Political Islam and democracy: the case of Algeria

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In A. Hadenius, *Democracy's Victory and Crisis*, Cambridge University Press, 1997

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Texte intégral

The majority of political scientists studying democratization in the Third World avoid Muslim countries due to the difficulty posed by Islam religion which is intricately linked to politics. Indeed, analysis of the relationship between Islam and democracy is only speculative when separated from historical experience. As a religion, Islam does not take sides for or against democracy. The importance for this discussion is the human interpretation of religion in relation to political conflicts. I will deal with the issue of Islam and democracy throughout the Algerian experience from this perspective.

The bid for democratization made by Algeria between 1989 and 1992 is of interest, for it sought to combine two features. The country was (a) trying to free itself from an authoritarian regime, while (b) remaining Muslim at the same time.[1] Following violent riots in October 1988, Algeria adopted a multiparty system, and in February 1989, a constitution institutionalizing the contest for power came into force. As a result of this constitution, some sixty political parties emerged; one of these, however, demonstrated an imposing strength at once - both for the number of its militants, and for the favorable response it met on the part of the working classes. Indeed, in June 1990, the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) swept the local elections and won control of 55 per cent of the local councils, and was in the lead following the first round of voting in the general election of December 1991. The army responded by canceling the second ballot, thus putting an end to the process of democratization, which had only lasted three years. The justification invoked by the army was that elections should not serve the purposes of a party that threatened democracy. Since that time, Algeria has sunk into violence, with around 60,000 deaths between January 1992 and January 1996. In this chapter, I shall examine why democratization failed in Algeria, and I shall explore the relationship between democracy and the political dimension of Islam by emphasizing that the Islamist movement is a contradictory product of modernity and that it meets ideological limits impeding the construction of a modern state, and that, nevertheless, democracy is possible in the Islamic countries because democratization of institutions and liberalization of society are two historical processes and their rhythms of evolution are different.

The influence of the army on the political system

One reason why democratization broke down m Algeria was that the army wished to avoid any sudden change of political regime, for this would have exposed its leaders - especially its field officers - to legal proceedings and squarings of accounts. One obstacle was therefore the leaders fear of being taken to court for past mismanagement and bribery. This fear was not unfounded, for the state monopoly in foreign trade had fostered considerable embezzlement and overbilling in contracts with foreign companies. The managerial elite were seeking a smooth transition, and the victory of a single parry - Islamic or otherwise - frightened them. This is an undeniable reason for the breakdown of the democratization process; indeed, it helps to explain why democratic transitions have come to a halt in many Third World countries (such as Nigeria, where elections won by a non-Islamic party were canceled). In Argentina, generals accused of ordering the torture and assassination of opponents long obstructed democratization. In Algeria, after the elections won by the ISF were canceled, and as repression has increased, this factor has assumed a greater complexity. The number of people jailed, tortured, or killed has complicated any negotiations aimed at the restoration of civil peace, for animosity between people has turned to hatred. The situation involves a powerful process of self-destruction. Either the present situation will continue, and hundreds of lives week after week will be lost; or one side will prevail militarily, costing tens of thousands of lives.

The conflict has taken such a bloody turn because the physical sur vival of the protagonists is at stake. The ruling elite felt physically threatened, and after an unsuccessful attempt to neutralize the Islamists by any and every means, has decided to exterminate them.

This situation can be explained by the army' s attempt to manipulate the democratization process. Until February 1989, the leaders of the military clearly favored the continued monopolization of political power by the National liberation Front (NLF). But as mis system reached its limits, they came to believe that they could revitalize the NLF by offering it some opposition. For them, democratization meant an institutional reorganization of the political system for renewing the NLF elite and introducing market practices. Thus conceived, democratization would not affect the unwritten law of the Algerian political system according to which the source of power is the army. It bears noting that the army has always appointed the president, and appointees to government positions have required its approval. Furthermore, the ministry of defense unofficially controls both the ministry of the interior (on which the police and administration depend) and the ministry of justice.

