslim community¹⁴. Moreover, some Arab regimes perceived as the West's "relays" have resorted - yet in a selective way - to the democratic reference, so that it could not easily be taken over by their islamist opposition. But some islamist forces have begun to adopt the democratic referent - often not in tactical terms but in strategic principles¹⁵. More importantly, in some countries where inclusion strategy is applied, islamist forces seem to behave in a democratic way in integrating the logics of the parliamentary game. One really has to study the problematique case by case in a contextual and dynamic way, as situations differ from country to country and are volatile.

Sure, the "one man, one vote ... one time" vision is not to be peremptorily rejected as it is a theoretically possible consequence of each electoral process outcome. It is not to be excluded, but it is not a fatality. We think one has to analyse carefully the question in the various contexts in order to avoid a priori generalizations based on essentialist presupposed assumptions or on the basis of outdated islamist textual sources.

Political interactions between the Northern and the Southern partsof the Mediterranean in cultural-ideological terms

There is anyway no determinism: it depends on the behaviour political actors adopt in reference to some norms and not on the norms in themselves. And it is this point to which we would finally like to invite you to pay attention. In the question of "democracy" and "Islam" as ideological elements in the attitude we mutually adopt in the Northern and the Southern parts of the Mediterranean, how do cultural differences between political actors interact? But, first, the preliminary question is: "are there differences?" And if the answer is: "Yes, there are", first, of which kind are they? and second, do they necessarily lead to conflict?

Democracy seen as a Western concept

An interesting starting point in the problematique of "Democratization in the Arab-Muslim World" is the Ghassan Salamé's definition of democratization as "the adoption of institutions and practices acknowledged by the West as democratic, or at least similar to

¹⁴François BURGAT, "Les islamistes et la démocratie : repères pour une recherche", in Bernabé LOPEZ GARCIA, Gema MARTIN MUNOZ & Miguel H. de LARRAMENDI, *Elecciones, participacion y transiciones politicas en el Norte de Africa*, Madrid, Agencia espanola de Cooperacion internacional, 1991, p. 169

¹⁵*Ibid*, p. 171

its own"¹⁶. This definition is on a sociological-politological point of view perfectly relevant because it is not based on a philosophical abstraction¹⁷ disconnected from its context, but, on the contrary, it highlights its cultural and sociopolitical basic roots. This definition enables us to understand the geopolitical problematic of the "Islam and the West" relationship in socio-psychological and political terms.

Democracy seen as a selectively applied concept

Thus, in Salamé's definition, democratization is "the adoption of institutions and practices acknowledged by the West as democratic, or at least similar to its own". In a way, the democratization process in the Arab-Muslim World in itself is not the point. In many islamists' eyes, the point, which is highlighted by Salamé's definition, is its particular - Western - cultural basic roots. As such, the concepts of democracy and democratization are not seen as neutral in the Muslim-Arab world as well as in the South in general. Moreover, history shows that the West often applies them where and when it suits its interests. As Robert Mugabé, from Zimbabwe, reminds us: "Why must we ever listen to those who only yesterday were our oppressive colonialists, as they now seek to be our mentors of democracy and preach to us multiparty democracy which they never practiced in respect of our countries?"¹⁸ But as a Yemeni professor mentions regarding Human Rights, "the wrong application of the Human Rights' theme by dominant powers does not prove that the idea of respect for Human Rights itself is suspect"¹⁹.

Both as an analogy and as part of the problematic, we would like to briefly mention one of our past studies about Islamic and Western perceptions of the "New World Order"²⁰, which showed how the new order was felt in the Arab-Muslim world as partial in both senses of the word: that is to say particular - non-universal - and biased - unjust.

The "New World Order" is considered as partial - unjust - because it would not be applied in all similar situations, but only when and where it suits Western interests.

¹⁶Ghassan SALAME, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁷As interesting as it may be in other kinds of studies.

