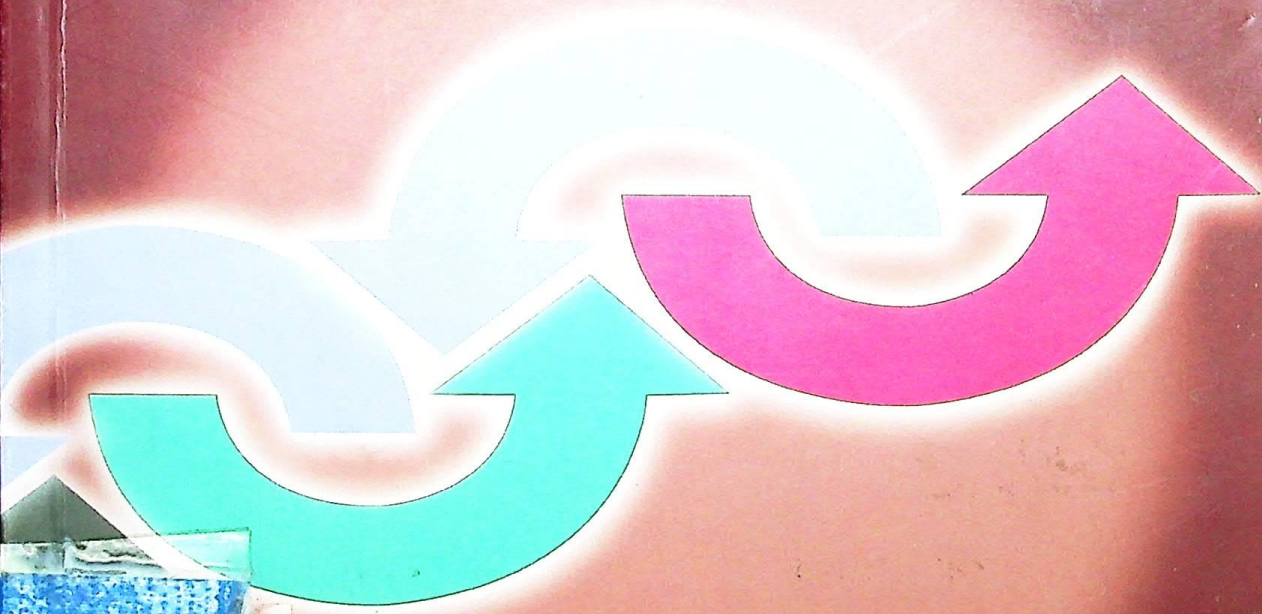


# Political Transitions in the Arab World

Part Three

Contemporary Paradigms and Cases

Edited by  
Roger Heacock

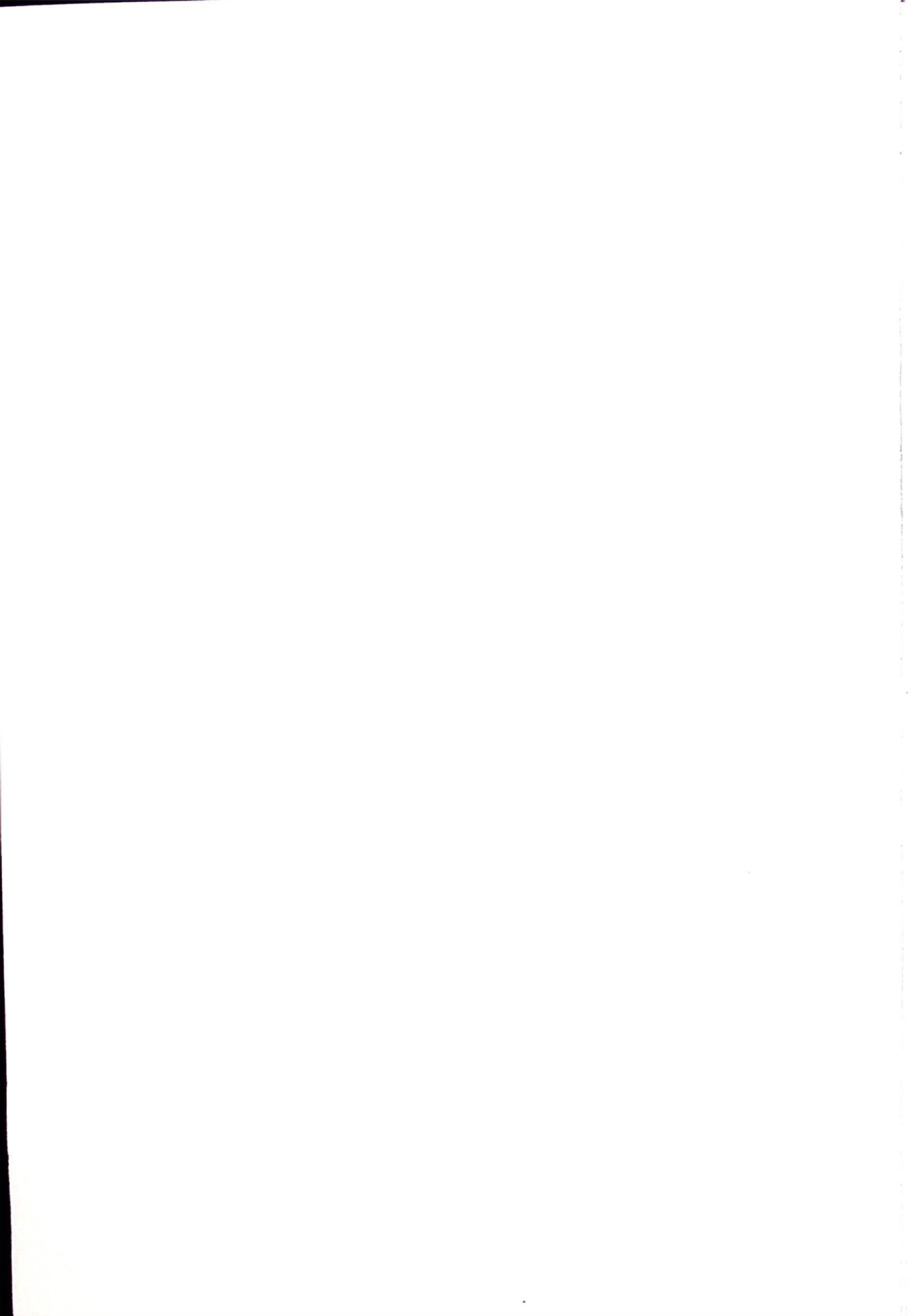


2002

Models and Cases in the  
International System -5-

جامعة بيرزيت  
BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY

معهد ابراهيم أبو لغد  
للدراسات الدولية





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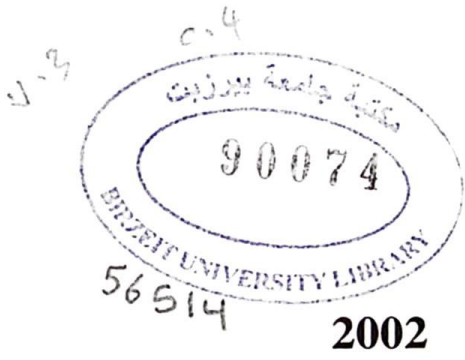
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معهد إبراهيم أبو لغد للدراسات الدولية  
Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of  
International Studies (IALIIS)



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## INTRODUCTION

*Joni 'Asi*

The debate on political transitions as applied to the Arab world (see volumes one and two of this series) is ongoing, and the applicability of one or the other of the extant models to this region is a lively one, as the present set of studies demonstrates. Most of the arguments advanced below are based on historical and descriptive data, but theoretical considerations are not absent, in particular those that tend to call into question the universality of democratic transitions while stressing their importance as guides to analysis and even to behavior. It is in this spirit that the authors, in addition to the first chapter dealing with the key political transition in the Arab Mashreq during the late Ottoman period, examine the cases of Egypt, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority.

Henry Laurens shows that the years 1878 to 1882 constituted an important transitional era in the history of the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces. It is during that period that the Ottoman Turks (the Romans of the Islamic world, as Albert Hourani described them) had to make adjustments in their system of rule, aimed at consolidating the position of the state in the international arena. This meant reinforcing the Ottoman center at the expense of the provinces. Continuing with traditional decentralized policies would inevitably mean losing ever more control over the peripheries (including the Mashreq) in favor of the European Powers. This resulted in a 're-centralization' of Ottoman government, which in turn put an end to the traditional autonomy or semi-autonomy of the Arab provinces. Another, and related reason for this trend, we are told, is the increasing burden of military expenditures, especially in the face of Russian political and military pressures on the borders of the Empire.

Max Weber's vision of political legitimacy, as expressed in his last book, *Economy and Society*, may be considered a suitable theoretical framework for the present volume of modern and contemporary experiences in political transitions. In the chapter on political communities, he gives expression to his concern for unity as an overriding value. This has caused some people to attribute to Weber an excessive admiration for strong military establishments as the guarantee for national unity over the long term. Others have suggested that such a reading is superficial and misguided. Randall Collins<sup>1</sup> for one suggests another reading of the text. According to him, Weber did not really center on the purely internal organization of society. Instead, he thought the relevant concepts were imperialism and nationalism, and the link between them. According to Collins' reading of Weber, politics is an outside-in process. External military relations determine the internal political makeup and orientation of states. At any event, Weberian political legitimacy can be one of three types: charismatic (where the center of authority is personal), traditional (where it is inherited through religious or family practice) or legislative (where authority is based on the rule of law), the concern being with the nature of legitimacy and not with its source. And in order for legitimacy to be conferred upon the ruler by the people, they in turn need to have the type of emotional strength based on their being a "political community" with the sense of a shared destiny.

Turning now to the historical model discussed by Henry Laurens, it is seen that external pressures, as well as the excessive losses in human lives and property resulting from successive Ottoman-Russian wars, contributed to the emergent feeling within the Arab provinces in the late 19th century that they had been marginalized for the sake of Europeans and Turks. This coincided with internal social and cultural developments epitomized by the spread of



the rapidly increased access to the printed word on the part of vast sectors of the Arab populations. This combination of external and internal factors led to the rise of political movements, such as Syrian nationalism, Arab nationalism and Islamism. These movements largely occupied political space in the Arab world during the twentieth century.

Helga Baumgarten's contribution may likewise, and even more explicitly, be perceived in a Weberian perspective, as seen by the use of the concept of patrimonialism, and the question of political transitions in this part of the world. The concept of neo-patrimonialism developed over the past quarter of a century, notably with the contribution of Eisenstadt, who attempted to apply it to the third world. Even more relevant in this regard is the work of Bratton and Van de Walle, who used the concept in their study of African countries and their institutions, notably the presidency, as well as clientelism, with the use by the former, resorting to the latter, in the quest for political legitimacy (something they call institutional neo-patrimonialism). Contrary to the doubts expressed by some specialists, Baumgarten believes that this term is the best means for explaining the nature and degree of changes in the Arab context. She drives her arguments home through her treatment of the Arab state as a neo-patrimonial political rentier state.

The Egyptian case, to which, incidentally, Baumgarten alludes in her application of neo-patrimonialism to the Arab world, lies at the core of Kamal Al Astal's contribution. He identifies two notable characteristics of the Nasserist political regime: popular mobilization and bureaucracy. Popular mobilization was an essential tool of the regime, but carefully controlled by means of the three bureaucracies which were the army, the administration and the party. Such a regime was neo-populist and bureaucratic to be sure, but not neo-patrimonial, something which better suits the post-Nasserist regimes of Sadat and Mubarak, with the

simultaneous ideological softening of the regime. Despite any criticism that can be leveled against Nasser's regime, it must be recognized that the goals set at that time could not be realized in the short run, and required a period which was denied the country because of the international (cold war) and regional (Arab-Israeli) configuration. At any rate Nasser managed, to transform Arab nationalism from a cultural and intellectual nationalism (as expressed by Michel Aflak) to a popular and mass nationalism. He also transformed it from an idea serving foreign interests (as in the days of Sharif Hussein) to an Arab movement that resists the idea of being at the service of foreign interests and states, and seeks to play an independent role at the local, regional and international levels. It is notable that these Nasserist strands are today mainly expressed today in the Islamic stream, which may be viewed as a new type of 'non-secular' Arab nationalism.

In attempting to come to terms with the question of transition in the Palestinian National Authority, it may be useful to refer to the use of the (ultimately Hegelian) notion of "political society" put forward by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan,<sup>2</sup> and which they contrast with "civil society" (consisting of national groups and social mediation). Political society, for them, is the sum of interactions between domestic political groups in a given social formation, which affect political decisions leading up to beginning of the process of democratic transition. These groups may be inside or outside the institutions of the government in question. In the opinion of those authors, a consensus between the groups making up the political society is a prerequisite for democratic transition.

George Giacaman's piece represents an attempt to project the future of the Palestinian political system by studying its pre-Oslo past. In that historical period, he explains, the "PLO example" was forged, which over-determines the prospects



for transition in Palestine. Linz and Stepan's concept of political society is a useful prism for understanding the role of the PLO example, since the pre-Oslo phase in which that example was created is that during which Palestinian political society was created and developed. At the same time, it encompassed civil society. Alongside, and subordinate to, the political parties or factions, were also the various unions and groupings purporting to represent corporations of various types, as well as women, students, and the like. In other words, the PLO example is one in which civil and political society are combined, the former being subordinated to the latter. For Linz and Stepan, in order for democratic transition to occur, political society should be stronger than civil society (as in Palestine). But the two societies must remain distinct, which in Palestine, based on the PLO example, is not the case. Giacaman, on the other hand, believes that the key to the (future putative) democratic transition in Palestine is to be found in the development, which he does not believe to be sufficient as yet, of a vibrant and effective civil society.

The Lebanese case shows that other models need also to be sought out to explain the variety of experiences in the Arab world. One may, for example, find agreement among political élites and groups in favor of transition, without the actual development of a democratic system. The Lebanese particularity, of course, lies in the fact that the political consensus was forged with the objective of making peace among sects, and preventing the total domination of one over the other. This is what Nadine Picaudou demonstrates, when she shows Lebanese society to be a pluralistic one, constantly seeking consensus among its sects. The Lebanese version of democracy, therefore, is one that does not seek clear majorities through which to guarantee stable rule, but on the contrary, one that seeks to create a political balance

## Introduction

that will guarantee peaceful coexistence within the society, on a sectarian basis. The Lahoud-Hariri-Berri trio is intent upon dividing up the state's institutions and its resources. This balancing act stands in for the notion of citizenship and the political and social free will that it implies, and prevents it from developing. There can be, she concludes, no end to the tribal variety of pluralism, followed by the strengthening of the Lebanese state, without the development of a higher sense of belonging, that is to say, citizenship. Worse, if such a transition towards Lebanese citizenship does not occur, according to Picaudou, the fabric of society and polity could break down once again, with war as the outcome.

Graham Usher's contribution adds yet another, albeit negative, dimension to the question of social cohesion in Lebanon. It is the symbolic significance of the Palestinians in Lebanon. Their presence on Lebanese soil is opposed by all the Lebanese communities, and thus lends a kind of unity to a society that would otherwise be bereft of it. It makes it possible to find a consensus on a particular question, and compensates to a certain extent for the lack of consensus in so many other areas. This role of the Palestinians in Lebanon is analogous to that which they play in the Israeli society (both the Palestinians living within the borders of the Jewish state, and those under occupation), where they also provided a somewhat artificial sense of cohesion to a fractured society. In Lebanon as in Israel, the goal for many among the political élite, but also within the population at large, is to bring about, through violent or peaceful means, the emigration of the Palestinians. In Lebanon, this means of course, refusing to consider granting the Palestinians the advantages of Lebanese citizenship, something on which there is also a consensus. As with so many other societies in the Arab world, the legacy of colonial and post-colonial strife has tended to

paralyze what in the case of Lebanon would otherwise be the natural inclination towards a modern, pluralistic, but also democratic society.

Guido Moltedo's contribution is included for comparative purposes. Discussing the example of Italy in the 1990s, he shows us that Europe, like the Arab world, is not entirely shielded from situations of "endless transition", where underlying political changes are negligible or even counter-productive. Moltedo demonstrates that, for a variety of reasons, one form of sclerosis (the Cold War era's Christian Democratic hegemony) may be removed, only to yield another one in the guise of political transition (the ineffective rule of the democratic left). This new impasse at the end of the twentieth century, as Moltedo correctly foresaw, inaugurated an era in which a new and perhaps even more dangerous type of regime, whose political opportunism, in the form of the Berlusconi-Fini-Bossi triumvirate, is matched by rhetorical excesses, social turpitude and cultural bankruptcy. One can only speculate as to the ultimate outcome of this process.

Combining the dilemmas posed raised by the various examples in this volume, taken from the Arab world (and the one European case retained for comparative reasons), one can only be struck by a series of new questions: how does good government articulate with democratic transitions, if at all? Does the record not show that in many cases the correlation is a negative one? Is good government on the part of new (notably third world) states more compatible with one-party regimes of a certain (popular) type? May it not be the case that excessive emphasis on formal democracy (elections, alternation, power sharing, etc.) can yield unwanted and deleterious results in the area of governance and social cohesion? These questions are beginning to be raised in



## Introduction

the scholarly literature, and should some day become the subject of a new and very serious debate.

### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> *Weberian Sociological Theory*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1996.



## Un exemple de transition: les provinces arabes de l'Empire ottoman et la crise d'Orient (1876-1883)

*Henry Laurens*

Une vision trop commode de l'histoire arabe à l'époque ottomane ferait des provinces arabes de l'Empire ottoman, un ensemble stagnant ne réagissant que par saccades réactives aux évolutions en cours impulsées par une Europe conquérante. Inversement une perspective trop endogène conduirait à négliger systématiquement le poids des facteurs étrangers (occidentaux et ottomans) dont le seul rôle serait de provoquer des «déviations» à une histoire arabe dont la conclusion logique aurait dû être la constitution d'un grand ensemble politique unitaire. Ainsi les événements de la décennie finale de l'Empire ottoman (1912-1922) seraient une sorte de trahison due à la duplicité des puissances impériales européennes (France et Grande-Bretagne) et à la défection inattendue des Etats-Unis. Une immense littérature a été consacrée à l'histoire politique de ce moment crucial pris plus comme un commencement des réalités contemporaines que comme un débouché des évolutions précédentes. En conséquence, l'histoire du XIXe siècle a été négligée, en particulier dans ses relations avec les transformations du XXe siècle.<sup>1</sup>

En dehors de quelques événements régulièrement cités comme l'affaire des placards de Beyrouth, l'impact de la crise d'Orient de 1876-1882 a été généralement ignoré et l'importance de ces années cruciales passée sous silence. Pourtant elles sont pleines d'enseignements aussi bien pour la compréhension des dynamiques des changements que pour celles des modalités de

la transition dans l'histoire arabe contemporaine. Pour mieux les comprendre, il faut néanmoins d'abord revenir sur les transitions précédentes dans la région.

### **L'héritage du XVIIIe siècle**

Les acquis de la méthodologie historique actuelle ont permis de dépasser l'opposition entre les différentes formes de temporalité et les événements chers à une histoire consacrée aux événements et à l'action politique. L'anecdote n'est plus cet élément vide de sens, il sert de révélateur aux évolutions en cours et permet de mieux les restituer. Une crise politique permet alors de mieux les saisir, tout aussi bien dans leur rapport au passé qui vient de s'écouler que dans le futur qui s'annonce. Le moment de transition devient alors celui où s'ordonne l'ancien et le nouveau dans une concordance des temps qui n'est pas exclusivement linéaire.

L'Empire ottoman au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle constitue un ensemble décentralisé dont la cohésion est maintenue par le fait que le pouvoir central est resté le pourvoyeur unique de la légitimité du pouvoir. Les dominants, pour pouvoir se maintenir dans leurs positions de pouvoir, ont besoin de recevoir une forme d'investiture de la Porte qu'ils monnaient sous forme de paiement d'impôts. Sinon ils risquent de voir surgir des compétiteurs munis de la précieuse investiture. L'exemple d'Acre est des plus significatifs à cet égard: les Zaydanis, en dépit de leurs fortes assises locales, n'ont pu tenir face à un Jassar Pacha qui appartenait de droit à la classe dirigeante de l'Empire.

La décentralisation reposait sur la cohésion relative d'une coalition de groupes sociaux qui avaient su capter à leur profit l'essentiel des revenus fiscaux des provinces grâce aux différentes formes de fermes fiscales. Les revenus des productions urbaines et rurales étaient ainsi contrôlés par les serviteurs du Sultan (kul,



asker, mamlouk), les familles de ulama détenteurs des magistratures religieuses, les riches commerçants et de plus en plus par des «notables» (a'yan) dont le statut social théorique était celui de «sujets». Avec l'intégration croissante de l'économie ottomane à l'économie monde dominée par l'Europe qui se traduit par l'échange de matières premières d'origine agricole contre des produits manufacturés, un groupe d'intermédiaires composé essentiellement de minoritaires non-musulmans prend une place de plus en plus importante. Géographiquement cela se traduit par un développement de plus en plus rapide des régions littorales avec une diminution correspondante du poids des régions de l'intérieur et de leurs grandes métropoles.