Military leaders did not fear elections, for they believed the NLF would eventually form an alliance with the ISF in the national assembly, and indeed would invite it to join in a coalition government - and that army preeminence in the political system would be respected at the same time. But the Islamists' resounding victory meant that the ISF could control me national assembly alone, and could form a government without military approval. In asserting their independence from the army, the Islamists had made clear their intention to form a government in which the ministry of defense would no longer control the Justice and interior ministries. The ministry of the interior would regain its sovereignty vis-à-vis the ministry of defense, and the ministry of justice would resist the pressures of the security services. Officers would become individually vulnerable in the face of the administration they had once

controlled, and which now had slipped from their hands. Not only was power - as something to be plundered, and as the basic means of domination - escaping the army's control, but the new situation would expose military leaders to legal proceedings for embezzlement and corruption.[2]

In a word, democracy is the process by which power changes hands without violence or force. Democracy is the means by which a political system works and develops in a pacific manner, while accepting changes in the political regime. Holding or gaining power by force - which is contrary to the very principle of democracy - means that the political order is not consensual, and is not the result of a majority choice. This takes us back, in a way, to T. Hobbes' methodological hypothesis of a *state of nature,* or, even better, to H. Arendt's, who took the view that, as long as force regulates the contest for power, society is still in the *prepolitical* phase. [3] The major contradiction of Algerian democratization resides in the fact that the military leaders tried to democratize the institutions while at the same time maintaining the political system at a *prepolitical* level, and while continuing to serve as the source of power themselves. In any political system, there can be but one source of power - the tyrant in an authoritarian system, and the electorate in a democracy.

Might this imply that the Islamists are attached to democracy, and to the idea that the electorate is the only source of power? This is not certain, for the Islamist movement is riven by a profound ideological and political contradiction: it expresses, on the one hand, the wish of the working classes to play a part politically; but it lacks, on the other, the ideological means to materialize such an aspiration,

The Islamist movement: a contradictory product of modernity

The people's protest; a modern pattern of political behavior

Generally speaking, the Islamist movement, in its anti-authoritarian and working-class dimension, is the product of the wish of the masses to enter the political fray (from which they have been excluded by the institutions of the authoritarian single-party regime). Until October 1988, political life in Algeria was dominated by official events, which the press would describe in a manner contrasting with the reality of everyday life. In addition, rumors circulated in the streets about antagonisms between various vested interests in the elite. The exaggerated attention shown the comings and goings of the president, and the loud publicity surrounding ministers' routine activities, contrasted sharply with the alleged passivity of the population (who on television were only shown cheering the rulers). The political system was centered on the ruling elite and founded on the exclusion of the masses, who were unable to make their voice heard about which national leaders should be chosen, or about which social and economic policies should be adopted.

Social protest took a religious turn because it was hard for the Algerian leaders to repress opposition expressed in religious terms. In this respect, the Islamist movement does represent the people's wish to assert their existence vis-à-vis the fossilized political system that had been born in the resistance to the colonial power. By embracing Islamism, the street disturbed

the political system's peace of mind. The street had, as it were, broken into the political scene, and become the actor who insists that the state is a public affair, not a private one. In this sense, the Islamist protest is a modern phenomenon, for only mod ernity allows the masses to play a political role.

In medieval society, politics - which was regulated by the logic of patrimonialism_ was the exclusive business of the aristocracy and the king's court. Only after the English and French Revolutions, the urban riots of the nineteenth century, and the Russian Revolution did political systems open up and integrate the working classes. Aside from the Russian Revolution (which repeated the "gagging" policies of the previous regime), these overtures resulted in citizenship in Western countries. An expression of this is the fact that elections are regularly held for choosing representatives to public office.

From this point of view, Abbassi Medani and Ali Belhadj, the two leaders of the ISF, are closer to the European model than to traditional Islam. They are closer to Robespierre and Lenin than to Mawardi or Al Ash'ari [4]. For Muslim tradition forbids the uprising of the people, condemning it as *fitna* .[5] Obédience to an unjust prince is preferable to *fitna,* say the doctors of the law of the faith. This traditional Islamic rule excluding the masses from the political scene is violated by the Islamist protest. Islamist leaders reject the accusation of *fitna,* and justify their struggle by asserting that their opponents are impious. Although traditional Islam accepts rebellion against an impious prince, Algerian presidents - from Chadli Bendjedid to Liamin Zeroual - have all claimed to be attached to Islam, and so they cannot be impious according to Islamic law. Article 2 of the constitution, moreover, stipulates that Islam is the religion of the state. From a religious point of view, rebellion cannot be justified in Algeria. As mis rebellion is not founded m religion, then, it must be explained by new Muslim aspirations reflecting the influence of modernity.