¹⁸New York Times, April 22, 1990. Quoted by Jean-François REVEL, *Le regain démocratique*, Paris, Fayard, 1992, p. 341

¹⁹Mohammad Abdel Malek Al-Mutawakkel, "Islam and Human Rights" (in Arabic), *Al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi*, n°2, 1997, p. 5

²⁰Vincent LEGRAND, "Islam-Occident" : normes et perceptions croisées sur le "Nouvel Ordre mondial", Paper presented at the Louvain-la-Neuve Workshop on "L'éthique de l'espace politique mondial : métissages disciplinaires", 1996, June 21-23, Unité des Relations internationales, Département des Sciences politiques et sociales, Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium). A revised version was published in Spring 1998 in *Les Cahiers du Monde arabe*, CERMAC, Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium).

Second, the "New World Order" is considered as partial - non-universal - because it would reflect anything but Western values. This is a subtle subject, because if we look into the alternative Islamic projects for instance in Human Rights' affairs, while we can observe some "substantial" differences, our impression remains that there are lots of differences which emerge more from the psychological need for differentiation from the West than from the ontological existence of fundamental differences with the West.

We think democratization namely as an element of the "New World Order" project can be granted the same kind of approach.

Democracy seen as a selectively applied concept: further insights

What about the partial -unjust- character of the democratization problematique? This comes from the Arab-Muslim perception - namely islamists' perception - that the West promotes democratization in the Arab-Muslim world only where it suits its interests. This is again the well-known "double standards" protest which was heard during the Gulf Crisis and the Gulf War, in this case, in view of the different treatment administered to Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and Israeli occupation of Palestine. It is important to note that the islamists' primary target is not the Western civilization, but their own governments²¹. When do they aim the West? When it supports authoritarian regimes which are reluctant to open up the political spectrum to the opposition, namely the islamist opposition. Moreover, let us recall that regimes which do open up their political spectrum, mainly formally do so in a "survival strategy", as a last resort as a way of controlling the society, namely islamist forces, as we have seen earlier, and under Western pressure, for the West to see, in order to conform to conditions necessary to get some economic assistance: as such, they adopt what we call an "accommodation strategy", or in French, a "stratégie de complaisance"²².

Democracy seen as a Western concept: further insights

What about the partial - non-universal - character of the democratization problematique? What is important here is to realize that the current re-islamization of Arab societies "is based on a refusal of the Western-style cloning and a rejection not of the modernity in itself but of its arrogances"²³. The world liberal utopia does not pose problems in itself. What does pose problems is its propagandists' arrogance. The universal or the

²¹J. J. KIRKPATRICK, "The Modernizing Imperative. Tradition and Change", *Foreign Affairs*, 72/4, September / October 1993, p. 23

²²Bichara KHADER, *op.cit.*, p. 14

²³Jean-Claude GUILLEBAUD, "La fin du modèle occidental ?", *Politique internationale*, n°69, août 1995, p. 391

democratic emancipation do not in themselves trigger off fear, turning in on oneself and barricading. What does provoke such reactions is their ideological expression, that is to say disdainful and imperial²⁴.

"Substantial" vs. aesthetical differences

If we look into the Arab or Islamic political thinking, we will find much reflection on the organization of power in the political society namely on the base of Islamic principles. The question of popular participation in politics is naturally treated as many other subjects. The Islamic concept which is most often paralleled with the Western concept of democracy is "shura", which literally means "consultation". Indeed, there may be differences, but again, texts in themselves do not provide us with relevant sociological and politological materials: the question is "how are these texts enacted by political actors?" Second, if there are differences, of what kind are they? We think this is a quite similar problematique as that of Human Rights' islamic alternatives as it has appeared in the "New World Order" issue. There are certainly some "substantial", fundamental differences, but there are also a number of differences which emerge from the aesthetic-coloured psychological need to differentiate oneself from the "other", in this case, from the West. So, it would not be unimaginable to see Islamic versions of democracy, which would in essence look much to Western democracy, but full of Islamic references. Let us repeat that the same reference - religious or not - can be used in quite different directions. What seems anyway true is the need of identity assertion, should it be within the Western schemes or not.

Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations" :
the presupposed conflictual character of cultural differences

The question of difference is very complex. But whatever differences may be - rather fundamental for fundamental reasons or rather superficial (but no less important) for linguistic or aesthetical reasons, what do we do with them? What do we do with the often-presupposed conflictual character deriving from them? We would like to end our talk by discussing the "clash of civilizations" by the well-known "state's privileged story teller" Samuel P. Huntington.

According to Samuel P. Huntington, the different civilizations are in conflict with each other precisely because of their differences. First, we have to place civilizations in relation with each other and be conscious that the complexity of their "closeness" vs.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 384.

"distance" is more subtle than it can appear at first sight, at least, in the case of "Islam" and "the West". Some have shown that "their opposition is not that of opposites like light and darkness, but a rivalry of neighbours co-heirs of a same philosophical and religious humanism", so that their differences would be less responsible for the conflictual character of their relationship than their exclusive claim to manage a common civilizational patrimony²⁵. This is useful to balance the representations (as important as they might be) of differences, but this is finally a non-problem.

Beyond the deterministic presupposed conflictual character of cultural differences : the necessary ethics in political decision-making towards the "other"

Indeed, whatever "close" or "distant", it is the way civilizations are "instrumentalized" by political actors which determines the co-operative and/or conflictual character of their relationship. As far as the Mediterranean is concerned, it depends on the vision actors from both shores see it as a bridge or a gap²⁶. In fact, Samuel P. Huntington contrasts the ideological era of the Cold War with the civilizations' era of the post-Cold War era. But would the inter-civilizational confrontation not be the new ideology restructuring the international relations on other cleavages?

We consider that relations between civilizations are not fundamentally conflictual as such, rather it is the way political actors - "in Islam" as well as "in the West" - consciously and probably more frequently subconsciously - instrumentalize them which determines the co-operative and/or conflictual character of their relationship. It is possible to go beyond the deterministic vision of an unavoidable clash between different civilizations, in conflict because of their differences and pave the way for an ethics for the political actors (partly) free to manage the inter-civilizational otherness in warlike or peaceful terms. Partly, because these actors, namely Western actors, besides the sometimes negative dominant representations of their circles, are submitted to a whole series of pressures and constraints coming from their societies, would it be public opinion by the way of the media or corporatist interest groups. For the media, let us note its important responsibility in the relation of often misunderstood sociopolitical phenomena such as islamism - a subject which has been remarkably treated by Allan Thompson in the 1993 issue of ELIAMEP's *Southeast European Yearbook*²⁷. With regard to the corporatist interest groups, let us note for instance that according to well-

²⁵Jean R. MICHOT, "L'Islam et l'Occident : concurrents ? partenaires ?", *ADAPI-Lv*, n°15, 1994

²⁶Bichara KHADER, "Le pont et le fossé. La Méditerranée dans les échanges économiques euro-arabes", *Les Cahiers du Monde arabe*, n°64, 1988

²⁷Allan THOMPSON, "Fundamental Misperceptions : The media and the Islamic revival", in Theodore A. COULOUMBIS, Thanos M. VEREMIS & Thanos DOKOS (eds.), *The Southeast European Yearbook 1993*, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, 1994, pp. 189-203

informed circles in the United States, the "clash of civilizations" thesis would be used to prove the existence of a new danger - of a new foe (after the communist foe) - to convince the American people and its representatives of the necessity to maintain the Defense budget at its present level²⁸. However that may be, is the political decision-maker - within the limits of his cognitive capacities - finally not fully responsible in all conscience?

Before wrapping up, let us sum up the main points of the thesis of this paper in eight points.