On est ainsi loin de la définition théorique de la société ottomane fondée sur la division fonctionnelle entre «dominants» recrutés en dehors de la société par le biais de la «maison» sultanienne et «dominés» ou «sujets» composant la société et protégés des exactions du pouvoir par une autorité garante de l'application de la loi islamique et des règlements impériaux. Mais la formulation politique du temps reste profondément imprégnée par cette vision des rapports sociaux: si le pouvoir en place trahit sa mission en multipliant les exactions au détriment de la population, il commet des infractions graves envers la religion et le soulèvement devient légitime s'il reçoit la sanction des autorités religieuses.

Le régime néo-mamlouk en Egypte permet de bien illustrer cette situation. En 1770, Ali Bey al Kabir envahit les provinces syriennes en dénonçant les exactions et les injustices du gouverneur de Damas. En 1786, le pouvoir central tente de briser le pouvoir de ces beys indociles en appelant les «sujets» d'Egypte à la révolte contre les traîtres à la religion que sont Mourad et Ibrahim Bey à l'occasion d'une tentative de reconquête militaire qui échouera rapidement. En 1795, les grands ulama soutiennent

une révolte urbaine contre ces mêmes beys coupables d'avoir multiplié les iniquités. Ils obtiendront des engagements écrits de leur part, qui ne seront naturellement pas respectés.

Ainsi les provinces arabes de l'Empire ottoman du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle ne sont pas des sociétés immobiles ou stagnantes. Dans un contexte défini par une décentralisation croissante de l'autorité et par une intégration de plus en plus forte dans le système économique dominé par l'Europe, un certain nombre de groupes sociaux ont réussi à se saisir de l'essentiel des revenus fiscaux et des bénéfices produits par le commerce avec l'Europe. Ils forment ainsi une coalition dirigeante, souvent liée par intermariage (au moins à l'intérieur du même groupe confessionnel). La base économique de leur pouvoir se trouve confortée par l'investiture accordée par le pouvoir central contre le paiement d'un tribut théoriquement annuel, mais dont le versement est souvent volontairement retardé. Le langage politique reste celui de l'Islam avec l'insistance portée sur la moralité du comportement des gouvernants et la vision de la société est toujours celle d'une fonctionnalité sociale fondée sur la division entre gouvernants et gouvernés. Il en résulte que, si une partie importante de la classe dirigeante est issue d'autres régions de l'Empire ottoman, il n'existe pas d'opposition ethnique entre Arabes et non-Arabes. Néanmoins la décentralisation a permis de donner un rôle croissant aux «gens du pays» sous la forme de «notables» dont la place est loin d'être rigoureusement définie dans la définition fonctionnelle du pouvoir. Reconnaisant la réalité sociale des provinces, le pouvoir central est prêt à leur accorder l'indispensable investiture quand il ne peut pas faire autrement. C'est le cas périodiquement à Damas avec les gouverneurs issus de la famille 'Azem. C'est la situation propre du Mont Liban avec un émir et des fermiers fiscaux héréditaires.



## **Le produit des ingérences européennes.**

Avec l'expédition d'Égypte, la menace d'une invasion étrangère devient une réalité concrète. L'Empire ne réussit à maintenir son intégrité que par le recours à l'intégration dans le système politique européen. Le nouveau dogme du maintien de l'Empire devient une règle cardinale de l'équilibre européen de fait devenu mondial. Dès 1821, il va se trouver en opposition avec le principe des nationalités d'abord appliqué aux chrétiens des Balkans.

Si politiquement l'Empire conserve son indépendance, c'est aussi parce qu'il est de fait mis sous tutelle grâce à une application démesurément élargie du système des capitulations et des protections consulaires. Localement, l'équilibre européen se trouve transplanté dans une rivalité de consuls qui tous s'efforcent d'établir l'influence de leurs pays en se constituant des clientèles puissantes.

Pour les élites gouvernementales, la survie de l'Empire passe par l'adoption des règles européennes d'organisation de l'armée et d'administration de la société, définies comme de simples techniques aisément transportables dans la réalité ottomane. S'en tenir aux règles du passé, c'est inexorablement être condamné à tomber sous la sujétion directe d'une puissance européenne. L'impératif de réforme implique une recentralisation qui mettrait fin aux autonomies locales. Les élites en profitent pour mettre fin à l'antique fonctionnalité du pouvoir. Au milieu des années 1830, les définitions anciennes de dominants et de dominés sont officiellement supprimées au profit d'une identité ottomane commune à tous. En pratique, cela signifie que les élites du pouvoir vont maintenant avoir la possibilité légale de se perpétuer génération après génération aux plus hauts postes de l'État.

Ce retour au centralisme d'antan et ce recours aux techniques européennes ébranlent toutes les structures de la société arabe ottomane. La période dite des guerres de Syrie entre l'Égypte de

Muhammad Ali et le sultanat de Mahmoud II est une véritable guerre civile dont l'enjeu idéologique est la façon dont seront appliquées les indispensables réformes en dépit de la très forte résistance qu'elles suscitent. La langue politique reste toujours la même. Chacune des parties accuse l'autre de trahir l'Islam et de multiplier les avanies au détriment de la population.

Dans un premier temps, c'est Muhammad Ali qui profite du mécontentement social créé par les premières tentatives de réorganisation de la société. Dans un second moment, c'est le rejet de l'Etat moderne qu'il tente d'instaurer en Syrie qui est une des causes fondamentales de l'effondrement de sa domination avec l'intervention britannique toujours au nom de la défense de l'intégrité de l'Empire ottoman.

Quand au début des années 1840, les Ottomans rétablissent leur autorité dans les provinces syriennes, ils doivent tenir compte des résistances provoquées par la première tentative d'organisation d'un Etat moderne mais en même temps profitent de l'affaiblissement des forces locales dû à dix ans d'administration égyptienne. Comme la priorité de leur action porte sur les Balkans et le Caucase menacés par la progression russe et les mouvements nationaux d'émancipation des populations chrétiennes, ils ne peuvent consacrer aux provinces arabes que des moyens limités. Les réformateurs se débarrassent même de certains de leurs adversaires en les faisant nommer dans ces provinces éloignées, loin du pouvoir central. De 1841 à 1860, le pouvoir ottoman s'en tient à une pratique de grignotage des autonomies locales qui donnent en apparence aux notables la première place dans le jeu des pouvoirs. Ces derniers, aussi bien chrétiens que musulmans, n'hésitent pas à avoir recours aux protections étrangères pour tenter de contrer la progression, réelle mais peu visible, de l'autorité du pouvoir central.

## **La crise de 1860 et la réorganisation du système politique**

Les principes fondamentaux de la société ottomane étaient remis en cause par la politique des réformes des tanzimat. Son ambition était d'assurer la survie de l'Etat en le rendant l'égal des puissances européennes. Secondairement, la politique des réformes permettait d'assurer le maintien au pouvoir de la bureaucratie gouvernementale dont les compétences et l'importance numérique s'accroissaient constamment avec la modernisation de l'administration. Par la force des choses, les changements ne pouvaient être seulement formels. La fin de l'armée traditionnelle de soldats de métier impliquait le recours à la conscription donc à l'ensemble de la société, c'est-à-dire l'abandon de la division fonctionnelle de la société entre combattants et non-combattants. L'Etat moderne, pour exister et dans le cas ottoman pour simplement survivre, passe obligatoirement par l'adoption du principe d'égalité formelle de ses ressortissants.

Comme en Europe occidentale, la progression du principe d'égalité des conditions sociales pose la question de l'émancipation des non-membres de la religion dominante et donc la remise en cause d'un régime juridique à base religieuse pluriséculaire. Dans le cadre ottoman, le problème est d'autant plus compliqué que les puissances européennes se posent en protectrices des confessions non-musulmanes et que dans les Balkans on passe rapidement de la confession à la nationalité, provoquant la scission de la confession chrétienne majoritaire, l'orthodoxie, en Eglises nationales et suscitant des violences nouvelles qui n'opposent plus seulement musulmans et chrétiens, mais aussi chrétiens entre eux (Grecs contre Bulgares par exemple).



L'Etat ottoman tente de contenir la menace en acceptant de constituer les confessions non-musulmanes en groupes dotés d'une autonomie juridique sanctionnée par une constitution octroyée par l'Etat. Les puissances européennes se portent garantes de cette nouvelle réalité du millet non-musulman, au moins en ce qui concerne les Eglises chrétiennes. Dans les provinces arabes, le passage à l'égalité formelle entre musulmans et non-musulmans est d'autant moins accepté que l'intégration, maintenant pratiquement réalisée à l'économie-monde européenne bénéficie essentiellement aux populations chrétiennes tandis que les classes urbaines de commerçants et d'artisans musulmans souffrent de plus en plus de l'invasion des produits manufacturés européens. Tout naturellement la crise sociale prend un caractère confessionnel qui s'exprime par l'angoisse de voir l'Islam lui-même en danger de disparition. A partir de l'édit émancipateur de 1856, la tension monte pour éclater en terribles violences dans le Mont Liban et à Damas en 1860. Si la défaillance de l'autorité ottomane est nette dans ces régions, en revanche les gouverneurs réussissent à éviter la contagion de la violence dans les autres territoires syriens et en Palestine. La France intervient militairement au nom d'un droit d'ingérence humanitaire sanctionné par l'Europe tandis que l'habile et brutal Fouad Pacha punit durement les responsables supposés du massacre. Une nouvelle fois une conférence internationale réunie au nom du dogme du maintien de l'intégrité de l'Empire permet d'assurer sur le plan juridique la souveraineté de l'Etat au prix d'une autonomie mesurée du Mont Liban.

Les événements de 1860-1861 constituent un tournant majeur de l'histoire de la région. L'action étrangère et la réforme de l'Etat tout aussi bien que les nouvelles demandes de la société ont permis d'avoir enfin recours à l'imprimé. Les premières imprimeries



étaient le fait de l'appareil d'Etat et des Eglises chrétiennes. A partir du milieu du siècle, l'usage se généralise suscitant un monde nouveau d'auteurs et de lecteurs de livres et de journaux. L'apparition du personnage nouveau de l'intellectuel (qui se recrute en partie dans les milieux traditionnels que sont les ulama et les religieux non-musulmans) et la constitution d'un nouveau système éducatif dont la première finalité est de procurer à l'administration rénovée les cadres modernes dont elle a besoin et à la société les professions nouvelles (médecins, avocats, enseignants, comptables...) correspondent aux nouvelles demandes sociales. La définition d'un nouveau savoir lié aux nouvelles pratiques inspirées par le monde occidental (il faut prendre en compte l'action des missionnaires américains) conduit à une rénovation de la langue et de la culture, une renaissance intellectuelle.

Les conséquences des événements de 1860 sont révélatrices des nouvelles évolutions en cours. Sur le plan politique, c'est la fin du grignotage des autonomies locales dans les régions bordières de la Méditerranée. L'énergique reprise en main de Fouad Pacha est suivie d'un désarmement de fait des bandes armées dépendant de tel ou tel notable local. Jusqu'à la fin de l'Empire, le gouverneur de province réussira à lever les impôts et à assurer la conscription en s'appuyant sur de simples forces de gendarmerie. L'armée ne sera utilisée que pour réprimer les soulèvements locaux venant des zones de l'intérieur des terres à proximité du domaine de la bédouinité (cas périodique du Hauran). Le rétablissement de l'ordre public est lié à une action continue de mise en valeur des terres incultes au bénéfice principal de la grande propriété. Les notables ne sont plus seulement les garants de cet ordre public, ils en sont les bénéficiaires et ont tout intérêt à son maintien. Ce cercle vertueux se retrouve en particulier dans l'accélération du processus de sédentarisation des bédouins à proximité des zones déjà en culture. Un certain nombre de chefs

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tribaux deviennent des grands propriétaires fonciers et ces nouveaux producteurs sont les partenaires des courtiers en produits agricoles des centres urbains qui étendent ainsi leur action profondément à l'intérieur des terres. L'extension générale des terroirs et l'intensification des relations commerciales avec l'Europe constituent le contexte favorable à un démarrage démographique, puisque les nouvelles conditions sociales et économiques font ressentir cette région comme sous-peuplée et manquant d'hommes.

En même temps, la crise a attiré l'attention des puissances européennes. Dans les conférences internationales on a étudié la question d'une éventuelle constitution d'une grande province de Syrie, éventuellement autonome. Comme souvent dans l'histoire, le projet politique émerge au moment même où la réalité conduit à une évolution contraire. Jusqu'à l'invasion égyptienne, le pivot géographique, économique et politique était constitué par l'axe politique majeur Acre-Galilée-Damas. Par sa centralité, il empêchait l'émergence d'un véritable Liban indépendant et la définition d'une véritable identité palestinienne. La prise d'Acre par Ibrahim Pacha se fait au bénéfice des centres urbains jusque-là entravés dans leur développement: Beyrouth peut alors prendre son essor dans une relation ambiguë avec une Montagne libanaise autonome, Damas redevient le centre politique majeur d'un espace tourné vers l'intérieur en voie de recolonisation rurale, Jérusalem prend la fonction de véritable capitale provinciale d'une Terre sainte en plein développement autour d'un nouvel axe Jaffa-Jérusalem.

Si l'idée de Syrie n'est pas nouvelle dans l'histoire, au moment où elle apparaît comme projet politique, elle n'en est pas moins élaborée dans un contexte où elle perd son véritable centre géographique dans une fragmentation de ses espaces économiques.

Significativement les premiers intellectuels locaux à reprendre l'idée le font à partir de Beyrouth et non de Damas. Dans le discours du cercle des Boustani, la nouvelle identité en voie d'élaboration cumule les trois termes intégratifs que sont l'appartenance syrienne, arabe et ottomane. La priorité n'est pas à la constitution géographique d'un espace politique, mais à la définition d'un discours permettant d'abolir la différence et par là la violence d'origine confessionnelle. L'impact en est relativement limité dans la mesure où le nouveau discours ne touche qu'une étroite élite urbaine entrée dans le monde de l'imprimé et devenue familière des idées occidentales. Dans la décennie 1860, ce qui importe le plus est la recomposition géographique en cours liée au rétablissement généralisé de l'ordre public.

### **Discours réformateurs et action politique**

La grande crise qui ébranle tout le système international européen au risque de provoquer un conflit généralisé a pour origine les évolutions ottomanes et affecte dans son ensemble l'Empire. Le foyer majeur des tensions est toujours les Balkans, mais l'éclatement de la crise vient aussi de l'épuisement du programme des Tanzimat. Certes les réussites sont notoires: un nouveau cadre administratif a été mis en place et la division des pouvoirs (armée, justice et administration) a été instaurée dans les faits tandis que la mise en valeur de ressources nouvelles se poursuit à un rythme de plus en plus accéléré. Mais l'Etat moderne coûte de plus en plus cher, en particulier dans son aspect militaire indispensable pour faire face à la menace permanente de la Russie. L'endettement devient croissant d'autant plus que l'on maîtrise mal les techniques financières modernes et que l'on est obligé de faire appel aux banques européennes à un coût de plus en plus prohibitif. Inexorablement les ressources de l'Etat sont



hypothéquées au profit des créanciers européens, soutenus par leurs gouvernements. Il s'en suit une nouvelle perte d'indépendance qui complète celles dues aux capitulations et aux protections consulaires.

A la fin des années 1860, c'est la fin de la grande époque des vizirs réformateurs. Aucune personnalité forte ne réussit à s'imposer au gouvernement et le sultanat démontre son incapacité à diriger l'Empire en entretenant une dangereuse instabilité ministérielle sans vouloir définir une véritable ligne politique. L'action réformatrice est poursuivie dans les provinces tandis que le désordre s'installe dans le pouvoir central.

L'épuisement politique se traduit dans la remise en cause de l'autoritarisme, technocratique avant la lettre, des tanzimat. Les multiples libertés de l'ordre ancien n'existent plus, mais on n'a pas accédé à la liberté nouvelle qui semble triompher dans l'Europe libérale des années 1870. Plus grave encore, l'ordre nouveau, en dépit des précautions d'ordre rhétorique prises, a été ressenti comme une remise en cause permanente de l'ordre social islamique idéal. Les ingérences étrangères, loin de diminuer, se sont multipliées. Dans les provinces balkaniques, les nouvelles perspectives ethniques superposent à l'opposition première entre chrétiens et musulmans celle de nationalités en formation à travers les opérations d'invention de la tradition et de réveil national.

Si l'évolution est plus avancée dans les Balkans, elle se retrouve dans le reste de l'Empire. Les anciennes fonctionnalités sociales se sont effacées même si certaines formes d'organisation mamlouke sont réapparues dans l'Égypte des khédives ou la régence de Tunisie. La nouvelle norme de l'égalité des conditions s'est imposée et la volonté des élites gouvernementales de se poser en aristocratie ne contredit pas cette réalité, puisque c'est



le talent et non plus l'hérédité qui prime. Dans les provinces musulmanes qui ont vu leur autonomie consacrée par des traités internationaux, la mise en place de l'Etat moderne s'est appuyée sur une prise de conscience croissante de l'existence d'une identité collective propre. En Tunisie et en Egypte, on s'affirme Tunisien ou Egyptien tout en restant formellement des Ottomans. Certes au plus haut niveau de l'Etat, les gouvernants dotés d'une importante fortune personnelle qui font d'eux des «Grands», peuvent toujours aspirer à de hautes fonctions dans l'administration ottomane en dehors de leur action dans leur propre pays. Mais ils n'hésitent pas à utiliser, quand le besoin s'en fait sentir dans la compétition entre rivaux ou dans la confrontation avec les puissances européennes, l'arme du patriotisme local dont ils reconnaissent l'importance.

Si au début des années 1870, les identités égyptiennes et tunisiennes sont nettement affirmées, la situation est plus confuse dans le domaine de l'administration directe ottomane. Le discours de l'Etat est devenu l'ottomanisme défini comme une commune allégeance à l'Empire en contrepartie de l'absence de discrimination entre ressortissants. Dans la vision commune, au moins de ceux qui ont accédé au monde de l'imprimé, la distinction s'est opérée entre Turcs et non-Turcs là où la séparation est nette du point de vue linguistique et floue quand il s'agit de la religion.<sup>2</sup> On parle ainsi de plus en plus de Turcs et d'Arabes sans que cela soit contradictoire avec une commune appartenance ottomane qui restera jusqu'à la fin de l'Empire la seule référence juridique avec celle de la confession.

Les progrès des communications ont aussi rapproché les musulmans de l'Empire des autres musulmans. L'ouverture du canal de Suez a permis l'intensification des relations avec les musulmans de l'Inde voire de la Chine. L'imprimé permet une bien meilleure connaissance de ce qui se dit et s'écrit au delà des

frontières ottomanes et les idées occidentales ne sont pas les seules à profiter de ces nouveaux courants d'échange. Dans les années 1870, au concept ancien de communauté musulmane dont la représentation symbolique majeure restait le pèlerinage aux Villes saintes, se superpose la réalité nouvelle d'un monde musulman produit des nouveaux systèmes de communication.

Le retour aux temps qui ont précédé immédiatement les réformes étatiques n'est plus dans l'ordre du concevable parce qu'il ne correspond plus aux réalités sociales. En revanche, l'impasse dans laquelle se trouve enfermée la société contemporaine est tangible. Les élites ne peuvent voir de solution que dans une nouvelle avancée dans la voie des réformes, mais en changeant le caractère. Dans le milieu des intellectuels issus de l'appareil administratif ottoman, on conçoit qu'il faut abandonner la pratique de l'autoritarisme pour passer à un véritable libéralisme fondé sur la sanctification des libertés et de la représentation politique par un texte constitutionnel. Ce qui est un nouveau pas dans l'adoption du libéralisme européen est aussi représenté comme un retour à la tradition la plus ancienne de la consultation. Le constitutionnalisme des Jeunes Ottomans a pour but à la fois de neutraliser les oppositions confessionnelles, de mettre fin par là aux ingérences européennes, et de supprimer l'aliénation des musulmans par rapport aux réformes en islamisant le discours. Islamiser les réformes c'est permettre une véritable appropriation du libéralisme qui cessera d'être ressenti comme étant d'origine étrangère.

Toujours dans le monde de l'imprimé, mais cette fois chez les intellectuels issus des institutions religieuses ou ceux plus proches de la société que de l'Etat, on a aussi conscience du danger provoqué par les impasses de la situation présente. Inexorablement la domination européenne progresse dans l'ensemble du monde musulman et l'on place en avant la nécessité de résister à ce que

l'on n'appelle pas encore l'impérialisme. La résistance ne peut se faire dans le cadre des Etats musulmans existants. Isolés, ils n'ont pas les moyens de faire face. La force ne peut venir que de leur union. Aussi la définition des nouvelles entités ethniques n'est pas un fait souhaitable, car il est facteur de faiblesse supplémentaire. L'union de tous les musulmans n'est qu'un instrument de la lutte, car les facteurs de la faiblesse actuelle sont internes à la société musulmane. On a abandonné la recherche d'un savoir positif sur la nature au profit de la récitation psittacique de formules que l'on croit être la véritable religion. On glose sur des commentaires de commentaires de commentaires au lieu de savoir relire les textes fondamentaux afin d'en retrouver la force originelle. Ce dont il faut se débarrasser ce sont des déviations accumulées depuis des siècles pour revenir à l'essence conquérante de la religion, moteur de la transformation de la société. Il ne s'agit plus d'islamiser les réformes, mais de réformer l'Islam en revenant au temps des origines.