Content of the Islamist claims

If we examine further why me Islamist message meets with such a response from the working classes, we discover it is because of the social nature of the claims the message conveys. The message concerns neither the redemption of believer's souls in the beyond nor the promise of paradise for the masses. It has to do with jobs, housing, transportation, running water, health care, etc. [6] It condemns, furthermore, corruption in the civil service, and defends the constituent's dignity in the face of a harsh, arrogant and scornful bureaucracy. In a word, it demands social justice, equality, and an end to privileges. Let us look more closely at these demands.

In the medieval social model, whether European or Muslim, the prince handed out neither material nor immaterial benefits to his subjects; he simply guaranteed their safety. Princes and other lords received incomes from sinecures and various taxes, and exploited labor by means of serfdom and the corvée. The population were completely subject to those who held power (through tallage and the corvée). This reality gave birth to the myth of the prince who was just and good, and who aided the poor and the meek. According to this myth, however, the humble and weak do not demand of the prince that he be kind and hand out benefits. Rather, the prince's kindness is the result of his own initiative. In the Islamic tradition, Omar Ibn Khattab is viewed as the just prince and the model for other princes. He became a model of justice because the princes who succeeded him were not troubled by the destitution of the poor, the widows, and the orphans, who requested the prince's favors and appealed to his humane feelings and faith.

In the modern model, destitute social groups rebel because they consider that, if they fall below a certain level of poverty, they have a right to rebel against the prince. Such revolts and riots are started by people who are convinced that they have social rights, and that these must prevail. Demanding respect for social rights is a recent form of political behavior - in the spirit of the kind of modernity that sparked off the idea that it is the duty of the state to assist the needy. This concept of social rights is the foundation of the welfare state, the aim of which is to integrate the underprivileged social classes into the political system by means of social policies guaranteeing distribution of goods and ser vices. The state thus seeks to avert riots by working on their economic and social causes. As the right to vote is not enough to ensure civil peace, the state intervenes to minimize social exclusion and the marginalization of entire sectors of the population. Thus, the relation between the prince and his subjects differs, bom in form and in substance, from that between the state and its citizens.

But if the state claims the monopoly on violence in order to assure everyone's security, it will become a welfare state, insofar as the protection of life involves rescuing those in economic need. This dynamic is contained in the Hobbesian contract:

And whereas many men, by accidents inevitable, become unable to maintain themselves by their labour; they ought not to be left to me charity of private persons; but to be provided for, as far forth as the necessities of nature require, by the laws of the commonwealth. For as it is uncharitableness in any man, to neglect the impotents; so it is in the sovereign of a commonwealth, to expose them to the hazard of such uncertain charity. [7]

In this same perspective, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen affirmed in article 21: "Public assistance is a sacred debt, Society owes subsistence to less fortunate citizens, either by finding them work or by securing the means of existence of those who are not in the condition to work."

In a word, the demand for social rights is a recognition of the modern state. Therefore, community would like the state to entirely assume its prerogatives of guarantor of security and solidarity at national community level This indicates that the autarky of social groups as we know them (family, chins, tribal groups, etc.) has faded away to be replaced by a representation of social bonds which transcends blood ties and local mechanisms of solidarity. Modernity has consisted, precisely, in destroying such old forms as villages, extended families, and tribes.

The same goes for the condemnation of corruption. Such a proscription implies the notion of a public service. Corruption is considered evil only when society has become aware that public office should not serve private ends. But in the past, public office was venal and an institutional source of wealth. In the precolonial Maghreb, a civil servant could raise revenues for his own use, a form of excise called "jah." [8] The amount collected for "jah" depended on the civil servant's rank. In one form or another, "jah" still exists, but it is viewed as abnormal by constituents. It can be observed from the top to the bottom of the state, but public opinion condemns it as corrupt. This same public opinion has forgotten that "jah" was once part of the local political culture. The Islamist message condemns corruption, forgetting its origins in the ancient "jah" practices of traditional society.