First, in order to study the problematique of democracy in an islamic context, one has to resort to social sciences' instruments of analysis, and not to Koranic texts or discourses of islamist theoreticians disconnected from their past or present historical contexts. The problem of democracy has preoccupied Latin-American, African and Asian researchers in the social sciences. So, why the Arab-Muslim world would be so exceptional that we would not use the same tools of analysis. Besides, there is no such thing as incompatibility between the Arab-Muslim world and democracy as exemplified by the fact that democracy works in other islamic contexts, like Malaysia or Turkey.

Second, islamism, as an expression of political opposition to the post-colonial authoritarian regimes, along with feminist movements, Human Rights' organizations and other political or professional forces - all what constitutes the rising civil society -, is one of the driving forces of political transition in the Arab-Muslim world, sometimes in democratic terms. This is due to the crisis of legitimacy of nationalism on which were based post-colonial Arab states, and for which we can distinguish (1) political-ideological, (2) socioeconomic and demographic and (3) cultural-ideological factors.

Third, we saw how islamist forces can lead in some cases to the political opening of regimes which perform a "survival strategy" through their parliamentary inclusion in the political system. The issue : "once the polity opened, do islamists constitute democratic forces in themselves?" remains an open question, which can only be tackled on a case by case basis.

Indeed - and this is the fourth point - islamism is multifaceted and diverse, assuming various characters in each country and within each country. It has to be analyzed in its

²⁸Mohammed Abed AL-JABRI, "L'Islam et l'Occident. «Choc des civilisations»? - Avenir des relations?", Paper presented at the International Seminar on "L'Europe et l'Islam : Dynamiques et Convergences", Toledo (Spain), 1996, April 11-13, p. 4.

geographical and historical perspectives. We must avoid generalizations presenting Islam and Islamism as the enemy replacing communism and the Soviet Union, as it is indirectly suggested in Samuel P. Huntington's thesis.

Fifth, cultural differences are to be relativized and a distinction should be made between "substantial" differences and aesthetical differences. The latter particularly play a subtle role of differentiation deriving from the psychological need for demarcating oneself from the West. So the actual prominent use of the Islamic reference in the contemporary Muslim societies. This should not be considered as antinomic with the adoption of modernity itself. It is the modernity in its arrogant Western hegemonical imposition which poses problems.

Sixth, whatever cultural differences, should they be "substantial" or aesthetical, it is the way political actors - on both shores of the Mediterranean - instrumentalize them which determines the co-operative and/or conflictual character of their relationship. Differences in themselves do not unavoidably lead to conflicts. This is the ethical challenge political actors face in this problematique. In this respect, respect for "otherness" is crucial.

Seventh, democracy should be viewed as a process. It emerged as a concept and a practice in Athens, took roots in emerging industrial Europe and yet has to be protected every day from corruption and subversion. In the Arab-Muslim world, the concept is perceived as linked to its Western cultural roots, yet there is a popular quest for democracy. But democracy is a continuing education process and should not be purely reduced to an electoral game. So we should not fall in the trap of confusing real democracy, based on the respect of the law and the "legitimacy of the difference"²⁹ with formal electoral democracy.

Eighth, we think that democracy cannot be sold "key-in-hand". Rather it should emerge as a popular demand taking into consideration the cultural identities of Arab-Muslim societies. Indeed, democracy is often perceived as a Western concept, and, even worse, as a selectively applied Western concept. There are Southern demands for contributing to the elaboration of universal norms in the "New World Order" on an equal footing with the actually dominant West.

We hope we contributed somewhat to open out new horizons in our reflection about "Democratization in the Arab-Muslim World", maybe sometimes against the current of some dominant representations in our societies or in our political, media and scientific circles and as the "state's privileged story tellers", since we were condemned to write a story, we hope we helped writing another story,

²⁹Ali Oumlil, *La légitimité de la différence*, fi Char'yyat al-Ikhtilâf, Rabat, 1991

a better one, full of promise for a better understanding, peaceful and respectful relationship between the two shores of the Mediterranean.