Islamiser les réformes et réformer l'Islam aboutissent à la même conclusion immédiate. L'autoritarisme de l'Etat ottoman ou des Etats musulmans n'est qu'un facteur supplémentaire d'affaiblissement. Le constitutionnalisme ou la consultation est la seule voie permettant d'associer la société aux changements indispensables et de mettre fin aux ingérences permanentes de l'étranger. La force des deux mouvements vient de ce qu'ils correspondent aux attentes du moment: la déliquescence de l'appareil d'Etat face aux ingérences étrangères et la nécessité de réadapter le discours politique à la nature islamique de la société. Leur faiblesse profonde est celle de la faiblesse de leur audience: la petite fraction de la société qui a accédé au monde de l'imprimé. Agir sur les masses ne peut se faire qu'en ayant recours au vocabulaire islamique simplifié de la lutte religieuse, du jihad, sans pouvoir réellement communiqué les ambitions plus hautes



du libéralisme et de la réforme religieuse.

Néanmoins le monde de l'imprimé coïncide en grande partie avec celui des autorités sociales. Notables urbains et ruraux, fonctionnaires et militaires, religieux et enseignants sont les adeptes potentiels de ces nouveaux courants idéologiques. Dans la lutte pour le pouvoir, ils constituent un enjeu essentiel. Les «grands» de l'Empire, ministres ottomans, égyptiens ou tunisiens ou «princes» égyptiens, généralement dotés d'une confortable fortune, ne l'ignorent pas. La littérature réformatrice, dans toutes ses tendances, est financée par eux. Il en est de même pour les loges maçonniques, principales structures d'organisation des mouvements nouveaux, qui sont sous le patronage direct de ces gens puissants ayant leurs propres ambitions. Ils n'hésitent d'ailleurs pas à prendre directement la plume et à signer des programmes de réformes faisant d'eux les champions des idées nouvelles. Parallèlement, ils se placent dans le jeu des puissances européennes, apparaissant comme les chefs de «partis» français, anglais ou russes. Sur la scène politique des années 1870, on ne peut faire abstraction des influences conflictuelles des puissances chrétiennes lorsque que l'on veut accéder aux postes de pouvoir et éventuellement exercer une action réformatrice et on renforce sa position quand on peut faire entendre que l'on dispose d'importants relais politiques et intellectuels dans la société.

### **La crise d'Orient et l'apparition d'un mouvement arabiste**

La Bosnie-Herzégovine entre dans l'histoire contemporaine comme point de départ d'une insurrection en juillet 1875. Rapidement le mouvement se propage à la Bulgarie. La répression menée par des troupes irrégulières indignes l'opinion publique européenne émue par les «atrocités bulgares» tandis que les

musulmans supportent de plus en plus mal les ingérences européennes. Le 6 mai 1876, la foule massacre les consuls de France et d'Allemagne à Salonique. Les constitutionnalistes profitent de la situation pour lancer un mouvement populaire dans la capitale. Le 30 mai 1876, le sultan Abdülaziz est déposé. Il meurt quelques jours après dans des circonstances troubles. Son successeur Murad V, proche des libéraux, ému par les événements montre des signes d'instabilité mentale. Il est à son tour déposé le 31 août 1876 au profit d'Abdülhamid.

Le maître de l'heure est le chef des libéraux Midhat pacha. Dans le contexte d'une guerre avec la Serbie où les armées ottomanes se comportent brillamment il fait élaborer une constitution, promulguée le 23 décembre 1876 et censée rendre sans objets les interventions européennes. Abdülhamid, soucieux de maintenir son autorité fait exiler Midhat en février 1877. Le parlement ottoman siégera un an avant qu'en février 1878 le sultan fasse suspendre la constitution.

En avril 1877, la Russie avait déclaré la guerre à l'Empire ottoman. On se bat sur le Danube et dans le Caucase. Après des premiers revers, les Ottomans réussissent à arrêter la progression ennemie lors du siège de Plevna. En janvier 1878, la résistance s'effondre. Les Russes marchent sur la capitale et imposent le traité de San Stefano (3 mars 1878). La Grande-Bretagne refuse de voir le triomphe de la Russie et obtient la réunion d'une conférence à Berlin qui, dans son acte final, réorganise tous les Balkans au prix de lourdes pertes territoriales ottomanes (3 juillet 1878).

Dans les provinces arabes, la mobilisation ottomane s'est faite sans difficultés. Les armées ottomanes, en particulier celles combattantes à Plevna, ont été largement composées d'Arabes. La ponction humaine au détriment de la population arabe

musulmane, surtout paysanne, a été considérable. Les correspondances consulaires évoquent de nombreux villages dépourvus d'hommes adultes. Il est probable que les pertes humaines ont été proportionnellement plus importantes en 1877-78 que dans les conflits postérieurs du XXe siècle.

On comprend mieux le mécontentement général de la population et sa désaffection envers le régime ottoman. Dès juillet 1878, des placards avaient été affichés à Damas contestant l'autorité ottomane au nom d'une identité proprement syrienne:<sup>3</sup>

«La prospérité des nations repose sur deux bases fondamentales: une bonne administration et le règne de la justice. C'étant, les sujets doivent être libres, laborieux, et disposés à sacrifier leur intérêt personnel à l'intérêt de l'Etat. S'ils n'arrivent pas à posséder ces qualités, ils reconnaîtront, mais trop tard, la faute qu'ils auront commise.

«O Syrie, secoue ta paresse et ton indolence. Lève-toi et agis. Il y a déjà trop longtemps que tu gémiss sous le joug et l'esclavage de l'injustice. Infortunée, ne vois-tu pas quel peut être ton avenir? Hâte-toi, car tu es la plus fertile, la mieux située, la mieux douée, en un mot, la reine des nations de l'Orient. Jusqu'ici, tu n'as subi que tyrannie et calamité. La mesure est comble. On t'a ravi tes lieux, on t'a chassé de tes terres. Tes maisons sont en ruine, tes richesses ont disparu, tu es dépouillé par ton gouverneur et par tous ceux qui t'administrent. La justice s'est enfuie de tes tribunaux. On ne fait aucun cas ni de tes savants ni de tes principaux personnages. Tes enfants les plus distingués sont dédaignés et tenus à l'écart. S'ils réussissent parfois à faire agréer leur service, ce n'est qu'à prix d'argent, tandis que l'on distribue les places dont ils étaient dignes à des gens tarés et incapables dont l'intérêt personnel est la seule règle de conduite et ton anéantissement le plus cher désir.



«Tes chefs t'ont abusé et ont semé la discorde parmi tes enfants. Ne sais-tu pas, O Syrie, que la religion n'a rien de commun avec la politique? Ton ennemi le plus acharné n'a d'autre but que de semer la discorde parmi tes fils, chrétiens ou musulmans. Sache que le temps des illusions est passé et qu'il faut compter avec la réalité. O Syrie, marche unie dans la voie de la liberté et de l'action. Tiens les rênes de la justice par ton courage, tu vaincras l'injustice, le despotisme et la trahison.

«Si ton maître étend vers toi une main menaçante, réponds-lui:

« [Salam, le temps de l'oppression n'est plus!] S'il se moque de toi, ne désespère pas O Syrie d'arriver petit à petit à ton but. Pour mettre un terme à la misère qui t'accable, il faut que tu sois unie, persévérante et énergique. Avec de la patience, ton succès est certain. Ne te crois pas délaissée: tu as des amis qui viendront à ton aide et qui attendent. Réveille-toi, O Syrie, le jour est proche. Tes amis vont venir.

«La sagesse exige que tu agisses avec calme et constance et non avec passion qui te serait funeste. Il faut étouffer la voix de l'intérêt personnel, lorsqu'il s'agit de l'organisation et du bonheur d'un pays. Allie la réflexion à la sagesse. Tu suppléeras ainsi à ce que j'aurai pu te dire sur la gloire et sur la constance. Prends garde, O Syrie, de te compromettre et tu seras un jour libre et indépendante. Mon langage est vague, mais tu liras dans ma pensée. Un ami t'avertit et le soin d'exécuter te regarde. A bientôt !».

Ce texte dont il n'existe plus que la traduction française est probablement le premier document politique issu d'un milieu arabe et d'inspiration syrianiste.

Le risque était de voir la tension se transformer en violences confessionnelles comme en 1860. L'administration provinciale a réussi à empêcher une telle dérive. Ainsi le Consul de France à

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Jérusalem note le 21 septembre 1878 une action en ce sens des autorités. Il constate néanmoins que:<sup>4</sup>

«Il n'en est pas moins urgent de voir mettre un terme à cet état d'incertitude et de malaise qui pèse si cruellement depuis trois ans sur ce pays: de ce côté, la population musulmane surtout a supporté avec une abnégation admirable cette longue crise, aggravée encore par les exactions des fonctionnaires ottomans. Toutefois il ne serait pas sage de compter en toute circonstance sur une soumission absolue: «plutôt une domination étrangère, me disait récemment un riche propriétaire musulman de Jaffa que la continuation de ce régime». Il n'est pas seul à tenir ce langage et il est permis de croire qu'un plus grand nombre le pense.»

Cette aspiration à un changement de régime correspond à un moment où la difficile application du traité de Berlin multiplie les frictions avec les puissances européennes et où le début du règne personnel d'Abdülhamid se heurte aux résistances des constitutionnalistes et à l'action des grands personnages de l'Empire refusant une autocratie dont ils seraient les premières victimes. Dans le rapport de forces du moment, le Sultan a été obligé de faire revenir Midhat et de le nommer gouverneur d'une grande province de Syrie (novembre 1878). Aux yeux de tous, le chef des réformateurs libéraux apparaît comme l'homme de l'Angleterre. Cette dernière est devenue la protectrice de l'Empire ottoman contre les Russes. Elle en a profité pour se faire céder Chypre. Pour bien des observateurs, l'Égypte et les provinces syriennes apparaissent comme l'étape suivante de sa progression territoriale sur la route des Indes. La France de la III<sup>e</sup> République, qui sort de sa période de «recueillement» après les désastres de 1870-71 tente de s'y opposer tandis que certains cercles coloniaux commencent à évoquer une possible conquête de la Syrie. En Égypte où la crise de la dette a provoqué une mise sous tutelle des finances au profit de la France et de l'Angleterre (le

condominium), les deux puissances s'opposent dans l'attitude à prendre face à un mouvement constitutionnaliste qui a pris nettement un caractère national.

Tout au long de 1879, les correspondances consulaires évoquent le développement d'une vaste «conspiration» arabe dont le but serait la constitution d'un «royaume arabe» regroupant toute la partie arabe de l'Empire. On soupçonne l'émir Abd al-Kader d'en être l'instigateur, ce qui est peu probable puisqu'il avait refusé une telle offre en 1860-61. En revanche, ce qui est certain, est le mécontentement général de la population et la volonté des grandes familles notablières de rétablir leur autorité au détriment de celle des gouverneurs ottomans. Le consul de France à Jérusalem montre bien cette dimension quand il accuse les Khalidi et les Husseini de vouloir obtenir le rappel de Réouf Pacha, gouverneur de Jérusalem et adversaire de Midhat Pacha dont il est théoriquement le subordonné. L'argument avancé contre le gouverneur est de vouloir remplacer l'élément arabe par des fonctionnaires turcs afin de mieux opprimer le pays. Dans ce contexte, le gouverneur ne peut que recevoir le soutien de la France puisque Midhat est identifié à tort ou à raison aux intérêts britanniques. La diplomatie française va donc prendre la défense du gouverneur contre Midhat et contre les grandes familles de Jérusalem.

### **La répétition générale**

Les années 1880-1883 vont apparaître comme la répétition générale des événements des premières années du XXe siècle. Depuis le début des années 1870, l'immigration juive en Palestine venue de Russie a changé de caractère. Aux personnes âgées venues pour des raisons essentiellement religieuses succèdent des jeunes gens fuyant l'oppression russe et ayant déjà des préoccupations politiques. Le millénarisme protestant britannique



rêvant de la reconstitution d'un royaume juif dans le cadre de l'accomplissement des prophéties y retrouve une nouvelle vigueur. Un aventurier britannique, Oliphant, lance le projet de constitution de colonies juives en Transjordanie, si possible sous protection anglaise. Ses activités sont surveillées étroitement par les Français qui ont dépêché en Syrie un officier, le capitaine de Torcy, chargé d'étudier les conditions d'une éventuelle mainmise française sur les provinces syriennes. Ce dernier a mis en évidence la nécessité d'élargir la clientèle politique de la France au delà des populations chrétiennes en se lançant tout aussi bien dans une politique de séduction des musulmans sunnites que des minoritaires musulmans, druzes et surtout alaouites. Il annonce ainsi ce qui sera les grands traits de la politique française sous le mandat: politique musulmane et division confessionnelle.

Abdülhamid accorde une audience à Torcy en juillet 1880. Le Français dénonce le complot britannique qui regrouperait dans une même action Midhat pacha qui voudrait se faire accorder un «khédivat de Syrie semi-indépendant» et une «colonisation anglo-juive de la Transjordanie». Le Sultan cherche à obtenir de lui la garantie d'un soutien de la France en cas d'éviction de Midhat. Il en reçoit l'assurance. L'ambitieux gouverneur est immédiatement rappelé. Il sera ultérieurement arrêté, interné et assassiné. A la suite de l'intervention française, le pouvoir central ottoman édicte une législation restrictive tendant à prohiber l'immigration juive en Palestine avant même que celle-ci ne prenne un caractère massif.

C'est dans les dernières semaines du gouvernorat de Midhat que sont apparues les premiers placards de Beyrouth. L'inspiration est la même que celle des placards de 1878 à Damas: autonomie de la Syrie au nom de son histoire passée et de l'exemple donné par d'autres provinces.<sup>5</sup> Mais cette fois le ton est violemment antiturc:<sup>6</sup>

### «Enfants de la Syrie.

- «1) Les réformes des Turcs sont une impossibilité. S'il en était autrement qu'est ce qui les a empêchés, depuis 20 ans, de faire ces réformes si souvent promises sur leur honneur à leurs sujets et aux Européens? Que pouvez-vous espérer d'eux?
- «2) Les Turcs, foncièrement arbitraires, corrompus par les intrigues et par excès d'ignorance, ne cessent de dominer, au nombre de deux millions, 35 millions de serviteurs de Dieu. Et jusqu'à présent, il ne s'est pas rencontré parmi nos sages, nos concitoyens, des hommes assez dévoués et capables de sauvegarder nos intérêts, notre honneur et relever notre patrie. Et cependant, nous sommes deux millions, enfants de la même patrie.
- «3) Si leur haute intelligence les empêche d'agir dans ce sens, nous, nous avons voué nos biens et fait vœux de sacrifier nos âmes pour sauver notre patrie aimée. Et il ne nous reste, nous le jurons par Dieu, qu'à troubler la quiétude dans laquelle vous vous complaisez, dussions-nous boire le calice de la mort.

### «Qui vivra verra».

Les contemporains ont généralement attribué cette série de placards à un groupe de jeunes intellectuels issus du cercle des Boustani. Il est significatif que la thématique soit essentiellement syrienne et que la préoccupation porte sur la définition d'une commune appartenance entre musulmans et chrétiens. Il n'en est plus de même pour les placards de la fin de l'année 1880:<sup>7</sup>

«Vous connaissez l'insolence des Turcs, leur tyrannie, leur caractère insociable. Vous savez qu'une poignée d'hommes de cette race vous domine, vous assujettit à son joug et fait bon marché de vos existences et de vos biens. Ils ont confisqué tous

vos droits, détruit votre honneur et le respect dû à vos lois et croyances. Ils ont créé des règlements qui condamnent votre noble langue à l'oubli et ils emploient tous les moyens pour vous désunir et affaiblir vos forces. Ils usurpent le fruit de vos fatigues, vous privent de la libre circulation dans votre pays et de la libre disposition de vos biens. Enfin, ils vous ont fermé toutes les voies du progrès. Ils vous utilisent, vous asservissent et vous traitent en esclaves comme si vous n' étiez pas des hommes.

«Mais, à votre tour, savez-vous que vous avez été les maîtres, que vous avez produit des hommes illustres dans toutes les branches des connaissances, que vous avez relevé des écoles, peuplé le pays, fait de vastes conquêtes et que c'est sur les bases de votre langue qu'a été édifié le Khalifat dont les Turcs vous ont ensuite dépouillé...?»

«Regardez autour de vous. Voyez comment vos compatriotes sont exposés à la mort et quels traitements on leur fait subir. Voyez de quelle manière sont gérés vos Wakoufs. Contemplez ces immenses terrains devenus déserts. . .

«Il faut songer aux moyens de relever votre pays de ces ruines.

**«En avant, pour briser le joug et vous émanciper.**

«Apprenez que les temps sont venus où nous devons reprendre nos droits. Secouez votre torpeur. Unissons-nous et marchons à la lumière de la vérité et de la justice. Enhardissez-vous à l'exemple de vos frères qui ont juré de ne pas reculer avant d'atteindre le but qu'ils poursuivent de délivrer la patrie des mains des usurpateurs ou de sacrifier des existences précaires sur l'autel de la liberté. Offrande pure, sacrifice sacré, s'il en fût.

«Et maintenant, après délibération et accord, le Comité exécutif a décidé de demander ce qui suit, avant de recourir à l'arbitrage



de l'épée. Si vous obtenez qu'on se rende à vos vœux, nous nous occuperons de votre organisation, sinon:

«Nous laisserons de côté les paroles, les regrets, les récriminations stériles et nous ferons valoir nos réclamations à la pointe de l'épée. L'homme qui vit a une longue perspective de jours devant lui et qui peut prévoir ce que le temps enfantera de prodiges».

«Voici les mesures que le Comité exécutif a décidé de demander:

«1) Indépendance en commun avec nos frères libanais, nous garantissant les intérêts de la patrie et le bonheur du peuple.

«2) L'emploi de l'arabe comme langue officielle. Liberté complète de la pensée et de la presse: ouvrages, journaux, publications de toutes sortes. Liberté d'action enfin, suivant les besoins du progrès et de la civilisation.

«3) Emploi de nos soldats au seul service de la patrie pour les soustraire à la servitude des turcs.

«Sur ces points et sur d'autres, nous aurons encore à faire valoir des privilèges et des remaniements (sic) que nous nous réservons de discuter à temps.

(Suivent quelques beaux vers résumant les idées et les appels contenus dans ce placard).»

Si on retrouve l'hostilité aux Turcs, il n'est plus fait mention de la Syrie sauf de façon implicite et la revendication semble s'orienter vers une identité arabe. Le plus marquant est la référence au califat dit arabe.

Cette référence donne un éclairage nouveau à l'interprétation. Le thème du califat arabe est en effet apparu quelques mois auparavant en dehors du contexte syrien. Les grands personnages de l'Empire, le Tunisien Kheireddine, l'Egyptien Halim et l'ancien khédivé Ismaïl s'opposent à l'instauration du pouvoir personnel

d'Abdülhamid qui mettrait fin à leurs ambitions. Ils utilisent les intellectuels réformistes, en particulier ceux en exil en Europe occidentale et lancent une campagne de presse sur l'illégitimité du califat ottoman par rapport au califat légitime dit arabe. Un candidat potentiel est immédiatement désigné, le chérif de La Mecque. Le Sultan a immédiatement compris le danger et dès l'été 1880 s'est posé en chef du monde musulman et non plus en tant que seul sultan des Ottomans. Les correspondances diplomatiques enregistrent le changement de discours et se préoccupent à partir de l'automne du risque d'un vaste soulèvement du monde musulman contre les puissances coloniales. D'abord utilisé par les ambassadeurs à Constantinople, le terme panislamisme va se trouver popularisé par un journaliste français particulièrement bien informé des questions orientales, Gabriel Charmes.

La revendication du califat arabe a un triple foyer: certains cercles dans la capitale de l'Empire ottoman, essentiellement d'origine arabe au sens large du terme (provinces arabes, Egypte, Tunisie), la presse en arabe publiée en Europe occidentale et le mouvement national en Egypte. En Syrie, on est directement influencé par ces journaux et les liaisons sont constantes avec l'Egypte. Il est finalement assez surprenant de voir que l'apparition du thème du califat arabe est assez tardive. Les correspondances consulaires soupçonnent nettement des associations musulmanes de bienfaisance d'être derrière la nouvelle série de placards et non plus le cercle des Boustani. Le changement de références le montre explicitement: il n'y a pratiquement plus de références implicites aux chrétiens et le discours est maintenant inspiré de préoccupations islamiques.