Yet the condemnation of corruption does not necessarily signify that people have assimilated all of the elements of modern political culture. For this condemnation results from an opinion held by most Algerians that a certain given amount of wealth exists, which should be

equitably shared by the members of the national community. They believe there is enough of this wealth to go around, and that it would afford a decent living to each and every family, were it not for corruption and the embezzlement of public assets. Corruption is thus seen not as an abuse of power in itself, but as an immoral practice preventing the fair distribution of riches. For the Islamist militant, the economic crisis results from the bad apportioning of wealth attendant upon corruption. The relationship between the economic crisis and low productivity is not truly felt, because wealth is regarded as God's gift, or that of Nature, and not the fruit of work. This pre-Ricardian conception of material wealth leads the man in the street to believe that, if incorruptibles were appointed to positions of responsibility, the distribution would return to something equitable, that all would receive their due, and that the crisis would vanish. But who can offer such guarantees? Those who fear God, in other words the militants of the ISF!

As far as the claims to dignity, social justice, and equality are concerned, these are inconceivable in traditional society, which is divided into social groups of unequal legal status and rank. A society composed of nobles and commoners, of aristocrats and plebeians, *of Khassa* (the elite) and *'amma* (masses), *of chorfa* (religious nobility) *and jouad* (war nobility) - such a society can hardly aspire to equality. Such an aspiration would be interpreted as a will to breach the moral code. In its demand for equality, the Islamist message denies these structural inequalities of traditional society, and is therefore a new and paradoxical product of modernity. But although new and modem, it fails to introduce a modern political project.

This does not mean that from the view point of the average Muslim there is a differentiation between the religious and temporal aspects of the political arena. In Muslim psychology, if daily living conditions are not satisfactory, it is due to the fact that one has displeased God. Very often, popular religiosity attributes an accident or natural disaster (drought, flooding, earthquake, etc.) to the sins of leaders and other faithful. However, what we must remember is that on the one hand, the aspirations for social justice, equality, and the end of economic and social privileges are the ambitions of a modern society, but that on the other hand, the average Muslim believes that he can obtain these ambitions thanks to religion only by the believer serving God and observing the religious commandments.

The ideological limits of the Islamist movement

Islamist militants are the children of modernity, both in their political attitude toward the state and in the content of their social claims. They could not, however, be conscious actors of modernity if they came to power, because they have no institutional, political project likely to support the claims they voice as political opponents. Modernity is the transition from the prepolitical to the political age, as defined by H. Arendt. For the latter, modernity is the contest for power without the resort to violence. Once in power, however, Islamists would remain in the prepolitical age, since they have no project tending toward a contest for power without the recourse to violence. There are two reasons for this: first, they reject the notion of man's sovereignty; second, they consider power to be something substantially and for ever in the hands of God.

The notion of sovereignty

J. Bodin's discovery of the sovereignty of man is crucial to the constitution of a political landscape which does not depend on the natural or divine order. Without sovereignty, there can be no representation. Originally, Bodin referred to sovereignty as held by the prince or the state. It is useful to recall that the idea of sovereignty has evolved by many stages. Originally, sovereignty belonged to God, and the monarch had to conform to the divine will from which he derived his legitimacy. With Jean Bodin, the monarch became sovereign and affirmed his autonomy from the church. The state subordinated divine will and made it an instrument of the monarch's power. This concept evolved, however, so that in time it was asserted that only the electorate was sovereign. This idea is expressed in constitutions in such phrases as "sovereignty is the property of the people." This means the people are endowed with a power - sovereignty - which they *pass on* and *delegate to* representatives, whom they elect at regular intervals. This is what elections are about, the basis principle of democracy. [9]

Contesting royal absolutism, the French revolutionaries of 1789 declared that sovereignty belonged to the nation and not to any individual, whoever it may be. However, the problem of absolutism would not be so easily solved, since every individual identifying himself with the nation and speaking - by the force of the arms -in the name of the Nation proclaimed himself to be the possessor of sovereignty. The dictatorial and totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century built their political ideologies on the premise that sovereignty belongs to the nation. In fact, the nation is an abstraction, an idea; so making sovereignty belong to the nation produces the same political effects as making it belong to God, to martyrs, to me army, etc. The notion of sovereignty only got rid of its idealism - the seed of dictatorship and absolutism - when it was bound directly to the electorate. It was only at that moment that the concept produced its full effects, definitely freeing the political sphere from mysticism which had until then marked the political history of mankind.

Soon after independence, in many Third World countries, the ruling elite proclaimed that sovereignty belongs to the nation, and that their legitimacy stemmed from the fact that they had liberated the nation. In affirming that sovereignty belongs to God, Islamists do not take a step back vis-à-vis the regimes they oppose. They only replace one abstraction by another. Even more than that, this substitution has received a favourable welcome by the man in the street for whom taking sovereignty from the hands of the rulers means preventing them from being unjust and limiting corruption. These two political positions - those of the military and the Islamists - referring to the negation of the political sphere, express a predetermined conception of man and social relations, negating the political sphere. The refusal of man's sovereignty is the ideological justification for the absolute domination of the governed by those in power.

But the Islamist message rejects this idea of popular sovereignty -without which there can be no democracy. Islamists do not object to the idea of elections as such, since the *choura* (consultation) responsible for designating the *imam* or *calife* incorporates the elective principle, even if in an embryonic form. The voter - whether enjoying this status within the framework of tax qualifications *(choura)* or on account of universal suffrage - lacks the *power* delegated by the electorate of Western democracies to those it elects to enact laws in its name. The *imam* or the *calife* is not elected, he is appointed, chosen. The process of choosing a leader does not, as with the Hobbesian contract, specify that the people should give up their natural rights to those chosen to protect them. [10] At the mosque, the contracting parties do not represent the whole society and, fundamentally, the chosen person will not have "legislative prerogative." We must understand this expression to mean only the capacity to interpret the *sharia* and not the power of making laws. [11] Understood as such, "legislative

prerogative" belongs to the Ulemas for they alone have the power of "tying and untying" *(Ahl al hal oual 'aqd).*

The man in the street aspires to participate in the choice of the ruler and would not understand why the choice belongs to a restricted body of electors. Hence, Islamist movements do not oppose universal suffrage; Islamist militant expects the electorate to choose a candidate who knows the divine laws, in order that these might be better implemented. This candidate is not elected to enact laws - only to ensure the application of divine law. To a certain extent, then, the Islamist militant favors a religious political order based on the principle of elections. Is this possible in theory and in practice? The answer is negative for the following reason.

The notion of power as a vacant seat

Democracy consists, politically speaking, of a number of procedures by which the electorate at regular intervals chooses those who are to hold power. This is the golden democratic rule, and to be effective, it requires freedom of speech - in order to allow the opposition to express itself as such. But this golden rule also implies a conception of power vital to democracy: mat the *seat of power is a vacant seat* (Lefort 1986: 27), and that the representatives designated to exercise power in the name of the majority occupy only temporarily a seat which, by nature, is vacant. [12] Without this conception of power as a vacant seat, there can be no democracy. Islamists do not regard the seat of power as vacant. It has always been and always will be occupied by God or by the idea men have of God. The men appointed or elected to exercise power do so with the sole aim of applying divine teachings. But an election of this sort would be empty, meaningless. Indeed, elections are not even necessary in such a context; it would suffice if some authority or other simply appointed the most literate and learned persons in religious matters and entrusted them with the responsibility of running the community. In Islamist political ideology, elections are not a necessity; however, some accept the idea since most believers call for elections in order to be able to choose their leaders. Although refusing to grant their leaders me power they do not regard men as possessing-sovereignty-most believers do not wish to be denied the opportunity of choosing their leaders.

There was once a debate among the doctors of the law concerning the official title given to the *calife.* Etymologically, the word means "substitute." His official title is *Khallifatou Allahi fi ardihi,* which means "Substitute for God on His Barm," Some doctors of the law criticized this title, arguing that the *calife* could not substitute for God; rather, he replaces the Prophet, himself sent to Earth by God. For God occupies the seat of power eternally, and is therefore the only Sovereign. Use *calife* is appointed to replace the Prophet by enlightened men with a thorough knowledge of divine law. In other words, sovereignty does not belong to the people, and the latter are therefore not in a position to pass it on to their representatives. The seat of power is not vacant, and the voters/believers do not send representatives to occupy a vacant seat temporarily. In the event of being elected, those representatives placed in power by the voters/believers are expected to serve Him who holds eternal power: God. Elections are thus superfluous; for in a democracy, elections are the ebb and flow by which voters transfer sovereignty to a vacant seat. With no sovereignty, and with no vacant seat, this transfer is meaningless and without purpose.