Durant l'année 1881, la guerre des propagandes fait rage entre califat arabe et panislamisme. Face aux ingérences françaises en

Tunisie qui débouchent sur l'imposition du protectorat, Abdülhamid se pose en dernier défenseur de l'Islam. Le sort de la Tunisie, puis l'année suivante de l'Égypte montre que la séparation d'avec l'Empire ottoman conduit à l'imposition d'une domination étrangère chrétienne. Au lendemain de l'occupation britannique de l'Égypte, il n'est plus question de contester l'autorité du sultan. Seule la presse publiée en Europe occidentale continue encore un moment de porter la cause réformatrice, mais les cadres du mouvement sont dispersés. Certains passent au service des puissances européennes, en particulier de la France, d'autres se réconcilient avec l'autorité ottomane.

### **Les recompositions**

Plusieurs explications peuvent être données à l'échec du mouvement réformiste. La perte de la Tunisie et de l'Égypte a montré les dangers du séparatisme. Le Sultan a éliminé l'influence politique des grands de l'Empire qui, après 1883, sont dans l'incapacité de s'opposer à son pouvoir personnel. Le monde des notables et des fonctionnaires s'est rallié à son autorité.

Les correspondances consulaires françaises évoquent à partir de 1881-1882 une demande extrêmement forte de francophonie, en particulier dans les élites musulmanes. C'est vers cette date que le français supplante définitivement l'italien comme langue étrangère vernaculaire. Cette généralisation de la pratique du français, largement au delà des communautés chrétiennes, se comprend tout aussi bien par la nécessité de disposer d'une langue d'accès à la modernité européenne que par le choix du français comme seconde langue de l'administration, indispensable pour faire carrière. Être moderne pour un fonctionnaire ottoman c'est connaître le français.<sup>8</sup>

Le choix de la langue française s'explique pour plusieurs raisons. Les contacts avec la modernité occidentale se sont d'abord faits



## Un exemple de transition

par l'intermédiaire du corps diplomatique, or le français était la langue universelle de la diplomatie. Les premiers réformateurs des tanzimat étaient des diplomates et l'extension abusive des pouvoirs consulaires a rendu obligatoire la communication directe entre les responsables ottomans et les représentants des puissances européennes, entraînant à partir du milieu du XIXe siècle un déclin des institutions drogmanales. La France était de loin le premier investisseur étranger dans l'Empire ottoman et menait une politique particulièrement active en Méditerranée. La plus grande partie des missionnaires catholiques dans le monde était française et les catholiques ont mis sur pied un vaste réseau scolaire dans l'ensemble de l'Empire ottoman, relayé pour la population juive par l'Alliance israélite universelle. Ainsi à la demande de langue française commune à l'ensemble des composantes de la société ottomane correspondait une offre qu'aucune autre puissance n'avait la capacité de fournir. A la fin du XIXe siècle, les écoles francophones constituent la plus grande part du réseau scolaire moderne de l'Empire ottoman.

Au début des années 1880, les responsables français comprennent l'importance de l'enjeu et en dépit des lois laïques se donnent les moyens d'encadrer et de subventionner l'offre en langue française. L'extension de cette francophonie devient la marque d'appartenance à une civilisation levantine étendue à l'ensemble des rivages de la Méditerranée orientale ottomane. Les Français s'enorgueillissent de cette réussite et n'hésiteront pas à parler au début du XXe siècle, d'une «France du Levant» fondée sur l'adoption volontaire de la culture française.

Dans l'ensemble ottoman, les provinces syriennes se trouvent ainsi privilégiées grâce à l'importance du réseau scolaire francophone. Abdülhamid a parfaitement compris la désaffection de ses régions lors de la crise d'Orient. Il va s'agir pour lui de

désamorcer les contestations tout en affirmant son autorité. Il fait ainsi appel aux élites musulmanes (mais aussi chrétiennes) syriennes qui vont constituer une part conséquente de la haute fonction publique ottomane sous son règne. En même temps, le caractère islamique de l'Etat ottoman d'après le congrès de Berlin est réaffirmé. Le chemin de fer du Hedjaz sera l'expression de cette nouvelle politique. S'il refuse d'accepter le libéralisme politique, il maintient le cap des réformes «technocratiques» tout en rendant crédible la référence islamique les inspirant. De même, il fait de la rivalité des puissances occidentales, puisqu'il ne peut les éliminer, l'instrument du maintien de l'autorité ottomane en interdisant la constitution de fait de toute «zone d'influence privilégiée» (ce que ne sauront pas empêcher les Jeunes-Turcs, ses successeurs). La part faite à la référence islamique et l'intégration des élites syriennes à l'administration ottomane ne doit pas dissimuler le déclin concomitant de l'influence des notables locaux. Les provinces syriennes sont gouvernées grâce à une entente constante entre consuls européens et gouverneurs ottomans. La priorité est donnée aux règlements des incidents confessionnels: au consul, il revient de sanctionner les éléments de sa clientèle compromis dans l'incident, au gouverneur de prendre des mesures contre les notables locaux jugés responsables de l'atteinte à l'ordre public. L'Etat ottoman devient le partenaire exclusif des Puissances étrangères et les notables musulmans ne peuvent plus avoir recours à ces dernières dans leurs conflits avec les autorités.

### **Transition et répétition générale**

La crise d'Orient dans les provinces arabes constitue bien une transition majeure dans l'histoire du Proche-Orient ottoman. Elle se présente comme une contestation du pouvoir ottoman qui ne

se fonde pas sur une réaction aux entreprises réformatrices contrairement aux crises précédentes, mais au contraire qui s'articule directement sur les résultats des réformes dans les domaines économiques, culturels et administratifs. Elle est le produit d'une insatisfaction engendrée par l'écart croissant entre les promesses de l'ordre moderne et les impasses de la situation présente. La demande de libéralisme politique s'accompagne d'une volonté de retrouver une légitimité islamique aux évolutions en cours. Les considérables pertes humaines de la guerre russo-ottomane rendent encore plus insupportable le sentiment de se trouver délaissé au profit de la part européenne et anatolienne de l'Empire. Il s'exprime dans une affirmation régionaliste syrienne rendue problématique par le grignotage permanent des autonomies locales et par le fractionnement géographique de l'espace syrien. Le régime hamidien rétablira l'autorité du pouvoir central grâce à un savant compromis fondé sur le rejet du libéralisme politique et de la décentralisation et le recentrement de l'administration ottomane sur la part arabe de l'Empire et le recours à la légitimation islamique des réformes doublée d'une liberté accrue accordées aux communautés confessionnelles non-musulmanes. Ce compromis peut être défini par la mise en place d'un nouvel équilibre des forces sociales qui se retrouve dans un équilibre correspondant des influences étrangères entre elles. L'allégeance au régime en place s'impose et tout discours de contestation se trouve interdit par une censure vigilante.

Les groupes contestataires ne disparaissent pas brusquement vers 1883. S'ils ont perdu leur base sociale, ils trouvent refuge dans l'exil égyptien et européen. Dans un certain nombre de cas, la filiation est nette entre les contestataires de la période 1876-1883 et le mouvement jeune-turc de la période suivante (plus chez les exilés politiques que dans les mouvements clandestins de l'intérieur). A la fin de la période hamidienne, on retrouve la



même insatisfaction générale qui conduira à accepter avec joie la révolution de 1908 puis à s'opposer avec les mêmes arguments qu'en 1878-1882 à la politique du Comité Union et Progrès.

Ainsi les idées exprimées en 1878-1882 ne disparaîtront pas dans le silence de l'époque hamidienne. Elles vont prendre d'autant plus de forces que durant ces décennies le monde de l'imprimé continuera de s'étendre accroissant l'audience de ces réflexions politiques. Le privilège de ces années 1878-1882 est d'avoir vu pour la première fois apparaître une pluralité de discours, l'arabisme, l'islamisme, le syrianisme qui sont destinés à devenir les courants politiques majeures du XXe siècle dans le Proche-Orient arabe. Il faut naturellement y ajouter ces forces extérieures que sont l'impérialisme en général et le sionisme en particulier. Rétrospectivement ces années 1878-1882 peuvent être définis comme une répétition générale en dépit du silence qui lui succède pendant plus de deux décennies.

Pour en revenir à un cadre général d'analyse de la transition dans le monde arabe, l'exemple de 1878-1882 permet de discerner plusieurs étapes: une insatisfaction générale exprimant une contestation du régime politique en place, qui n'est pas une volonté de retour à une situation précédente mais le produit des évolutions sociales et culturelles qui ont eu lieu sous ce régime, une crise politique avec de multiples ingérences étrangères et l'expression libre donnée aux discours politiques réformateurs, une recomposition politique fondée sur la définition de nouveaux équilibres dans lesquels les évolutions sociales et culturelles trouvent leurs aboutissements au moins provisoires.

La dimension culturelle, simplement définie de façon quantitative par la part de la population ayant accès au monde de l'imprimé et aux moyens d'information moderne, semble être le moteur essentiel du changement et des transitions. Un régime en place

trouverait sa force dans son adéquation momentanée avec les attentes de la population et son niveau culturel. L'insatisfaction serait générée par l'augmentation du niveau culturel sans changement majeur dans le régime politique. Les discours contestataires ne sont pas alors seulement portés par de nouvelles forces sociales, ils sont aussi utilisés par l'élite gouvernementale dans une situation de compétition et de luttes pour le pouvoir. Mais le régime peut se maintenir, en dépit d'une situation de crise, s'il sait procéder aux recompositions nécessaires qui permettent de satisfaire, au moins partiellement et momentanément, aux attentes de la population.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Sauf dans le cadre d'une historiographie nationaliste arabe qui s'est généralement bornée à une énumération de toutes les formes de «résistance» arabe à une domination ottomane oppressive et a multiplié ainsi les anachronismes dans l'interprétation historique.

<sup>2</sup> C'est le phénomène contraire en Anatolie où les turcophones chrétiens de religion grecque ou arménienne sont progressivement amenés à se définir comme Grecs ou Arméniens. De même les musulmans grecophones ou slavophones vont devenir (dans le cadre territorial de l'Empire) des Turcs.

<sup>3</sup> 30 juillet 1878, MAE, Damas cor. Pol. Vol. 11, fol. 174-75, cité par Joseph Hajjar, *L'Europe et les destinées du Proche-Orient III, Bismarck et ses menées orientales 1871-1882*, Damas, Edition Tlass, pp. 1105-1106.

<sup>4</sup> MAE, Turquie, Turquie, Jérusalem, XIV.

<sup>5</sup> Placard mentionné dans une dépêche du 3 juin 1880.

<sup>6</sup> MAE Beyrouth, vol. 23 fol. 183 dépêche du 3 juillet. Placard du 28 juin 1880. Hajjar, Op. Cit. p. 1173.

<sup>7</sup> MAE Beyrouth, vol. 24, fol. 36-47 ; Hajjar, Op. Cit. Pp. 1282-83.

<sup>8</sup> «Among civil officials, the minimum prerequisite for whose careers had historically been the ability to perform the duties of a scribe (kitabet) in Ottoman Turkish, the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of a demand for men with the analogous qualification - again referred to as kitabet - in French. For them, proficiency in French became not only the symbol, but virtually the content, of cultural «modernity». Carter Vaughn Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom, A Social History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, p.144.

## Neopatrimonial Leaders Facing Uncertain Transitions

*Helga Baumgarten*

The Third Wave of democratization, which started in Portugal in 1974, has reshaped the centuries-old problem of system transformation. System transformation has since then been conceived exclusively as the change from non-democratic to democratic systems. This has been consolidated in the wake of the 1989 collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, with the transformation of most former Eastern Bloc countries into new democracies.

The Arab World, together with parts of South East Asia and Africa, has so far seemingly resisted this worldwide trend. Until today, there is nobody, except for partisan politicians, who would claim that this or the other Arab State has started a process of change in the direction of democracy, not to speak of any successful transformation into a full fledged democracy. This has posed a major problem for students of the Arab World. Two approaches have dominated their attempt to confront this perceived exceptionality. One school links the failure of democratization to take hold in Arab countries to the dominant religion there, i.e. Islam. The most outspoken representative of this approach, Samuel Huntington, tends to see a basic incompatibility of Islam and democracy (Huntington 1984:216, also 1993 and 1996: 109-121, esp. 114: “The general failure of liberal democracy to take hold in Muslim societies is a continuing and repeated phenomenon for an entire century beginning in the



late 1800s. This failure has its source at least in part in the inhospitable nature of Islamic culture and society to Western liberal concepts.” )

The second school focuses on the attempt to explain why democracy is absent in the Arab region. In the words of one of the critics of this approach, Lisa Anderson, “violating the ordinary conventions of social science methodology, it often addresses the absence of a phenomenon in a particular place” (Anderson 1995:78). Members of this second school usually start with the attempt to determine the major preconditions for democracy, thus - inadvertently - arguing very much in the vein of modernization theory as used in the fifties and sixties. They invariably end up with either civil society or economic liberalization. In a second step, they are searching, often rather desperately, for the appearance of these very phenomena which they consider alternately as the harbingers of democracy or as major preconditions for a transformation into democracy, in the countries they study or in the region in general.

Studies following this second approach are focusing, therefore, either on real or perceived signs of civil society (see the different studies on Civil Society in the Middle East: Brynen et al 1995, Norton et al 1995, Ibrahim et al 1995), or attempt to over-interpret political openings in the wake of economic liberalization measures as the beginnings of democratization, with countries like Jordan taking the center of attention (Laurie Brand 1992 and 1995, Rex Brynen 1992, Glenn Robinson 1998, Malik al-Mufti 1999).

However, during the last few years, a certain sobering can be observed, probably best expressed by Lisa Anderson (1999:3): “...we students of democratization in the Middle East succumbed remarkably easily to the vain hope that reality would catch up to

theory before we would be required to consider the limitations of the theory itself. The last decade has turned out to be instructive and sobering. Political democratization did not happen in most of the Middle East, and those of us who set out to support and study it were left in many respects normatively disappointed, politically unprepared, and scientifically isolated.”

But it is not only the Middle East which caused a change of attitude in the students of the region. Transformations in other parts of the world, from Asia via Africa to Latin America, turned out to be less solid and successful than expected by students working within the new disciplines of transitology and consolidology (cf. Philippe Schmitter 1995). In the meanwhile, therefore, many studies have directly posed the question, if the third wave of democratization had ended (“Is the Third Wave Over?”, Larry Diamond 1996), or if democracy had been just a moment (“Was Democracy Just a Moment?” R.Kaplan 1997, quoted by Eisenstadt 1999:98,112). Also, and in the same context and against the same background, new terms have been proposed for these “incomplete” or “unsuccessful” transitions to democracy, like “illiberal democracy” (Kaplan 1997,also F.Zakaria 1997), “façade-democracy” (Milton-Edwards 1993), “not liberal-constitutional democracies” (Fareed Zakaria 1997), in general “a great variety of semidemocratic authoritarian regimes” (Eisenstadt 1999:98, Schmitter /Karl 1991).

To sum up, while elections are by now being held in almost every state worldwide, only a few of these states are transforming, or begin to transform, into what Schmitter calls “consolidated democracies” (Schmitter 1995). Eisenstadt speaks in this context of states in which elections are held regularly, but “in which neither the legal institutional guarantees of basic freedoms nor the maintenance of the broader autonomous public are upheld”

1999:98). Or, to quote a recent empirical case from our region, we are confronted with the critique by Ghassan al-Khatib of the political situation in Palestine after the first free elections in 1996, pointing out “the poor performance of the Palestinian Authority in running the affairs of Palestinian society, including the demonstrated absence of accountability, due process of law, transparency and proper services” (Palestine Report 7,3, July 5, 2000: 3).

Against this background, the question imposes itself if the approaches used so far for the study of contemporary Arab systems and the changes taking place in many of them (but also in other areas and states in the South of the contemporary International System) are the appropriate ones, or if time has not come for a critical re-examination coupled with the attempt to try and address the questions posed above in an entirely different way.

This paper, therefore, proposes an alternative approach, addressing the problem, in a first step, empirically, rather than normatively. Instead of asking why democratization, which has (seemingly) started to spread worldwide, is not happening in Arab states, or, more precisely, why the first step in the direction of a transformation to democracy, usually (more or less) free elections, has not been followed by the actual establishment of a democratic system, i.e. the consolidation of democracy, it attempts to take an in-depth look at existing Arab political systems and tries to understand the transformations that can be observed there. Then, in a second step, and lifting the analysis to the level of theory, Arab political systems are conceptualized as representing a particular form of authoritarianism, i.e. neo-patrimonialism.

Secondly, the paper will examine the kinds of change that can be observed in such systems, focusing on the question -firmly based



on the theory of neopatrimonialism - of who is initiating the change, for what reasons, and with what intention.

Thirdly, the regional and international context of these changes is analyzed, leading to the introduction of the theory of political rents. Thus, Arab states, especially the states in the Mashreq, will be conceptualized as neopatrimonial political rentiers.

## **1. Neopatrimonialism**

### **1.1. Theoretical sources of the paradigm of neopatrimonialism**

The study of neopatrimonialism goes back to both, Max Weber in his studies on the sociology of power at the beginning of the 20th century, and Samuel Eisenstadt in his analyses of the problems of modernization in newly independent states in the South in the second half of the 20th century.

It is important to note that both Weber and Eisenstadt developed the paradigm to study specific cases of transformation. Weber analyzed the transformation from patriarchy to patrimonialism, which occurs once an administration and a military force has developed and put at the personal disposal of the ruler (Weber 1972: 133-134, 580-624, 636-653). Weber's studies led him to the conclusion - relevant for our purposes here - that patrimonial rule can co-exist with a wide variety of economic systems (Weber 1972:640), including capitalism. Put differently, this special system of rule is shown to possess a considerable degree of flexibility (posing of course immediately the question of its degree of stability respectively its proneness to change into another system, or, alternately, its capability to maintain itself under a vast variety of changes occurring in its environment).

Eisenstadt conceptualizes the particular form of political systems developed in newly independent states in the South after the end

of colonialist domination, and develops in this context the paradigm of neopatrimonialism (or modern patrimonialism), built on Weber's patrimonialism. According to Eisenstadt, post-colonial, (often) nationalist rulers re-introduce, or fall back on, traditional, i.e. patrimonial, methods of political power and organization in the face of increasing problems of and crises in their states in the post-independence period (Eisenstadt 1973 and 1978). In other words, neopatrimonialism is constituted by the particular articulation of the form of the modern, post-independent state in the South with traditional, i.e. patrimonial forms of personal rule (Eisenstadt 1973: 10-11, 50-68). However, Eisenstadt immediately warns of an exclusive focus on the personalistic aspect of this rule, but rather draws our attention to the basic modes employed by this system in "coping with problems of political life and organization" (Eisenstadt 1973:12). This will be taken up at a later point in this paper, in the analysis of Snyder and Bratton/Van de Walle, who have developed a different terminology, i.e. "neopatrimonial institutions"). Important for our purpose here is the fact, exposed clearly and in much detail by Eisenstadt, that already the old term patrimonialism, especially as used by Weber, "has been applied to societies with different degrees of structural differentiation ... and attests to the possibility of a meaningful use of the term patrimonialism in application to both noncomplex and complex, traditional and possibly also modern regimes alike" (ibid. 12). Like Weber (1972:640), Eisenstadt, therefore, stresses the very wide applicability of the paradigm. Finally, it should be pointed out that patrimonialism, and for that matter neopatrimonialism, differs from other types of social and political systems, not so much based on its structural aspects, i.e. on the dominant personalistic structure of power, but over and above everything else, by its particular mode of coping with problems of political

life and organization. These particular patrimonial/neopatrimonial policies are intended to “assure the continuity of such systems” (43): “The rulers attempted ... to minimize the possibilities of the development of new political orientations and the demands for new types of political participation, or new concepts of political symbolism, and as far as such new political concepts and organizations tended to develop, to suppress or segregate them.” (44).

The common characteristics of traditional patrimonial and modern patrimonial or neopatrimonial regimes, according to Eisenstadt, are therefore,

- “basic modes of coping with political problems
- relations between center and periphery
- major types of policies developed by their rulers
- the general format of political struggle and process” (Eisenstadt 1973:60).

The decisive difference between patrimonial and neopatrimonial systems, according to Eisenstadt, is located, first, on the level of “the political problems which were faced respectively by such traditional and modern regimes, and, second, in close relation to these problems, in the constellations of conditions which could assure the continuity of any specific patrimonial system. The combined effect of both these differences explains some of the crucial characteristics of the neopatrimonial regimes and of their dynamics.” (p.50). Finally, there are “differences in the patterns of political organization, ranging from cliques and kingly household in the traditional sphere to more complex, bureaucratic or party organizations in the modern ones” (p.60). The new problems of neopatrimonial regimes, so the argument of Eisenstadt continues, are first, “the growth of political demands oriented towards the center” (p.51), which in turn created “different problems of expansion” (ibid.).



## Neopatrimonial Leaders

The major dimensions of this expansion are:

- “the establishment and maintenance of some new, broader, unified political framework”
- “the ability of regimes to incorporate new élites within the central political framework and “to include new groups and strata into membership ... and/or new or different symbolic dimensions of collective identity”
- “the ability of regimes to effect possible changes in various new patterns of control over resources and/or their distribution” (ibid.).