The Koran nevertheless designates man in general as *calife* of God on Earth. Thus God makes man Ins representative on Earth. But there is a basic difference between affirming that man - that is to say all men -is the representative of God on Earth and proclaiming that a single man among them is. While the first case gives all men a responsibility towards God in the quest to

live on Earth in conformity with divine law, the second case gives this responsibility to one man towards all men. By distinguishing himself from other men, the *calife* substitutes himself for God. While the first case has no political effect, the second has an effect of great importance, for it provokes a transfer of the allegiance owed to God on to one man. In proclaiming the *calife* the substitute of God on Earth, the political order presents itself as a divine order in which the obédience of subjects is as natural as obédience to God himself.[13]

The democratization of institutions and the liberalization of society

The Islamists' inability to build a democratic political order is essentially due to their denial of popular sovereignty, and to their belief that the seat of power is eternally occupied by the notion of God. These two elements are not, however, absolute obstacles to democratization, insofar as Islamists are themselves divided as to how opportune elections are. If the elective principle is accepted, together with that of the alternation of power, a democratic transition will have been set in motion, and as time goes by the people will less and less easily relinquish their right to elect their leaders. Through elections, the notions of popular sovereignty and of power as a vacant seat will progressively take root in the political culture of the electorate, without the latter being clearly aware of this.

One could object at this point that such considerations do not suffice to found a democracy, which consists also of public liberties, equality of the sexes, secularization of the public sphere, etc. But the latter are not the foundation of democracy; rather, they derive from it It is thanks to political democracy - power as the object sought in a peaceful confrontation - that these notions have spread, as society liberalized on account of the struggle of elites through literature, the press, human sciences, schooling, social work, etc. The liberalization of society is not a condition of democratic transition, although it can trigger the process.

Political democracy fundamentally means popular sovereignty and power as a vacant seat. Without these two elements, power cannot be the prize sought in a free and public competition. On the other hand, such arrangements can characterize a society where a portion of the population is deprived of the right to vote, all candidates must belong to a certain faith, catechism is taught at school, blasphemy is legally punished, and a party claims to be religious on the sole condition that it acknowledges public sovereignty and does not consider power its own by right.

If democracy is limited to its political definition, it can be imagined in societies that have not been liberalized. The liberalization of society is the result of an evolution in men's political history, and it has been strengthened every time me idea of popular sovereignty has gained ground in the majority. This is why eliminating religion from the public sphere is not a condition of democracy. In many democratic countries, religious symbolism is strongly present in the public sphere. Religion is compatible with democracy when the former does not regard itself as the legitimate holder of power, for democracy is not atheistic, and it does not demand that citizens be so either. Democracy is a religious. Hobbes political atheism is not incompatible with the citizen's faith, as long as external demonstrations of this faith, in the public sphere, do not go beyond certain limits.

Democracy consists of two aspects: the first is political and relates to the choice of leaders by the electorate; the second concerns the liberalization of society (equality of the sexes, freedom of speech, autonomy of the individual, religious tolerance). All Islamists reject **the** second aspect of democracy, but they are divided on the first. Some believe the choice of leaders by the electorate is compatible with Islam; others object to it because of what it entails, i.e., popular sovereignty. The fact that Islam ists are likely to accept elections paves the way for democratization in Muslim countries. The objections of Islamists to the second aspect of democracy do not constitute an insurmountable obstacle to democratization. The liberalization of society is the fruit of an evolution in mentality and political culture, and by its nature it evolves and broadens endlessly. It developed in Western countries as the history of these societies unfolded. To this day, judging by the hostile reactions to voluntary abortion both in the United States and in Europe, individual autonomy is not accepted by large sections of public opinion. Moreover, when European countries legitimized elections, the liberal ideology - which is the basis of democracy-was not as sophisticated as it is today. For an entire century - from 1848 to 1945 - elections took place in France in which women could not vote. The liberalization of society is a consequence of political democracy and not an essential precondition. It can be felt in daily life through the imperceptible changes in the symbolic representations which structure social ties while ensuring cohesion between individuals in the national community. Weapons cannot modify symbolic representations that are rooted in the past and in the collective unconscious. A non-liberal or non-liberalized society can be a democratic society in which power is gained through elections. The best example is India, which has been a parliamentary democracy since its independence, notwithstanding all the sociological archaisms that characterize Indian society.

Political democracy means elections, a legal opposition, respect for other's freedom of speech, free labor unions, and an independent judiciary. On the basis of these principles, the masses take part in political life, and citizenship is built. Moreover, these principles will *eventually* reshape me imaginary political world of the believer, who will no longer fed the need to resort to religion to make himself heard.

Thus, democratization in Muslim countries will not be achieved against the will of the Muslims, or with their physical extermination. It will be accomplished with them, or not at all, for at least three reasons. The first is that political Islam was bom from the local political culture, and was an outcome of the history of the national liberation movement. [14] This ideological reality is deeply rooted in society, and it would be pointless to use violence against it: it would simply foster martyrdom and confer political legitimacy upon the Islamists. The second reason is that political Islam is the bearer of the popular discontent fueled by high population growth, rampant unemployment, an acute housing crisis, and deep social disintegration. The third reason is that it expresses religious concern in the face of the social upheavals of recent decades. Religion is trying to assert the permanence of its values in a changing society in which identity landmarks are blurred. [15]

It would therefore be a mistake to wait for all political parties and currents of opinion to embrace liberal ideologies before setting the democratic process into motion. Democratization simply requires that the principles of alternation and legal opposition be accepted by all concerned. If we were to await the advent of political parties which defend liberal ideological values, Third World countries in general - and Muslim countries in particular - would be running the risk of never emerging from authoritarian systems.

In conclusion, the Islamists have no future as founders of a political regime. Without realizing it, they undoubtedly nurture aspirations for modernity, and even for democracy, but they have no political model for institutionalizing such aspirations. That is why they are condemned to being strong as opponents of non-democratic regimes. In power, they would quickly contradict the aspirations of the masses who had supported them. I term *fruitful regression* the process by which Islamists would lose their popularity, allowing democrats to win over many categories of the population which formerly had favored the Islamists. Indeed, democrats could attract many voters with the ideas *of sovereignty* and *power as a vacant seats* thus enriching local political culture and no doubt contributing to the initiation of the *social liberalization process.*

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Notes

[1] In the preface to their book, O'Donnel, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) stress that, in view of the specifities of Islam and of the link between politics and Islam, they had decided not to include Muslim countries in their study.

[2] This does not mean that power, after slipping from the army's hands, would be exercised by people interested in democracy. Any political project devised by a religious movement is anti-democratic, for it grants sovereignty to God, i.e., to those who speak in God's name and who believe themselves to be invested with a divine mission allowing them to tall off those they consider their opponents. Religious feeling implies elements of self-sacrifice and denial that brook no contradiction. When it deals with politics, furthermore, it requires all citizens to subscribe to the same political project, or even to belong to the same political party - which is the very denial of a democratic way of life. But religiom feeling is not religion, the latter having been perceived is various ways through the centuries.

[3] Arendt (1970)

[4] To learn more about medieval Islamic political thought, see Rosenthal (1958)

[5] What is called *fitna* in Islamic tradition (upheaval against legal authorities) is also condemned in the European tradition. The first thinker who did not condemn it was Locke. One of the differences between Hobbes (1960) and Locke (1966) is that me latter legitimizes the right of resistance against an unjust Prince which does not respect the natural rights of the citizens. In affirming the legitimacy of resistance. Locke distinguishes himself from the thinkers of the social contract who preceded him and who did not dare go so far

[6]See Addi (1992b)

[7] Hobbes, (1960: 227).

[8] See Cheddadi (1980)

[9] John Locke (1966) was the first to elucidate the relationship between *trustor and trustee*. It is not coincidental that this modem political theorist uses the notion of *trust* when referring to voters, who entrust representatives with their sovereignty. (The latter, in turn, can betray this trust by acts of tyranny or absolute power which encroach upon the people's rights.) J.J. Rousseau (1977), by contrast, does not address the issue of trust, for he regards sovereignty as the property of the people, and thus as somedimg winch cannot be delegated. Sovereignty is an attribute of the general will, and it cannot be delegated to individuals

[10] The Hobbesian contract is a myth, but the designation of the *calife* is also a myth. In reality, this designation is the result of a balance of power in the community between the competing forces

[11] See Schacht (1964)

[12] I borrow this notion of power as a vacant seat from Lefort (1986).

[13] In the Koran, the word calife (in me sense of Vicare or Lieutenant of God) is used nine times: two in the singular and seven in the plural. In the singular, it designates Adam (sourate II, verse 30) and David (sourate XXXVIII, verse 26) as Lieutenants of God on his Earth. But

in no case whatsoever does the word have the meaning of political leadership either in the plural or in the singular.

[14] See Addi (1994)

[15] See Addi (1992a)