Based on this, Eisenstadt concludes that neopatrimonial systems, in distinction from patrimonial systems, tend to develop more systematically internal crises and breakdowns. In other words, “... they vary with respect to the conditions of their stability. It is not that the modern patrimonial (i.e. neopatrimonial) regimes are necessarily more volatile or unstable than the traditional ones, but rather that, **as in all modern regimes, there develops a continuous tendency to change and expansion** “(p.60-61). Obviously, the decisive aspect for Eisenstadt is, that neopatrimonial regimes constitute a specific form of modern regimes, exposed to the challenges all modern regimes have to face, i.e. the challenge of change. Therefore, he concludes, they actually do change.

Still, he maintains, that the “various ‘types’... of neopatrimonial regimes ... could persist in any given society for a long period of time in some sort of equilibrium with a minimal circulation of its respective élites, insofar as its basic constitutive characteristics - i.e., levels of differentiation, political mobilization, as well as the prevalent orientations - did not change greatly” (51).

Based on this discussion, Eisenstadt already in 1973 poses the central research question, taken up again in this paper, “whether

the very patrimonial nature of these regimes limits the possibility of far-reaching changes in displacement of élites and in the distribution of power within them” .... “ or whether even when such revolutionary change takes place these regimes still may retain many of their patrimonial characteristics” (p.59, cf. also p.54-55).

We shall come back to this question at a later point in this paper.

Peter Pawelka (1985), placing himself firmly in this particular epistemological tradition, develops and uses the neopatrimonial paradigm in his important study of the Egyptian State under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. He does so in clear differentiation from the study of James Bill et al, which falls in the trap of an essentialist connection between Islam and patrimonialism, projected in turn into the contemporary Arab state (1994:136-227). While Pawelka developed the most complete and consistent theoretical analysis of neopatrimonialism as the basis for his study of Egypt (see part II of this paper), he seems to have underestimated the inherent potential for change in this type of political system, choosing instead to stress above all its static properties: “The patrimonialism-model explains above all the stabilizing moments of political power ... It does not explain under which conditions patrimonial systems function and when they collapse.” (p.28).

Before taking up the discussion of the potential for change inherent in neopatrimonial systems, the following passage will delineate the main features of the neopatrimonial system, as exemplified by the Egyptian state under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, based on the analysis presented by Pawelka. In a first approach to neopatrimonialism, its main and predominantly static features will be exposed. Then, through a critique of Pawelka’s analysis of nepatrimonialism, its dynamic features will be investigated, following the original argument as presented by Eisenstadt, but also based on some internal contradictions in

Pawelka's neopatrimonialism-analysis.

## **2. Main features of neopatrimonialism (Pawelka 1985:23-32)**

Neopatrimonialism is a system of personal rule, relying both on legitimacy on the one hand, on bureaucratic (administrative and military) rule on the other. Its legitimacy is based on a combination of traditional loyalties and material rewards.

Bureaucracies are used to implement the particular patrimonial (I am using here, following Eisenstadt, the term patrimonial, while Pawelka uses paternalistic. The term patrimonial is preferred over the term paternalistic, because we are dealing here with the very patrimonial modes of coping with problems, which are constitutive for the patrimonial resp. neopatrimonial system) strategies of rule.

- At the center of the system, we find the neopatrimonial ruler. He is responsible for all political decisions taken and implemented through a network of personal relations. Within this network, neither the holders of public office nor the different institutions do enjoy any measure of independent influence or importance. Power is highly concentrated in this system. This refers both, to the level of political leadership, as well as to the level of geographical distribution of power. The neo-patrimonial leader clearly dominates and controls the political élite below him. Not less important, it is the power-center (ruler and élite as well as the capital of the state) which rules society at large respectively the whole territory of the state. Finally, it is the executive power which dominates the system, at the expense of both legislative and judicial power.
- The élite, the political as well as the economic, is situated below the neopatrimonial leader. All élite-members, respectively the different parts of the élite, are engaged in a process of permanent competition and struggle between one



another. The neopatrimonial leader actively encourages this competition. He thereby attempts, usually successfully, to prevent the formation of any real or potential opposition by a process of divide and rule. At the same time, he presents himself as the ultimate political arbiter.

- Legitimacy is a central feature of the system. This legitimacy, both, of the system, and of the neopatrimonial leader, is based on traditional loyalties, but also, and at the same time, on material rewards. However, in neopatrimonial systems, new forms of legitimacy - like elections, parliament, new ideologies propagated through new forms of political organizations like parties, political movements and the like - are used in addition to the traditional ones, and become incorporated into the system (see the discussion in both, Eisenstadt and Pawelka, esp. of parliament and political parties).

At this point of the analysis, however, we shall continue with the argument as presented by Pawelka with the focus on traditional loyalties, while the whole question of new forms of legitimacy will be taken up at a later point.

The state and the neopatrimonial leader are responsible for keeping up social order, for working for the good of society in general, and for the achievement of the major political goals of society and state. Responsibility for the social and economic well-being of society is thus clearly entrusted in the hands of the state and the ruler. They have to provide social welfare as well as economic development. They do this not only via politics, but also through material handouts, often in the form of money payments. This is, obviously, the basis for turning corruption into a systemic feature of neopatrimonial societies and states.

- The political sphere becomes a space reserved exclusively for the state and its representatives, i.e. the neopatrimonial

leader and the élite (here we move to the more negative aspects or characteristics). Barriers against any kind of social criticism, against social as well as political demands, are placed very high, and thus extremely hard, if not impossible, to overcome. Concomitantly, the neopatrimonial leader tries to prevent any autonomous social organization in society. Last but not least does he relate to society at large predominantly via bureaucratic structures.

Obviously, this first sketch projects a predominantly static picture of the neopatrimonial system, implying that change in this system is highly unlikely, if not altogether out of the question. In order, therefore, to investigate if there is any potential for change inherent in the system, it is necessary to take a second look at it.

In a first step, our analysis will go back to the discussion of neopatrimonialism, as presented by Eisenstadt. In a second step, a new look will be taken at the level of the relevant actors in the system, i.e. neopatrimonial leader and élite, based on both, Pawelka and Eisenstadt.

### **3. Neopatrimonialism and the Question of Change**

Eisenstadt, as mentioned above, qualifies the neopatrimonial state as a modern system. Based on this original and for his further analysis decisive starting point, obviously to be placed in the context of modernization theory, very much influenced by it, but also astonishingly free from its inherent limitations - Eisenstadt stresses the role of multiple modern challenges to which neopatrimonial states are exposed. At this point, suffice it to state very briefly the major challenges introduced by Eisenstadt:

- Large scale social mobilization, resulting in new economic, political and social structures (1978:279) with the entry of new social groups into the wider political arena

- “continuous processes of replacement and restructuring of élites” (ibid.),

with the old élites being replaced or even destroyed, sometimes physically, while new élites take over the increasing numbers of élite-positions, especially in the military and in the bureaucracy (ibid.)

- economic changes with a focus on export-orientation, directly connected, of course, with the process of integration in the world-economic system.

As a reaction to these challenges, in the face of never ending new challenges, new demands and pressures for change, new forms of legitimacy are developed and introduced into the system, like elections, modern parliaments, modern party systems and the like. With the changes of the symbols of legitimation, changes in the composition of the ruling groups occur.

Against this background, regime changes in neopatrimonial systems tend to occur quite frequently, with either just members of the ruling group being replaced or with changes in both the élite structure and the policy of the system. (1978: 279-281).

Still, at the end of his detailed analysis of neopatrimonial changes, Eisenstadt reaches the following conclusion: “How can we explain the perpetuation in these societies of patrimonial characteristics and structures?” (1978: 283).

Eisenstadt’s answer focuses on the role of the specific process of integration of these societies in the international system, i.e. on colonialism, and in the post-colonial period on the structures of dependency (1978: 284-285). At the same time, he sees possibilities for change only in the possible impact of these very international forces which have been historically responsible for maintaining patrimonial features in neopatrimonial systems, i.e. foreign élites as well as external support of oppositional, i.e.



dissociated local élites. In order to push our analysis forward, it seems necessary to take a closer look at the decisive level, according to both Eisenstadt and Pawelka, for the possibility of change: the neopatrimonial leader and the top-élite.

In his analysis of the neopatrimonial leader and the élite, Pawelka stresses the systemic quality of neopatrimonial systems, i.e. that élites are engaged in continuous competition and power struggles (and are encouraged in this by the neopatrimonial leader). He focuses on a number of positive impacts on the system from this constant competition, namely the input of new ideas, capabilities and competence into the system. Based on this impact, the system can increase its problem-solving capacity.

If we change our perspective from that of the top-élite to the perspective of the neopatrimonial leader, we arrive at similar conclusions. In order for the neopatrimonial leader to stay at the center of the system, i.e. to keep in power, he must control the process of decision-making, while at the same time being able to manipulate the relevant political structures, i.e. by encouraging élite competition. Pawelka, therefore, concludes that there are clear systemic pressures for innovation within the neopatrimonial system. The neopatrimonial leader must look for new ideas, must encourage the development of new ideas within his élite, must look for and find more capable élite-members, in order to enable the system to develop and to be able to confront ever new challenges. The overall picture is one of flexibility and innovation, with an inherent potential for change. However, like Eisenstadt, Pawelka arrives at a similar conclusion, even if based on a different focus and level in his analysis. In spite of all these potentially positive features of the system, which in themselves point to the potential for change, Pawelka ends by stressing the dysfunctional aspects of the system, with the constant rivalries and power-struggles in the end undermining and even preventing any

problem-solving capacity of the system and leading it inexorably into paralysis and stagnation. Also, Pawelka points out very clearly and convincingly how problematic the system is, because innovation stands and falls with the neopatrimonial leader, i.e. with his capacity for innovation and change as well as his level of skills in balancing the competing forces within the *élite*.

Still, we do rest at this point with two interpretations, leading to contradictory conclusions: one pointing to the inherent potential for change within the neopatrimonial system, the other one stressing the stagnation or static qualities of the system.

A short summary of the results achieved so far seems in place here. Without doubt, the elements most relevant for the problem of transition in neopatrimonial systems are

- The neopatrimonial leader, i.e. the central power
- The *élite*.

It seems, therefore, sufficient for our purposes in this paper, to focus our analysis of the ability of the neopatrimonial system itself to modify, to develop and ultimately even to change, on the neopatrimonial leader and on the *élite*. Obviously, the crucial element here, which links the neopatrimonial leader and the *élite*, is the question of legitimacy. Starting from here, I should like to continue the rather abstract theoretical discussion with some reflections on the possible course which potential movements for change could take on the *élite*-level. Two basis courses of action, originating in the *élite*, could possibly bring about change (these ideas are developed based on research results of transformation-research, i.e. transitology. Cf. Schmitter 1995, also Pawelka 2000, especially his charts).

1. One *élite*-fraction fights against another *élite*-fraction and gains the upper hand.

## Neopatrimonial Leaders

This could occur especially when

- a) this élite-fraction acts in conformity with international hegemonic political and economic trends, like privatization, political openings, democratization etc. and when
- ii) it succeeds in co-opting a new group into the élite, thus strengthening itself against its competitors.

All this presupposes, however, a certain openness of the neopatrimonial leader to go along with this new policy, i.e. an inclination on his part for the potentially positive implications of this policy-change. It requires also, that the neopatrimonial leader refrains from strengthening at this point the anti-reform resp. anti-change group ( or groups) within the élite. This course of development could then, potentially, lead to more or less profound changes in policy, but does not necessarily have to change the functioning of the system per se.

2. Different groups within the élite coalesce and co-operate in order to introduce change. They might thus succeed in either
  - a) changing the leader and putting a new leader from within their ranks at his place, thus again perpetuating the system as such or in actually
  - b) changing the system, by preparing the ground for the introduction of new rules of the political game.

Here, of course, the intervening variable of foreign intervention, of the influence of outside forces, seems to take on special relevance. Eisenstadt pointed to this rather succinctly, as shown above. Before reaching a conclusion, based on both theoretically and historically grounded research, it seems appropriate here, to take a look at a number of historical experiences in different parts of the world with transitions from neo-patrimonial rule, both successful and stillborn. I shall choose here the cases of



Latin-America, Africa and Egypt, because we do have some landmark research done, based on a strong theoretical base and examined through the relevant historical experience.

### **Neopatrimonial transformations examined**

#### 1. Latin America (plus Iran, Zaire and the Philippines - The analysis of Richard Snyder (1992))

In a seminal study on “transitions from neopatrimonial dictatorships”, Richard Snyder proposes to “examine the variables which account for transition to military dictatorships, transition to civilian rule, stability, and revolution as alternative paths of political development for neopatrimonial regimes” (Snyder 1992:379). In the context of “transitology”, Snyder does make an important contribution by directly posing the question about the interconnection between a specific regime type and the very specific transformation processes, which can be observed in the different cases. Also, he does not simply start with unspecified authoritarian systems, but rather focuses on a very special form of authoritarianism, i.e. neopatrimonialism. Finally, he overcomes the normative fixation of most transitologists on the necessary outcome of any transition, i.e. Western democracy and the necessity to judge every alternative outcome critically from this norm.

His conclusions can be used as the basis for further research and deserve to be quoted in full:

“Transitions from neopatrimonial rule can best be understood by analyzing the military’s capacity for autonomous action against the dictator and the strategies and relative organizational strengths of moderate and revolutionary opposition groups. These variables are shaped in crucial ways by the structure of the neopatrimonial state - specifically, the relationship of the ruler

to the military and the state's capacity to coopt domestic élites through patronage - and by the relationship between domestic actors and foreign powers."(Snyder 1992:395).

Clearly, Snyder focuses on the level, proposed above in our preliminary analysis of the neopatrimonial system, i.e. the neopatrimonial leader and his élite. He chooses different groups inside the élite, in this instant his example is the military, to analyze possible venues of action for it. Also, he stresses the importance of cooptation in the relationship between neopatrimonial leader and the élite as well as the opposition.

Finally, he highlights the possible importance of the interference of foreign powers via economic assistance - obviously vital for maintaining the neopatrimonial leader's patronage network, a point, which will be taken up at a later point in this paper.

While Snyder focuses on the military as the most relevant group within the élite in his cases-studies, his conclusions seem valid for other élite-groups as well. Also, his propositions concerning "the difficulty of transitions from neopatrimonialism to democracy"(Snyder 1992:395) are very stimulating. Based on the experiences in Paraguay, Haiti and Nicaragua, he suggests "that democratization can occur in countries ruled by neopatrimonial dictatorships after an intervening period of a more institutionalized authoritarian rule, either military dictatorship, as in Haiti and Paraguay, or party-based revolutionary dictatorship, as in Nicaragua" (ibid.). What are the major lessons to be learned from Snyder's work for the problem of neopatrimonial transitions in the Arab region respectively which research designs should be followed from here?

1. We have to investigate the capacity of different élite-groups for autonomous action against the neopatrimonial leader.

2. We have to analyze the relative organizational strengths of the different types of opposition groups, be they moderate or revolutionary.
3. We should concentrate on
  - the ruler's relationship to the military
  - the state's capacity to co-opt élites through patronage.
4. The relationship between domestic actors, i.e. neopatrimonial leader as well as different élite-groups, and foreign powers (via financial and economic assistance),

must be researched. An extremely important observation, obviously relevant in the case of Arab states in the region, is the proposition that transitions from neopatrimonialism to democracy tend to happen via an intervening period of a "more institutionalized authoritarian rule". We could start from there with the hypothesis, that in a number of Arab states, the possibility for the transition to democracy does exist, as we have experienced in many cases not only short periods (like in the case of Latin American countries), but actually very long ones (stretching over many decades) of institutionalized authoritarian rule (especially Syria). However, this point has to be investigated thoroughly through empirical historico-political research.

Also, Snyder has to be read very critically in this respect because of his sometimes very narrow reading of neopatrimonialism. For he conceptualizes neopatrimonialism over and above everything as a system with a very low level of institutionalization. As soon as a neopatrimonial state develops a more institutionalized system of rule, he calls these systems either military dictatorships or party-based revolutionary dictatorships, leaving it entirely unclear what happened to the neopatrimonial features in these states.

Again, it has to be stressed here, that we need at this point above



all new empirical research based on our new theoretically informed questions, and with a solid comparative dimension, both intra-regional (i.e. focusing on the Arab region) as well as interregional, using comparative research from other regions as a corrective.

Before continuing this line of questioning, however, we shall switch now to the analysis of the situation in Africa, as given by Bratton and van de Walle.

### 2. Bratton and van de Walle's politico-institutional explanation of regime transitions from neopatrimonial systems (1997)

Bratton and van de Walle begin their analysis of transitions in Africa with the introduction of neopatrimonialism as the "core feature of politics in Africa and in a small number of other states, including Haiti, and perhaps Indonesia and the Philippines" (p. 62, interestingly enough, they leave out the Arab region). Based on an analysis of the classical literature on patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism (p.61-62), they then proceed to develop the first part of their central argument:

"When patrimonial logic is internalized in the formal institutions of neopatrimonial regimes, it provides essential operating codes for politics that are valued, recurring, and reproduced over time" (p.63). They therefore use the term "neopatrimonial institutions" (ibid.) and choose to focus in their analysis on "three - albeit informal- political institutions that have been typically stable, predictable, and valued in Africa's neopatrimonial regimes." These institutions are presidentialism, clientelism, and "the use of state resources for political legitimation" (p.66).

In a second step, they try to capture the main differences, "the significant variations in political institutions that evolved across the different states in the region" (p.68), between African neopatrimonial regimes through a typology based on Robert Dahl, distinguishing these regimes "according to the extent of political

competition (for contestation) and the degree of political participation (or inclusion)” (ibid.).

They arrive at the conclusion “that the institutional heritage of neopatrimonial rule has shaped regime transitions in much of Africa.” According to their findings the major differences between neopatrimonial transitions in Africa and transitions from more bureaucratic authoritarian systems are, that “in the institutional context of neopatrimonialism, regime change is more commonly driven from below through mass political protest than initiated by incumbent state élites.” (p.269)

Thus or so it is argued, the relevant level of analysis in the case of Africa is, at least in a first step, the level of society in general, not the level of the élites.

Going (almost) back to the level of élite-analysis, however, in a second step,

Bratton and van de Walle point out that in general in the case of African states the push in the direction of political liberalization is based not on conflicts between moderates and radicals within the élite (as transition research from Latin America and Southern Europe suggests), but rather on “conflicts over access to spoils between insiders and outsiders to the state patronage system” (p.269). In this context, therefore, African “middle classes generally side with emergent movements of political opposition rather than buttressing the old regime” (ibid.).

Finally, the stakes of the political struggle are very high (capturing the state and its resources), and transition struggles are therefore fought hard and bitterly, never based on compromises and pacts. How can their approach and their research results be employed for the study of neopatrimonial

transitions in the Arab region? Possibly the most important analytical progress achieved Bratton and van de Walle is their conceptualization of neopatrimonial practices as political institutions (cf. their detailed discussion on this question and in general the question of institutionalism on p. 274-275, and above all on p.276) and, based on this, their application of a “politico-institutional approach” to their subject, which allows them to put in the center of their study “the reciprocal influence of institutions and politics” (Thelen and Steinmo 1992:15) i.e. “to bring politics back in” ( Bratton, van de Walle p.276).

Proceeding from there, they reach another important conclusion, valuable for a study of the Arab region, namely the limits to the possibility of applying findings from the studies of transition research made in Latin America and Southern Europe to other areas in the world, where different political traditions and different political institutions obviously lead to different trajectories of transformation: “African cases help to demonstrate that many of the findings of the transitions literature do not travel well, in part because they are artifacts of the distinctive configuration of political institutions in Latin America and Southern Europe. This is particularly true of political pacts, for instance, widely argued to be central to Third Wave transitions, but absent from most of Africa” (p.275).

Their study is a major push for the argument that transitions have to be studied empirically in the different regions of the contemporary world system, in order for political scientists to be able to make precise and relevant observations on the impact of global pressures, like the pressure to liberalize both the economy and politics and to introduce democratic procedures, on political systems in these regions. Obviously, we must strive to critically and carefully combine both, the results of transitology



presently representing the hegemonic theory and research design, and the results of painstaking empirical research on particular cases of political systems, their specificities, their historical background, their current configuration and their concrete changes, by posing the critically decisive question, why and how changes in a particular region and in a particular system do take a specific direction (cf. Pawelka 2000, esp. his suggestion for new and alternative research strategies).

If we start our comparison with a look at the two cases of African and Arab neopatrimonial systems, we are immediately struck by some decisive differences:

In the Arab neopatrimonial states, the *élite* level is the single decisive level for analysis. Elites there are much more cohesive and better organized social groups, they differ from their African counterparts in size, homogeneity, and stability. There are no cases in the Arab region of change being initiated from below; rather the contrary, middle classes generally side with the state, not with the opposition, and compromises seem to be the norm rather than the exception, based on the perception by the different *élite*-actors and *élite*-groups, that all of them gain through cooperation, respectively based on the ability of the neopatrimonial leader to keep up cooptation as the central institution in the state.

Finally, it seems that African neopatrimonial systems, compared to Arab neopatrimonial systems, are characterized by a much wider distance between center and periphery, between the neopatrimonial center (neopatrimonial leader and *élite*) and society, by much smaller and less organized *élites*, by much more limited possibilities to use patronage, much more restricted availability of resources needed for patronage, therefore by much less use of cooptation, and, based on all this, by a much lower

level of legitimacy of the system in society at large, but also in those élites excluded from the system of patronage. Still, it comes as a surprise that Bratton and van de Walle do conceptualize neopatrimonialism very narrowly, practically excluding all cases of neopatrimonial systems based on highly developed bureaucracies, a feature after all inherent both in Weber's and Eisenstadt's definition of patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism. Thus, as mentioned already above, they are not able to see the possibility to extend their analysis to the different Arab neopatrimonial states. A final point of criticism, also relevant for the following analysis of change in an Arab neopatrimonial system, needs to be made based on the stimulating essay by Snyder and Mahoney (1999). Snyder and Mahoney focus their critique on the selection by Bratton and De Walle of the broad "Dahlian dimensions of political competition and participation" (1999: 112) as the basis of their typology of African neopatrimonial regimes. They argue that the categories competition and participation do not capture the much more important "variations in the structure of patronage" (like "the degree to which the ruler's clientelist network penetrates state and social organizations and the different kinds of benefits distributed through such networks" (*ibid.*), and therefore suggest for further studies that they should use "a more nuanced typological framework", exposing also core micro-institutions of neopatrimonial regimes like patronage and the like.

They conclude on a more general level, that future research on regime change needs serious conceptual work, based on which the variations in so-called non-democratic regimes can be adequately expressed and captured. Secondly, more finely grained typologies should be developed, superior to the, as they call it "highly aggregated categories of neopatrimonial regimes". Still, Snyder and Mahoney do not address critically the fixation of

Bratton's and van de Walle's analysis on the goal of each and every transition, the measuring point for all transitions being democracy, presented in an almost teleological fashion. Before taking up the suggestion for further research, it seems timely to focus our attention on one particular case of an Arab neopatrimonial system, its structure, its institutions, and the changes it has passed through. This is also necessary in order to build a basis for the application of the neopatrimonialism paradigm to other states in the Mashreq.

3. **Neopatrimonialism in Egypt** (from Nasser to Mubarak) according to Pawelka (1985).

i) Pawelka's analysis of the neopatrimonial state in Egypt

In his analysis of the political system in Egypt under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, Pawelka introduces the paradigm of neopatrimonialism, as shown in quite some detail above. In order to grasp the essential workings of the neopatrimonial system, Pawelka focuses his analysis on the neopatrimonial leader, the élite, the bureaucracy, political parties, and on parliament.

He analyzes very thoroughly both the functioning of these different parts of the system, and the changes occurring in them, thereby drawing a complete picture of the Egyptian system and the changes it went through from the July 1952 revolution until the beginnings of Mubarak's rule after the assassination of Sadat. Without doubt, his book on Egypt is an unrefutable demonstration not only of the applicability of the neopatrimonialism paradigm in postindependent Arab states, but also and above all of the superiority of this approach. After all, Pawelka covers every major political, economic, and even cultural-ideological aspect of Egypt, explains, both theoretically and empirically, the functioning of each and every part, both separately and in cooperation with the other parts; he demonstrates the changes over time, their



functional and dysfunctional aspects, and finally points to the possibilities as well as the necessities for further change.

Major aspects of change concerned leadership styles (with Sadat developing a much more deeply ingrained neopatrimonial style than Nasser, in order to compensate for his lack of charisma, among other things, p. 35), recruiting-patterns for the élite (with a process of demilitarization starting under Sadat, coupled with a broadening of career opportunities, while at the same time the élite under Sadat became more closed, conservative, elitist, and liberal-capitalist in orientation, p.28-34), the changing role of parties (the change from the one-party state to the “multi-party-system”, with entirely new functions given to the parties under Sadat, p.80-94) and of parliament over time (with parliament assuming a more central role under Sadat, giving space and opportunity to the upper middle and upper classes for increased political participation in the system, i.e. a first, still very narrow liberalization). Still, at the end of his analysis of neopatrimonialism at work over time in Egypt, Pawelka concludes that this paradigm, which served him so well in comprehending the Egyptian system, and making it comprehensible to others for that matter, is in essence a static concept, incapable of grasping, understanding and explaining change. Therefore, in order to analyze the developmental aspects in Egypt’s history from the fifties to the eighties of the 20th century, he turns to another theory, the theory of state capitalism and of the state-class and the theory of the peripheral bureaucratic-developmental state, building principally on the work of Hartmut Elsenhans (1981).

This leads us to a central dilemma or problem, which was already posed in similar fashion by Eisenstadt (1978) and which needs to

be discussed in the following pages: can the neopatrimonialism-paradigm explain change or is it an inherently static model, i.e. only able to explain aspects of stability? According to Pawelka, the neopatrimonial paradigm can only explain “interactions inside the state apparatus, as well as interactions between the state apparatus”, i.e. the neopatrimonial leader and the *élite*, and society. It is incapable of grasping and explaining the political and socioeconomic dynamic of the system, as it is over and above everything a static concept (p.102). In particular, “potential change inside the political *élite*” cannot be grasped with this concept, or can only find a partial explanation (p.40).

However, if we go back to the introduction of the paradigm by Pawelka, as well as to its analysis and discussion by Eisenstadt (1973, 1978), we find a rather different picture. Both Pawelka and Eisenstadt stress the far-going changes within neopatrimonial systems, be they changes within the *élite* (*élite*-circulation), in *élite*-recruiting-patterns, new and changing configurations between different *élite*-groups, even the systemic quality of change and flexibility, following from the constant competition between *élites* on the one hand, which is actively encouraged by the neopatrimonial leader, as well as the necessity for the neopatrimonial leader, to keep his place at the center of the system, thereby forcing him to encourage flexibility and change within the *élite* and reaching into the *élite*. Also, to remain on the level of the neopatrimonial leader, his focus on development policies, the pressure on him to do so, in order to fulfill his role as the leader taking care of the material needs of society at large, of the *élite* in particular, and above all his dependence on legitimacy, again in society at large and especially in the *élite*, force him to actively encourage change, to make it possible at the least.

Both Pawelka and before him Eisenstadt have elaborated on this systemic quality of the neopatrimonial system, Eisenstadt

on a very abstract and theoretical level (for ex. 1978:279: “ The neopatrimonial contours of these societies persisted, despite far-reaching social, economic, and political changes within them. Moreover, the neopatrimonial modes of social action influence crucial aspects of these changes ...”), Pawelka both theoretically and historico-empirically. At the same time, both have reached a similar conclusion, namely that although there is a lot of change to be observed in neopatrimonial states, their basic systemic aspects remain constant.

Pawelka reaches two conclusions from there, first that neopatrimonialism is basically a static concept, and second, that it can therefore not grasp and not explain change, especially not political and economic development. Eisenstadt presents his conclusion more carefully worded in the form of a question:

“Here indeed of great interest is the problem as to whether the very patrimonial nature of these regimes limits the possibility of far-reaching changes in displacement of élites and in the distribution of power within them” (i.e. revolutionary change)...

“or whether even when such revolutionary change takes place these regimes still may retain many of their patrimonial characteristics” (1973:59).

I should like, therefore, to argue here that in following both Eisenstadt and Pawelka, who builds large parts of his analysis of the neopatrimonial paradigm on Eisenstadt’s work, we not only can use this paradigm to detect, understand, and explain change, both political and economic change, in the respective systems to be studied, but that we actually benefit tremendously from its use in the study of change and transformations.

Suffice it here to point out once again, that the neopatrimonial paradigm allows us to focus on inter-élite competition, on the pressure on the neopatrimonial leader to encourage and/or initiate



development, and, last but not least, on the crucial dependence of the system on legitimacy. This must not make us blind for the myriad dysfunctional aspects and developments within the system, but the paradigm is certainly able to clearly detect and analyze them. However, this whole controversy points to the necessity to focus in future studies on a crucial problem associated with neopatrimonial systems: how can we explain the extraordinary persistence of this system and its particular neopatrimonial institutions (Bratton 1997, Eisenstadt uses: "certain modes of coping with problems of political life and organization" 1973:12) under conditions of a vast variety of deep-going changes, and huge variations of these systems, for that matter, reaching from those in Africa, introduced above, to the very different neopatrimonial systems in the Arab region.

In order to deal with this problem, it seems appropriate here, to introduce a new theory which should be articulated with the neopatrimonial paradigm in the analysis of the astonishing stability of neopatrimonial system under conditions of both internal and external change.

## **Rentier State Theory and the Neopatrimonial State**

### **a) Theoretical Roots**

A central element in neopatrimonial systems is the availability of resources for the neopatrimonial leader in order to guarantee the smooth functioning of the regime. We should mention here in particular its distributive capacities necessary for maintaining the paternalistic and clientelist networks at the basis of the system, and which are at the same time essential for guaranteeing the power of the neopatrimonial leadership and élite. Already Weber stresses this in his discussion and analysis of patrimonialism, and the whole width of patrimonial regimes

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(Weber 1972: 641, when he speaks of “*arbeitsloses Renteneinkommen*”, necessary for maintaining the military and the bureaucracy). Eisenstadt takes up this point at a central place in his analysis (1973: 24). Also, both Weber and Eisenstadt place the patrimonial then neopatrimonial system in the wider context of the international system. Snyder (1999) and Bratton/van de Walle (1997) do this in the particular postcolonial context, when they discuss and analyze the role of foreign aid necessary to guarantee the maintaining of neopatrimonial patronage networks, and they talk specifically of rents in this context (Snyder 1992:393, Bratton/van de Walle 1997:27, van de Walle 1999: 211 “*systemic patronage and rent-seeking*”). Finally, Weber in his discussion of patrimonialism referred to the important if not central role of external trade in this respect, while Bratton/van de Walle observe the “*low level of extractive capacity of the neopatrimonial system*” and, based on this, explain the need of the system to “*rely increasingly on foreign aid*” (1997:67).

### **b) The Rentier state Paradigm**

At this point, the rentier-state paradigm, and in particular the concept of political rentiers or semirentiers should be introduced (the following analysis is based firmly on work by Claudia Schmid 1991 and above all 1997, also, available in English, Pawelka/Schmid 1988). Without entering the discussion of the Marxist tradition of rent, its development in the context of dependency theory, and its application on oil-rent as a primary and perhaps also the most striking example of an international rent, the major characteristics of rentier-states, and in particular rentier-states in the Arab region indeed in the whole of the Middle East (i.e. including Iran of course) have to be introduced.

Rentier states in the Middle East are defined as states whose budget is based to a relevant degree ( according to general agreement it is approx. 40% of the state budget, based on Luciani, see discussion in Schmid 1997:42) on external income, generated from the export of oil. Semi rentier-states or political rentier-states are states whose budget is based to a relevant degree (usually less than a rentier-state, i.e. they can and often do have a diversified economic structure and rely to a sometimes considerable degree on taxes) on a different kind of external income, namely various forms of foreign aid (development aid, aid for confrontation states, financial help for embarking on a particular political course, for ex. participation in the Gulf coalition 1990/91, support of or participation in the peace process after 1991 etc.). This external income is appropriated directly by the state or regime and it guarantees both its financial autonomy from and its undisputed political power over society at large (Schmid 1997:42-46). Rentier states or semi-rentier states are centralized systems with a large state bureaucracy and very often these states are neopatrimonial systems.

Internally, these states use rent in order to legitimize neopatrimonial leadership and political order through the distribution of patronage, directly to the élite, and through a myriad of client networks. This rent-allocation is used in various ways and does have a central impact on socio-economic structuring. Society in general as well as individuals in society in particular are systemically forced to participate in the struggle for rent, the cycle of rent-seeking, based to a high degree on personal relationships and clientelist networks.

The state can use these rents freely, outside the realm of the usual economic pressures. In general, rents are used less for economic



development, and more for the stabilization of the present regime. Still, it should be pointed out, that as rent allocation is based on political criteria, it can and often is used for economic development, especially in the context and as a consequence of political and economic crises.

### **c) The articulation of rentier state-theory and the neopatrimonialism paradigm**

Obviously, the level of convergence of the two types of systems, the rentier-state and the neopatrimonial state, is striking already on first sight. Both systems are highly centralized and are distinguished by a large public sector or state bureaucracy. They are based on patronage, client networks, and personal relationships. Legitimacy is achieved through material rewards, allocated and distributed on the basis of political criteria. It seems therefore justified to introduce a new provisional term, neopatrimonial semi rentier-states or neopatrimonial political rentier-states.

How is our analysis of neopatrimonial systems advanced through the articulation of the neopatrimonialism paradigm with rentier-state theory? In a first and decisive step, the introduction of rentier-state theory links the neopatrimonial state to the international system, placing it firmly in the international context (developing here the original analyses of both Weber and Eisenstadt, referred to above). Secondly, in a region like the Middle East, i.e. one of the most highly penetrated regional systems in the present world system (see the analyses of Carl Brown 1984, and later Bassam Tibi 1993), this articulation is an essential and indispensable stepping-stone on the way towards a more thorough analysis of the particularities of the different states in this region. Third, and

building on this through the focus on the analysis of state resources, we have here an important key for explaining the amazing resilience and stability of neopatrimonial systems in the Arab region. This becomes all the more clear when we compare Arab neopatrimonial states with African neopatrimonial states. The difference can be firmly placed in the field of state resources, both in their seemingly never exhaustible availability and in the high level of these available resources. Finally, political and economic crises in these states can be far better analyzed through the articulation of both paradigms, increasing at the same time the explanatory value of both of them, especially when we try to conceptualize and understand change, its causes, its direction, and its real and potential results. Last but not least, this articulation of both paradigms seems a good starting point leading in the direction of future theory building in respect to political systems in the Arab region and in the South in general, as well as concerning their historical and their present as well as future political transformations.

**d) Analysis of Egypt as a neopatrimonial political rentier-state**

A first example of the potential of such an analysis is provided by Pawelka, Albrecht and Schlumberger (1997), when they take a new look at the process of economic liberalization in Egypt in the 1990s, leading them to an entirely new interpretation of its causes in and its meaning for the Egyptian political system. Pawelka, Albrecht and Schlumberger conceptualize the Egyptian state as a typical semi rentier-state, which depends both on the productivity of its economy and on different kinds of rents (oil-rent, rent for the use of the Suez-canal, transfer-rents from the Gulf-states and finally financial aid from the west, i.e. political rents, Pawelka et al

1997:45). The crisis which began in the late 1980s started with a sizable reduction of rents, which in turn forced the government to take up more and more international credits leading to an ever higher budget deficit, inflationary developments etc. As a consequence, unemployment and underemployment rose dramatically. In this situation, the IMF and World Bank made further financial aid conditional on the implementation of deep-going reforms like privatization, liberalization and deregulation. The Egyptian economy has thus been transformed substantially since 1991, leading to a substantial reduction of the role of the state in the economy. Pawelka et al explain this change through the use of rentier-state theory, supplemented by the neopatrimonial paradigm. They argue that the dramatic reduction of rents in Egypt in the late 1980s led to a whole complex of socio-economic and political problems: rising unemployment, sinking per-capita income, marginalization and pauperization of large sectors in Egyptian society, produced among other things an increase in militant oppositional groups, mostly Islamist organizations. This in turn led to a reduction in the political legitimacy of the regime and in its ability to coopt oppositional groups. The result was an existential crisis of the regime. (Pawelka points out that regime-crises in rentier-states are caused by economic and financial problems, but manifest themselves as political crises.)

In this situation, the regime had no alternative but to accept and implement the demands of the international financial institutions. This transformation of the Egyptian economy, however, was only possible through the alliance of one sector of the previous state bureaucracy, the reform-oriented political élite, itself active in international business, with internationally oriented private business. This alliance was mediated through



the direct intervention of the president and made possible because of his powerful position inside the system. Thus, the Egyptian system was transformed to a considerable degree. However, this transformation should not be interpreted as the onset of democracy and the building of civil society. Rather, as Pawelka et al argue convincingly, we are confronted here with on the one hand, the breaking of the absolute power of the state bureaucracy and, on the other hand, the beginning of a new ruling alliance consisting of the reform-group inside the former state bureaucracy, and of private business operating internationally and based on the principle of economic competition. These two groups will, at least in the near future, need each other in an almost existential way, as Pawelka shows: the state bureaucracy will depend on the success of private business in order to maintain its legitimacy, and private business in turn will need the state in order to defend its economic course in the face of social-revolutionary movements, of opponents of its economic policies, and of critics and opponents within the political élite. The conclusion Pawelka et al reach, refers us back to the original argument presented in this paper. In order to understand the transformations taking place today in Arab states, we need to investigate the role of neopatrimonial patterns of interaction, or, to use the terminology of Bratton and van de Walle, neopatrimonial institutions, in order to avoid falling in the trap of superficial and, in the final analysis, false interpretations of the consequences of economic liberalization processes, which are, as shown above, all too often understood as the dawn of democracy. Pawelka has undertaken his research with a focus on rentier-state theory, while pointing intermittently to the neopatrimonial features and mechanisms in semi rentier-states.

His conclusion, which focuses more on the neopatrimonial paradigm, even to the point of putting aside the theoretical context of the rentier-state and the articulation of neopatrimonialism with rentier-state theory, surely validates our critique of Pawelka's skepticism of the potential of the neopatrimonial paradigm to grasp, interpret and analyze change.

### **e) Neopatrimonial Political Rentier-States in the Arab Region**

What are the conclusions concerning the use of the neopatrimonial paradigm for the analysis of Middle Eastern and particularly Arab states? It seems appropriate to articulate the two different paradigms, which obviously supplement each other perfectly. Their combined use allows the researcher to capture the particularities of the Arab region, i.e. the privileged availability of both oil-rent and political rents connected directly or indirectly with the existence of oil in the region and the international need for stability there. (I am excluding here the Arab-Israeli and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from my analysis simply for reasons of space, although this conflict obviously should be considered in any complete analysis of the Arab region and the astonishing longevity of its political regimes.). In comparison with the African neopatrimonial state, for example, it is the availability of external rents to Arab regimes, which distinguishes one type of neopatrimonial system from the other, thereby influencing all processes of change in these systems. Arab neopatrimonial political rentier-states, for example, do not suffer from lack of resources for keeping up their patronage networks, their legitimacy is hardly ever in doubt, they can co-opt ever new groups into their élites based on the availability of the required resources, and on the level of society, the majority of citizens are fully evolved in the process of rent-seeking and thus fully integrated in the overall system.

## Conclusion

This paper has introduced a new approach to the question of transformations, not only in the Arab region, but also in other regions in the South of the contemporary international system, like Africa, and parts of South East Asia. Transitology with its exclusive focus on democratic transformations has been shown inadequate for a study of recent changes in a variety of Arab states, where empirical facts contradict the expectations of this particular theory. The goal of our paradigm of neopatrimonialism and of the concept of neopatrimonial political rentier-states is therefore quite simple:

It is supposed to detect, explain, interpret, and understand adequately transformations and change taking place today in Arab political systems. Adequately here means that this change has to be understood in the particular historical, socioeconomic, and political context of the Arab region, in conjunction with the particular integration of this region into the international system. Thus, it is hoped to clearly detect the specificities of this region, in comparison with other regions in the South. Specificity of a region does not suggest uniqueness. Rather, what is aimed at here is to understand this particular region better based on new, theoretically informed in-depth case-studies, complemented by comparisons. These comparisons are required both on the theoretical as well as on the historico-empirical level. We need to examine current theories and paradigms as to their relevance and their explanatory value for a particular region, and we need to examine the data, historical and empirical, gathered on different states and systems in the light of the expectations derived from theory.

Transitology has been developed principally in the historical, structural, and political context of Latin America and Europe. Its explanatory value for the Arab region is therefore very low,



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as is the case also for Africa, as Bratton and van de Walle have shown in detail.

For a study of political systems in the Arab region, for an analysis of potential change of these systems, new and different questions and models are needed. Instead of an exclusive focus on transitions from authoritarian to democratic systems, instead of allowing only one pair of opposites, namely non-democratic and democratic regimes, it is suggested here to start focusing on in-depth studies of these non-democratic systems, which until now remain very vague, indeed. Our approach here suggests not to remain with the very wide and all-encompassing concept authoritarian, but rather to focus on a very specific form of authoritarian systems, i.e. neopatrimonialism. (The new focus by Linz and Chehabi 1998 or Snyder *ibid.* on sultanism does not seem very promising for Arab states.). In order to distinguish Arab from non-Arab neopatrimonial regimes, the introduction of rentier-state theory proved the most adequate venue.

The following research-questions are suggested as relevant for future research:

- Why has the Arab state been so extraordinarily adaptable and flexible in the face of ever new internal and external challenges, enabling it to change while remaining essentially stable and avoiding systemic transformation?
- Can this be explained from within the system or is it explicable only through the intervening variable of rent, i.e. on the basis of the articulation between neopatrimonialism and rentier-state theory, as proposed by us in this paper?
- Why has change been initiated only from above, and how has it invariably resulted in “stable transformations” within the system?

- How has the principle of co-optation been maintained until today in Arab systems, and why do ever new élite-groups allow themselves to be co-opted?
- Why do new élite groups invariably have shared interests with the neopatrimonial leadership, in contrast to the usual zero-sum-game perception of new élites in African neopatrimonial systems, while in the Latin-American case we come across ever new pacts between different élite-groups?
- Why is external influence in the Arab region usually employed in the sense of supporting and thus stabilizing existing regimes? Why is there no pressure for “democracy” exerted on regimes, as is happening in many other regions of the world?

And from an opposite perspective:

- How do Arab states and Arab societies react to the very general and hegemonic worldwide pressures in the direction of democratic change?

To summarize: what is needed today in the study of regime change, of transitions and transformations, is a variety of theoretically informed empirical studies with a strong comparative component, both inside the region and interregional, being firmly connected to the existing international context. We finally need real and close interplay between the study of empirical data and the use of adequate and promising theoretical tools.

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## **The Political Role of the Arab Socialist Union under Nasser's Regime**

### **Did the Arab Socialist Union under Nasser Play Any Real Political Role or Fulfill Any Clear Need?**

*Kamal al-Astal*

#### **I. Analysis of the Question and Argument**

In order to answer the above question, I would like to start with the following argument: Was this question based on an accurate understanding of the political role of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU)? Then one can raise many other questions such as, what was the nature of the ASU? Why did Nasser's regime create it? What was its real role? Did it fulfill any clear need? What were Nasser's aims for creating the ASU?

What is meant by vague and relative concepts like "real" and "clear" in this context? While one considers a role as a "real" one and a need as a "clear" one, someone else, on the other hand, may consider them neither "real" nor "clear." We have understood the "clear" political need in a twofold way. One, that the ASU may result in a restructuring of the perceived post-colonial political system insofar as it goes to cement the ground for the building of a civic society, and to retrench the gains of Arab socialization and political independence on the grassroots levels; and two, did the ASU assist in disseminating the Nasserite ideology and legitimizing Nasser's policy? Here, the political role can be understood in two different ways. The first is the ASU's role at the service of the regime, and the second, the ASU's political role as a democratic channel and as a tool of popular expression and will.<sup>1</sup> If one understands the



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political role in the first way, one can argue that the ASU played a real political role as an organ of Nasser's regime. However, if one looks at the ASU in the second way, one can argue that it played a real political role as a mass party.

I argue that the ASU did play a real political role as an arm of Nasser's regime. Moreover, the ASU did fulfill a clear need of the regime. However, the ASU did not play a real political role as a channel of popular political participation. At the same time, it did not fulfill any clear need of the Egyptian people.<sup>2</sup>

## II. Suggested Model of Analysis

In evaluating the ASU's role, it is necessary to analyze it within the framework of the entire political system and explore some of the problems that had been involved in the attempt to establish a party from the top, that is, by a government. In fact, the party was never meant to be an active institution with decision-making powers, but was conceived basically as a civic association to mobilize the people in an effort to stimulate social and economic development. Indeed, it was viewed as a means of mobilizing political support to the regime than as a vehicle for popular participation. So, one can say that:

1. The ASU played a "political role" for Nasser's regime. Meanwhile, the ASU's political role as a "mass party" was very limited and marginal.
2. The ASU fulfilled some of the needs of Nasser's regime. But at the same time, it failed in fulfilling any clear need for the Egyptian people.
3. Nasser's regime created the ASU as an integral part of the regime to affect the people and not to receive actual feedback of the popular influence.

4. The words “real” and “clear” are vague and relative. One can look at them from different, and sometimes, even contradictory perspectives.
5. The relation among the regime, the ASU, and the people can be looked at in different ways such as:
  - The regime The ASU The people
  - The ASU affects the people and not vice versa
  - The ASU was created from above and not from below
  - The ASU never developed much autonomy from the regime
  - The ASU did not assume any real popular political role and did not fulfill any clear popular need
  - The ASU failed to play the perceived and ascribed roles and did not fulfill the expectations at the official and popular levels

### **III. Hypotheses**

1. The ASU played a political role.
2. The political role of the ASU was at the service of Nasser’s regime.
3. As for the answer to the question, “Did the ASU play a real political role?”, my answer is yes and no. Yes, because the ASU played only a real political role from the Nasserist regime’s point of view. No, because the ASU did not play a real political role as a popular political party.
4. There was a need to create the ASU as an organ of the Egyptian bureaucracy to influence the political behavior of the people. However, it did not fulfill a clear need of the people.
5. I consider the ASU as an integral part of the regime and not as a channel to affect the regime and the decision-makers.
6. The ASU was a part of the superstructure. It was created from above and not from the popular base.

7. The charismatic relationship between the people and their president initiated a direct linkage, thus weakening the institutions (viz. the ASU) considerably as independent, power-yielding, decision-making organs.<sup>3</sup>
8. Nasser failed to institutionalize and democratize his regime. So, the ASU actually died with the death of its founder.
9. The promised and perceived political role and need for the ASU were greater than the ensuing reality because, contrary to Nasser's hopes, control continued to flow in the opposite direction—from the state authorities to the ASU.

#### **IV. The Nature of the ASU: A Mass Party vs. a Governmental Organ**

I argue that the ASU was nothing more than a governmental organ and it failed to play the role of a mass party. It seems clear that there is a contradiction between an authoritarian regime and a mass party. After 1962, Nasser's regime built a single party named the ASU, tying it to the society through a pyramid of assemblies and committees, but like the parliament, the party never developed much autonomy or assumed any real functions. It never became an elite recruitment mechanism. Its leaders were imposed from above (See Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix) (Hinnebusch, 1985). Nasser's regime was essentially personal and bureaucratic. Several structures were created, but they never achieved much autonomy from the government.<sup>4</sup>

The ASU, in the National Charter, became the country's single political organization. Its basic units were formed in villages and towns. In this system, members of the basic unit elect a 20-man committee, which meets twice monthly and whose members hold office for two years. The members themselves constitute the basic



unit conference, which is supposed to meet every four months. Each basic unit committee elects two members to represent it at the next level-the district (markaz)-and these elected members form the district conference, which meets twice yearly and itself elects a district council to meet twice monthly.

From each of the district councils, two members are elected to represent them at the next level-the governorate (*muhafazah*) which also has a conference and an elected council. The only difference from the lower level is that members are elected for four instead of two years. Above the governorates at the national level is a general conference of the ASU, composed of members of the governorate councils and also representatives of the army, police, women's associations, workers and peasants,<sup>5</sup> and other community groups. The general council meets every two years, but it elects a general council to meet every six months, and the general council, in turn, elects a 25-member higher executive committee (Mansfield, 1965).<sup>6</sup>

Dessouki argues that in Egypt, as in many developing countries, the single party claimed to be a *Gemeinschaft* party, an integrated mass movement unifying society, providing morale and leadership, and establishing popular consensus (Dessouki, 1987).

## **V. The ASU: One-party System vs. a "Front" for One-man Rule (Institutionalization vs. Personalization)**

Nasser won popular support not only because of his charisma but also because of the fact that he managed to raise the right slogans at the right time (i.e. national liberation). From a historical point of view, the people of Egypt worshipped and adored their rulers. This was connoted by the personalization of the regime. As a result, when Nasser disappeared, his policies and political structures withered aswell.<sup>7</sup>

The ASU represents Nasser's last attempt in the continuous, but frustrating, search for a formula of organized mass support, and a basis for a permanent institutionalized political structure. Nasser's regime failed in its attempt at building a single-party system (Holt, 1968). In the final analysis, I argue that the ASU was merely a "front" for Nasser's autocratic regime.

The single-party system spread in the Third World in the 50s and 60s. The ASU was conceived to be a vehicle for economic development, a symbol of national unity, and an instrument for human and social mobilization. The ASU failed to accomplish any of these goals. Neither economic development nor national integration was achieved (Holt, 1968).

Nasser exerted a magnetic hold on the masses. According to one Egyptian historian, "Our people became attached to some of their rulers to a degree of approaching mania and worship, as in the case of the president Nasser. The people regarded him as divine" (Baker, 1990:55). The adoration for Nasser obscured the authoritarian features of the regime and marginalized the role of the ASU.

### **VI. The ASU: To Fill the Political Vacuum vs. to Win Loyalties of the Masses**

In the 1950s, the Nasser regime began to create the first of a series of one-party organizations to replace the multiparty system. The government announced that these political structures would give the Egyptian masses an opportunity to participate in the new revolutionary political order. Baker argues that the liberals regarded these parties (the Liberation Rally, the National Union and the ASU) as efforts to fill the political vacuum created by the dissolution of the *Wafd* and other parties "with artificial organizations that found no real echo or response from the people"

(Baker, 1990:55).<sup>8</sup> In fact, the regime itself recognized that the successive Nasserite parties never succeeded in winning the political loyalties of the masses (Hinnebusch, 1985).

The ASU ignored all the abuses of power by the government. So, instead of controlling the government, the ASU was controlled by it. In other words, the ASU was dominated by the government at the top and paralyzed by the mass indifference below. It had failed to function as an effective elite-mass link.<sup>9</sup> The banning of all political parties produced a vacuum which Nasser's regime intended to fill up.<sup>10</sup>

## **VII. The ASU: Between Ideological Weakness and Marxist Penetration (Loyalty vs. Adversity)**

The Free Officers lacked a clear ideology. Arab socialism later became the country's guiding ideology.<sup>11</sup> The ASU was created by a presidential decree.<sup>12</sup> Following the formation of the ASU in 1962, there was so much social rhetoric indicating "a drift to left." In 1956, the Egyptian Communist Party voted to dissolve itself and support Nasser. The Communist policy was then to create a revolutionary political cadre within the ASU. The Communists wanted to gain influence in the ASU. One of the Egyptian left-wingers remarked that "Nasser wanted to build socialism without socialists."<sup>13</sup>

With the idea of creating some sort of cooperation with the left, a number of the Communist intellectuals were freed from prison to be brought into the organization.<sup>14</sup> The organizational and ideological void at the heart of the regime enabled the Communists to create a socialist vanguard within the ASU (Botman, 1988). They created and manipulated a secret apparatus within the ASU. The tensions between Nasser and the ASU were reflected on the ideological plane. It is noteworthy to mention



that the ideological conflict was but one manifestation of more fundamental misgivings on Nasser's part that the ASU was being exploited as a base for rival political power (power centers, i.e. Ali Sabri, Secretary General of the ASU, and the Communists - Fernandez-Armesto, 1982). After Nasser, Sadat purged these elements, in his so-called "Corrective Revolution" (Baker, 1978). More than a hundred ASU members as well as Ali Sabri were imprisoned (Key, 1975).

### **VIII. The ASU: An Arm of the Bureaucracy vs. a Mass Party**

The ASU remained more of a bureaucratic than a popular body. It was bureaucratic in the way it was built. Ayubi argues that "historical precedent suggests that the single-party systems tend to develop around a party (or a popular or national movement) which is usually formed from the bottom upwards while still outside government" (Ayubi, 1980:440). However, there was a situation where, instead of a political party running a state, Egypt's state was trying to breathe life into a party (Ayubi, 1980).

Although the ASU membership reached to some five or six million, the real power in the ASU always remained concentrated on a few personalities who kept moving between the government and the ASU.<sup>15</sup> Nasser made it clear that the ASU would not have any executive power. He seemed to have intended it chiefly as a means of mobilizing popular support behind the socialist policies and as a forum for the political education of the humbler classes (Stephens, 1971). However, the ASU indoctrination campaign achieved only limited success in its efforts to popularize socialism (Nutting, 1972). Indeed, the whole functioning of the ASU was not at all separated from administrative activity. Furthermore, there was little in the headquarters of the ASU to

remind a visitor that he was in the residence of a political party (Ayubi, 1980).

### **IX. The ASU: A Tool of Absolute Power and Dictatorship vs. Masses**

Sadat argues that the ASU later turned into an instrument for wielding absolute power and exercising control over everything, even people's livelihoods (El-Sadat, 1978). Moreover, in the public's mind the ASU was considered the "government's party." Like any government authority, it had an elaborate administrative organization. The bureaucratization of the ASU led it to be virtually a part of the state machinery, isolated from the masses. It also lacked sincere members and developed little two-way communication with the masses (Ayubi, 1980).

As it was later admitted, even at the official level, the ASU tended to follow a "desk" or "bureaucratic" approach that put barriers between it and the masses, "barriers which were only strengthened by the ASU's perception of its role as that of explaining and justifying the acts of the executive power" (Ayubi, 1980:445). The ASU was also becoming a new stage for "empire building" and furthering the interests of its own staff. Towards the end of the 60s, the ASU was developing less as a mass movement or revolutionary party and more as a governmental department manned by "routinist civil servants" (Ayubi, 1980).

### **X. The ASU: Nominal Politicization of the People**

Nasser defined the ASU as a coalition or alliance (*tahaluf*) of all working forces (*al qiwa al'amilah*): peasants, workers, intellectuals, soldiers, and native capitalists.<sup>16</sup> National leaders of the ASU were selected by Nasser to fill the posts in the Supreme Executive Committee and the Secretariat. The constitution of

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the ASU stipulated that a National Congress and a Central Committee were to be formed by elections, but these organs were never constituted (See Charts 1 and 2 in the Appendix).<sup>17</sup> The ASU failed in achieving a real politicization of the masses.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, the regulation that 50% of the seats were to be reserved for workers and peasants continues to be among the most hated aspects of the ASU from the point of view of technocrats, professionals, and the intelligentsia.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the cabinet and the president sat in dual capabilities as heads of the government and the ASU. Both the party and the bureaucracy were extensions of one and the same command structure, the president and his aides (Harik, Oct. 1973-July 1974).

### **XI. The ASU: Mobilization vs. Bureaucratization**

The ASU did not play a role in mobilization of the masses. Mobilization in Egypt was not perceived in a political perspective in relation to the masses, but it was taken in a rather technical sense and related to organization and administration. It is significant in this respect that the tasks of mobilization were not attached to the ASU or any other political organ but to the statistical agency (Ayubi, 1980).<sup>20</sup>

Hinnebusch described the ASU as follows: "Its leaders were imposed from above, at the top, Free Officers dominated, while at the base the existent local power structure was co-opted. Given the imposition of leaders from above...it failed even to serve as an effective instrument of mass mobilization and policy implementation" (Hinnebusch, 1985:19). The regime failed to develop the means of mobilization. Nasserism failed to institutionalize itself in an ideological party which could ensure its long-term durability (Hinnebusch, 1985).<sup>21</sup> Heikal disclosed that the recruitment procedure, based on selection, was conducive



to the accumulation of influence in the hands of party leaders. "Heikal was directing his criticism against Ali Sabri's Executive Bureaus, formed during the mobilization period" (Ansari, 1986:144-145). In short, the ASU became a part of the huge bureaucracy of the regime rather than a means of mobilization of the masses.

## **XII. The ASU: A Source of Legitimacy**

Nasser aimed to institutionalize his regime. He perceived the ASU as a source of legitimacy. Despite Nasser's repeated proclamations that the ASU was to be the "source of power," the organization's subordinate status led the entire institutional structure to be dependent for its momentum upon presidential direction and control. In fact, Nasser's legitimacy did not stem from any independent legal or institutional imperatives. However, the ASU played a role in the legitimization process of Nasser's regime.<sup>22</sup> In short, the ASU was an attempt to establish a means through which the leadership of the state could have a popular base, and by which a two-way process of communication between the rulers and the ruled could be conducted.<sup>23</sup>

## **XIII. The ASU: Marginalization of People's Participation (The Paradox Between Text and Reality)**

The ASU was theoretically designed to meet the ideological premise that there must be popular participation and representation on both the local and national levels. The ASU must represent the interests of all popular forces.<sup>24</sup> Participation by these forces in revolutionary activity must be in a single mass organization of the state in order to avoid social conflicts. Social conflict, according to the ideology of the revolution, was the result of political party activity, where parties represented social classes. So, the revolution.

must prevent the emergence of political groups by mobilizing the popular forces in the ASU (Harik, Oct. 1973-July 1974).

In fact, it was noted that the strata of the ASU (structures) must be elected in a hierarchical framework. However, Nasser died before holding the elections for the ASU structures in all levels. There were many differences between the provisions of the National Charter and reality.<sup>25</sup> It was noted that there would be elected local committees, regional and provincial councils, a general conference of congress, an organizational secretariat, and an elected Higher Executive Committee. Until 1970, when Nasser died, the president of the ASU was President Nasser himself (See Charts 1 and 2 in the Appendix).<sup>26</sup>

#### **XIV. The ASU: Nasser's Perception of its Role (The Difference Between Theory and Practice)**

The ASU was not formed on the basis of a pyramidal democratic organizational structure, although that was its proposed framework. In fact its structure reflected the undemocratic, latitudinal, horizontal organization of Nasser's regime, which was in essence carrying within it the previous form of organization inherent in post-colonial regimes. It was created to carry out Nasser's socialist policies (Arab Socialism). Despite that, Nasser did not need more popular support. The ASU was necessary to institutionalize the regime.

On 7 December 1962, the ASU was created to be a unitary political party and a means of gathering the support of the masses (Nyrop, 1983).<sup>27</sup> Nasser aimed at overcoming the traditional public attitude toward government. He adopted mass participation through a single-party system. Nasser sought many things from the ASU. These goals were:

1. To combine universal adult membership with a vanguard elite.
2. To contain and "melt" class differences.

3. To mobilize the dispossessed in order to isolate “reactionary” enemies of the revolution.
4. To act as a counter weight to the armed forces.
5. To carry Egypt’s socialist experiment to other Arab countries, especially at the expense of the Ba’ath party (Waterbury, 1983).

Despite these goals, there was an ambiguity around the functions of the ASU. In the debate over the shortcomings of the ASU, published in March 1965, a prominent trade union leader observed: “I think that there are many people who believe in the purposes and goals of the socialist union, but these people have to be given a certain function to perform and certain responsibility” (Baker, 1978:109).

During a discussion on halting the profit distribution by an Egyptian company, Nasser remarked: “What is the real role of the Socialist Union? Tell us how we can know what happened concerning the distribution and halting of profits. I have heard about this question through the Minister of the Interior, while the Socialist Union said nothing about it” (Baker, 1978:111).

In a 1966 *Rose al-Yusuf* article, Ali Sabri, then the Secretary General of the ASU, was asked to describe the function of the political apparatus. Sabri began with a vague formulation: “The political apparatus can fulfill a creative role in the operation of building the socialist community, with a membership possessing an enlightened ideological unity” (Baker, 1978:111). Ali Sabri used his post to create “power centers.” Nasser indirectly attacked this phenomenon (Dekmajian, 1972). Nasser’s developing perception of the ASU as one such dangerous center of power reflected in the changed official descriptions of the rightful role of the ASU. The first real sign of Nasser’s departure from such a positive view of the ASU came with his handling of the notorious Kamshishe affair.<sup>28</sup>



### **XV. The ASU: An Elite Party**

I argue that Nasser's Egypt, as a civic society, was underdeveloped because of warped development in a post-colonial mode of production (underdeveloped forces of production). Therefore, the society was not conducive to mass participation and democratization. Nasser's hope that the ASU would become a popular party and inspire a new political consciousness among the masses therefore promoting the cadre of new leadership from a younger generation remained unfulfilled. The ASU remained an ineffective elite organization (Vatikiotis, 1978). The ASU failed to be a mass party. A vanguard party was created within the ASU. Nasser was attracted to the Leninist model of a vanguard party to provide the ASU with the needed organizational backbone. In 1964, the Nasser regime announced its intention to form a "political apparatus" or cadre of militants within the ASU. Marxists penetrated the ASU and created the so-called "power centers." Top-level appointments were made by the mandate system. A presidential decree in 1962 allotted the key positions to trusted and reliable appointees (Baker, 1978).

### **XVI. The ASU: Neither Playing a Real Political Role nor Fulfilling a Clear Need**

In light of what I have mentioned above, one can say, from the point of view of the people's political participation that the ASU under Nasser did not play any real political role nor did it fulfill any clear need. Moreover, it failed to carry out Nasser's policies. First of all, the ASU failed in accomplishing its declared goals. Let us look more closely at some of them. The ASU, while maintaining the principle of universality of membership, eventually moved towards the formation of a vanguard. Moreover, membership was made voluntary.<sup>29</sup> Gamal al Utaifi argues that the voluntary nature of membership was something of a fiction.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the ASU failed

to contain and melt class differences. Nasser asserted that the ASU represented the national alliance of the working forces. Some people were excluded from the alliance such as those who were affected by the land reform laws and nationalization (Waterbury, 1983).<sup>31</sup> The rest of the legitimate classes were to cooperate within the new political framework of the party.

Nevertheless, the ASU had some kind of ideology and it possessed greater cohesion and a more focused action program. These two advantages were counterbalanced by two obstacles, which had an abortive influence on the previous party structures. The first obstacle was the lack of competent cadre sincerely dedicated to the cause and the necessary organizational skills to build the ASU. The second obstacle was the military presence in the system (Dekmejian, 1972). The influence of the original Free Officers within the ASU was very clear (See Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix). Regarding the mission of exporting Egypt's revolution, the ASU again failed in this envisaged task.

## **XVII. Conclusion: The Ambiguity & Failure of the Role of the ASU (At the Official and Popular Levels)**

In retrospective analysis, the ASU failed to institutionalize the regime and to democratize the political process. Evidently, it did not succeed in carrying out Nasser's policies or continuing his policy after his death. The ASU was an auxiliary instrument of political action, subservient to the will of the leader, and as such, did not acquire autonomy or a will of its own.

In addition, the ASU did not have the necessary preconditions for self-reproduction. It goes without saying that the ASU died with Nasser. The reason for this was the inability of the ASU to channel the desires of the populace through its so-called democratic channels on the one hand, and its latitudinal (de facto, non-pyramidal)

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organizational structure on the other (i.e. power centralized in the hands of the few and one man at the top).

The ASU was declared in the National Charter to be the nation's single political organization. This, in and of itself, was enough to put the ASU in a non-generative and recessive social condition (i.e. it shirked its functions due to, among other factors, the lack of opposition). It did not differ drastically from its predecessors insofar as its pyramidal structure and organization, from the village and basic units to those on district, provincial or governorate levels, were concerned (Vatikiotis, 1980).<sup>32</sup>

The organization of the ASU and the definition of its functions were not completed until June 1967-at the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli War. Until then, the projected plan of the National Conference to elect a General Council had not materialized. The relationship between the National Assembly and the ASU had not been made clear (Key, 1975). The formal construction of the ASU was never completed; the National Congress and the Central Committee never came into practice (Dekmejian, 1972). For the first six years of its existence, only nominated executive committee cabinet members headed the ASU; the higher bodies of the ASU were not established until 1970.

The ASU acted as a channel through which government policies could be disseminated and explained, rather than the wishes of the people passed up to the government.<sup>33</sup> The ASU was ultimately destined to fail just as the National Union had (El-Sadat, 1978). To begin with, Nasser had no illusions about the actual strength of the ASU in the mid-sixties, despite an alleged membership of some five million and an organizational structure that theoretically reached down into villages. In March 1965, Nasser flatly remarked, "The fact is that we have no actual organization, except on the books" (Baker, 1978:96).<sup>34</sup> In 1966, Haikal made the same



observation: “In the area of political organization the result up till now has been negative” (Holt, 1968).

In the published debate, Marshal Abd el-Hakim Amer attacked the basic principle of a one-party system (Holt, 1968). Moreover, from its inception the ASU was popularly perceived as another administrative extension of Nasser’s power (Vaitkiotis, 1968). The ASU came under the control of leftist elements, which clustered around Ali Sabri, a vice-president and the Secretary General of the ASU. Moreover, the secret vanguard organization within the ASU sought to establish a parallel if not alternative center of power (Vaitkiotis, 1968).<sup>35</sup>

The ASU had been created to stimulate mass political activity, but without any cohesive strong ideology or genuinely popular appeal activity, beyond an office in every town and a pyramid of executive councils and committees, culminating in Nasser himself; the ASU was almost inevitably condemned to dissolution.<sup>36</sup> Nasser, by creating the ASU, had given a false sense of continued political success. Nasser actually preferred not to take the risk of mass mobilization.<sup>37</sup>

Nasser complained that the ASU was unable to allocate responsibility in the various committees and at differential levels of its structure. In short, it had not been able to create a political cadre of leadership at any level.<sup>38</sup> The attempts at decentralization continued to be hampered by the autocratic structure in the ASU, and its ultimate control from the top.<sup>39</sup> Elections from the basic to the higher-level units of the ASU had never been completed.<sup>40</sup> At the top level, there was not a very clear distinction between the government and the ASU. The same army officers were members of both, and gradually the ASU began to assume administrative functions. The leader of both was Nasser (Vatikiotis, 1978).<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the ASU had played an important role of filling the political stage in Egypt and deterring the revival of other parties. It

actually died though with the death of Nasser.<sup>42</sup> In the final analysis, any appraisal of the ASU's role during a period of less than eight years, under Nasser, would depend on one's criteria and expectations.<sup>43</sup>

## APPENDIX

**TABLE No. 1. ASU Supreme Executive (1962-1964)**

No.	Background	Members
1	Officer	Gamal Abd al-Nasser
2	Officer	Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi
3	Officer	Abd al-Hakim Amer
4	Officer	Zakaariyya Muhyi al-Din
5	Officer	Anwar el-Sadat
6	Officer	Hussein al-Shafi'i
7	Officer	Aly Sabri
8	Officer	Hassan Ibrahim
9	Civilian	Nur al-Din Tarraf (Dr.)
10	Civilian	Ahmad Abduh al-Sharabasi
11	Civilian	Mahmud Fawzi (Dr.)
12	Officer	Kamal al-Din Rif'at
13	Civilian	Abd al-Mun'im al-Qaysuni (Dr.)
14	Civilian	Aziz Sidqi (Dr.)
15	Officer	Abbas Rudwan
16	Civilian	Mustafa Khalil (Dr.)
17	Officer	Abd al-Qdir Hatim (Dr.)
18	Officer	Kamal al-Din Hussein

*Source:* Dekmejian, 1972:148.

### Notes:

- Twelve members of the former presidential council and six of the former executive council constituted the total membership of the ASU Supreme Executive.
- The ASU Supreme Executive was dominated by the executive branch of the government.

TABLE No. 2. The ASU Provisional Secretariat (December 1964)

No.	Background	Name	Government Post	ASU Post
1	Officer	Zakariyya Muhyi al-Din	Vice President	Member
2	Officer	Husayn al-Shafi' I al-Din	Vice President	Secretary General in Alexandria Governorate
3	Officer	Hassan Ibrahim al-Din	Vice President	Secretary General in Alexandria Governorate
4	Officer	Anwar el-Sadat	Speaker of the National	Member Assembly
5	Officer	Kamal al-Din Rif'at	Deputy Prime Minister for Scientific Affairs	Secretary General in Giza Governorate & for propagation of Socialist ideology
6	Civilian	Ahmad Abduh al-Sharabasi	Deputy Prime Minister for Waqfs and Al-Azhar Affairs	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Farmers Sector
7	Civilian	Nur al-Din Tarrat (Dr.)	Deputy Prime Minister for the Sector of Labor, Justice, & Youth	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Trade Union Affairs
8	Officer	Abbas Rudwan	Deputy Prime Minister for Local Government and Services	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Upper Egypt
9	Civilian	Anwar Salamah	Minister of Labor	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Labor Affairs
10	Officer	Khalid Muhy al-Din	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Press Affairs



No.	Background	Name	Government Post	ASU Post
11	Civilian	Sayyid Mar'I	Vice President of National Assembly and Chairman of Misr Bank	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for National Capitalism
12	Officer	Sha'rawi Goma'a	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Organization
13	Officer	Fathi al-Dib	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Arab Affairs
14	Officer	Tal'at Khayri	Minister of Youth and Sports	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Youth Affairs
15	Officer	Husayn zu al-Fiqar Sabri	Councillor at the Presidency	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Foreign Relations
16	Civilian	Ali Sayyid Ali	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Labor Affairs
17	Civilian	Husayan Khalaf (Dr.)	Minister of Foreign Cultural Relations	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Socialist Propaganda and Culture
18	Officer	Abd al-Salam Badawi (Dr.)	Secretary General for Administration and Presidency	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Research
19	Civilian	Abd al Majid Shadid	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Financial and Administrative Affairs

No.	Background	Name	Government Post	ASU Post
20	Civilian	Abraham Sa'd al-Din (Dr.)	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Supervision of Higher Socialist Institute
21	Officer	Abed al-Fatah Abu al-Fadl	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Publications and Membership Affairs
22	Officer	Ahmad Abdallah Tu'aymah	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Bureaucracy
23	Officer	Kamal al-Hinnawi	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Lower Egypt
24	Civilian	Ahmad Khalifah	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Professional Affairs
25	Civilian	Abd al-Hamid Ghazi	—	Secretary of the Subsecretariat for Farmers' Affairs

**Note**

The above members of the ASU Provisional Secretariat were not elected but designated by Nasser.

### CHART No. 1.

#### Formal Structure of the Arab Socialist Union, 1963-1965

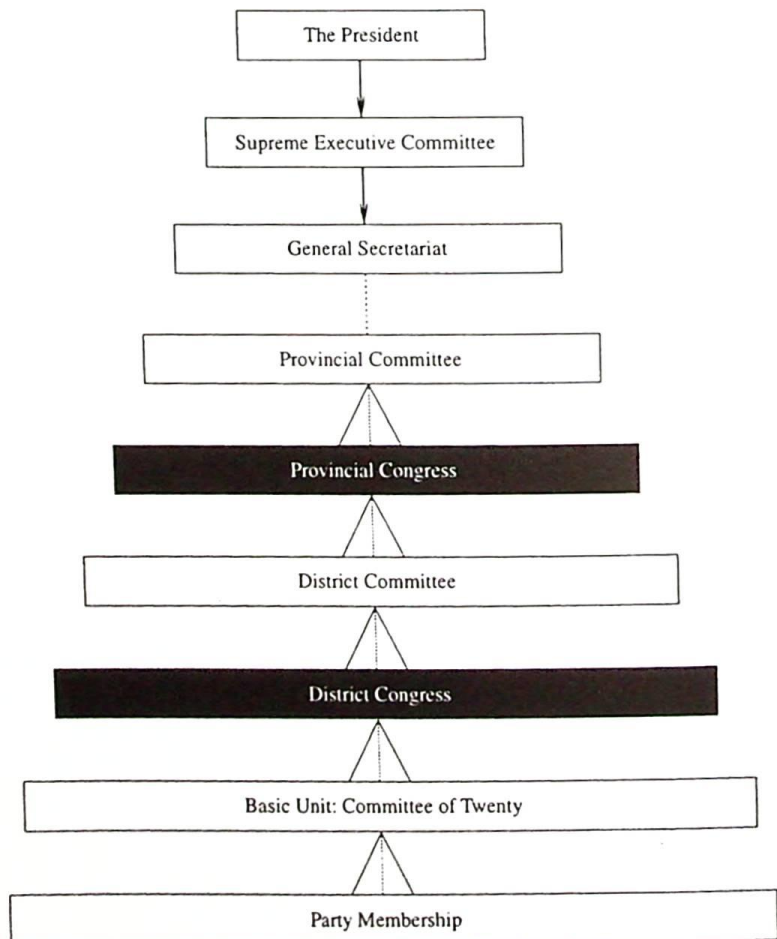
Constituted but not Convened

Direct Line of Authority

Election by Lower Level

Weak Authority Relations

#### THE SINGLE PARTY IN EGYPT





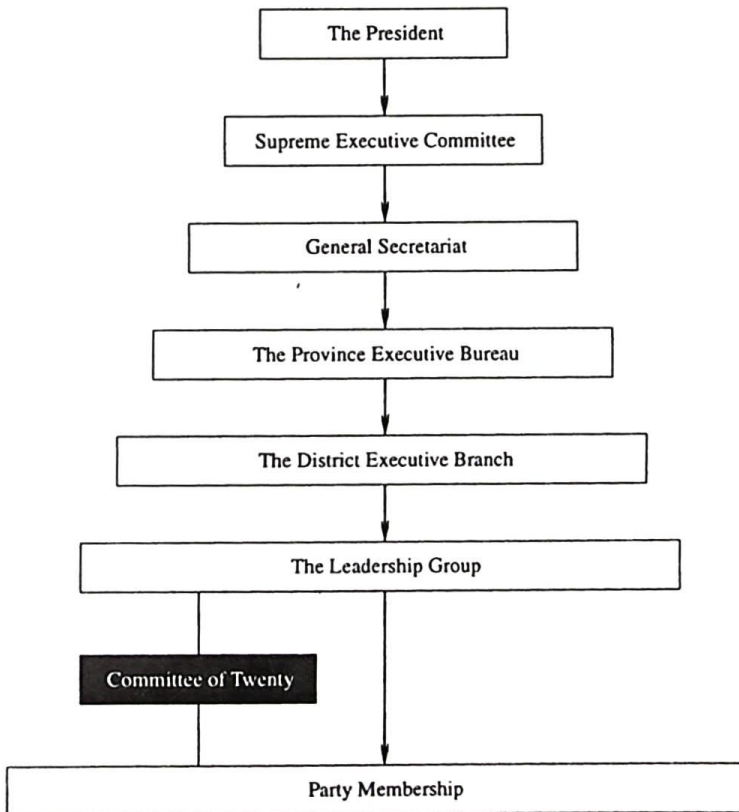
## CHART No. 2.

### Formal Structure of the Arab Socialist Union, 1965-1968

Constituted but not Convened

Direct Line of Authority

### THE SINGLE PARTY IN EGYPT



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## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> A **role**, in its general meaning, is the expected behavior associated with a social position (Kuper et al., 1985; Mitchel, 1968).

Also, we can understand a role as a pattern of behavior associated with a particular status position within a group or social situation. A person role, for example, in any situation is defined by the set of expectations for his behavior held by others and by the person himself. In this context, one can distinguish between:

- **Ascribed role:** a role that an individual or an institution acquires automatically at birth; and
- **Perceived role:** the role expectations that a person or an institution believes others want of him in a situation. It is the role that a person believes others expect him to play (Theodorson et al., 1970; Abercombie et al., 1988).

<sup>2</sup> A **need**, in social sciences, denotes whatever is required for the health or well being of a person, or society, such as the need for oxygen, for food, for love. In economics, the need concept may be justified in terms of the good being (Kolb et al., 1964).

A **need**, in economics, can also be understood as a state of tension or dissatisfaction felt by an individual that impels him to action toward a goal he believes will satisfy the impulse (Theodorson et al., 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, these institutions were affected by the dynamics of the charismatic relationship. Consequently, the power to question, to probe, disagree and modify or change, was replaced by the function of applauding and endorsing.

<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Parliament was shadowed by the executive. The Cabinet was accountable to the President, not to the Parliament. The President could legislate by decree, dissolve Parliament and screen all election candidates (Hinnebusch, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Half of the ASU seats on elected bodies at all levels must be occupied by farmers and workers because, according to the National Charter, they form the majority of the people and had been deprived of their rights to shape and direct their future (Mansfield, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> During Nasser's era, there were three attempts to form a single party. The first attempt was the formation of the Liberation Rally, which was officially inaugurated on 23 January 1953, six months after the military coup. It was a means of mobilizing support, legitimating the coup, and filling the vacuum left by the ban on political parties. It was envisaged as being an organization of the entire population. All of its key positions were occupied by officers, and all of them were filled by appointment (Mansfield, 1965). The second attempt was the formation of the National Union. On 16 January 1956, Nasser announced a new constitution. The National Union was created according to the constitution, to represent all groups of the society (Mansfield, 1965). For more details about the Liberation Rally and the National Union see Dessouk (1987) and Weelock (1960).



<sup>7</sup> The whole political structure depended on one man (viz. Nasser) (Vatikiotis, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> Baker argues that the liberals attributed this failure to the political impotence of the official parties; none of these official parties exercised any real influence on the absolute power of the military rulers. The ASU's occasional criticisms of the official policies were simply a "form of self-criticism used by dictatorships and totalitarian systems to absorb mass discontent and give the illusion of an opposing opinion" (Baker, 1990:55).

<sup>9</sup> Sadat declared that all political bodies that were created proved ineffective, such as Hay'at al-Tahrir (the Liberation Rally), al-Ittihad al-Qawmi (the National Union), and al-Ittihad al-Ishtraki (the Socialist Union). For more details see El-Sadat (1978) and Rodinson, M. "The Political System." In: Vatikiotis (1968).

<sup>10</sup> In addition, the ASU was used as a tool to support the regime.

<sup>11</sup> The following six points remained the main principle of the Free Officers after they had taken power: 1. Ending the British occupation. 2. Eliminating feudalism. 3. Ending Capitalist domination of political power. 4. Establishing social equality. 5. Forming a strong popular army. 6. Establishing a healthy democratic life (Goldscmidt, 1988; Said, 1972).

<sup>12</sup> Ayubi argues that "given the ideological and organizational weaknesses of the ASU and the fact that it emerged from within the existing bureaucracy and its internal development, it was more in the direction of bureaucratization than in the direction of the politicization" (Ayubi, 1980:185).

It was noted that the ideological confusion was clear. To remedy this situation, the Higher Executive Committee of the ASU decided to set up a "socialist institute" whose official objective would be twofold: Conduct "comprehensive studies in socialism" and produce "elements of leadership that are conscious ideologically" (Rejwan, 1974:84).

<sup>13</sup> The ASU provided neither an adequate safety valve for opposition nor a serious instrument for checking and influencing government policy (Stephens, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> Nasser established the secret party called the Vanguard Organization. This was to be the core structure of the ASU. Meanwhile, Nasser hoped that the ASU would be his first real party, his loyal support, and his ideological arm.

<sup>15</sup> And it must be observed that most of the movements had been from the government to the ASU, rather than the other way around. Dekmejian's study shows that of the 131 ministers who held office between 1952 to 1968, only two had positions in the "political organization" before becoming ministers, whilst at least 83 held an ASU position during or after their ministerial terms (Ayubi, 1980; Dekmejian, 1972).

<sup>16</sup> Nasser denounced the multi-party system and liberal constitutionalism of the old regime as a failure and as an instrument of reactionary landlords and capitalists whom

he asserted as exploiters of the masses (Harik, Oct. 1973-July 1974).

<sup>17</sup> As a rule, Nasser's aides and cabinet members were appointed to the Supreme Executive Committee, while the Secretariat was headed by an aide or a member of the Free Officers.

<sup>18</sup> A study on 564 members of the "general national conferences" of the ASU witnessed among alleged workers and peasants the following people: An ex-minister, an army general, four members of company boards, 25 directors in civil service, companies and banks, a university chancellor and a vice-chancellor, a lecturer at a polytechnic, 29 heads of divisions in the government, 117 pharmacists, accountants, administrators and clerks, two journalists and a radio programmer (Ayubi, 1980:447).

<sup>19</sup> The ASU was originally designed to inspire civic consciousness and to promote responsible participation by the people. However, this aim was not actually attained. (Said, 1972; Ayubi, 1980).

<sup>20</sup> However, the ASU continued to function primarily as a mobilizational and legitimizing agent for the executive branch (Dawish, 1976).

<sup>21</sup> McDermott argues that "Nasser preferred not to take the risk of mass mobilization, whatever the claims later of the ASU and the legislation ensuring that the *fellahin* held a set proportion of seats in Parliament" (McDermott, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> In fact, the lack of elected leaders opened a gap between the ASU and the masses, thereby harming its legitimacy (Dewkmejian, 1972).

<sup>23</sup> According to the official explanation, the aim of the ASU would be to educate and organize the masses, and to safeguard the republic from capitalist, feudalist and foreign elements. Its relation with the regime were defined by Haikal as "seeking, through democracy, to keep state authorities under its supervision in order to protect the economic and social achievements of the revolution. Contrary to Haikal's hopeful comment, control continued to flow in the opposite direction from the state authorities to the ASU (Dawasha, 1976:120; Said, 1972).

<sup>24</sup> The National Charter contained these principles:

*"Democracy* is the true sign showing that a revolution is a popular action. Democracy means the assertion of sovereignty of the people, the placing of all authorities in their hands and the consecration of all powers to serve their ends.

*Socialism* is the progressive nature of a revolution. Socialism means the setting up of a society on a basis of sufficiency and justice, of work and equal opportunity for all, and of production and services.

*Political democracy* cannot be separated from social democracy. Political democracy cannot exist under the domination of any class.

*The National Unity* was created by cooperation between those representative powers of the people that will be able to set up the Arab Socialist Union. This



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union will constitute the authority representing the people, the driving force behind the possibilities of the revolution, and the guardian of the values of true democracy.

The popular and political organizations based on free and direct election must truly and fairly represent the forces forming the majority of the population, the forces that have long been exploited and which have a deep interest in the revolution through their experience of deprivation. **The authority of the elected popular councils must always be consolidated and raised above the authority of the executive machinery of the state.**

There is a dire need to create a new political organization, within the framework of the Arab Socialist Union, recruiting the elements for leadership.

Criticism and self-criticism are among the most important guarantees to freedom.

**Socialism** is the way to social freedom. Social freedom cannot be realized except through equal opportunity for every citizen to obtain a fair share of the national wealth."

For more details, see text of the National Charter in Rejwan (1974), Dessouki (1987) and Said (1972).

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<sup>26</sup> Harik argues that "despite the secondary role of the ASU in national affairs, it created local, political opportunities for many individuals and groups who had been without a political base, and introduced a new sense of political participation among masses. It served to recruit and train regional and local leaders who came to be in charge of organizing political participation and consolidating mass support for the regime. As an auxiliary body to the bureaucracy, it helped in implementing national policy and solving local problems" (Harik, Oct. 1973-July 1974:97).

<sup>27</sup> In July 1978, Sadat abolished the ASU and formed a new government party called the National Democratic Party. The leaders of the new party were Sadat loyalists. The ASU was formally abolished in April 1980 (Nyrop, 1983).

<sup>28</sup> In Kamshishe, a minor ASU official was killed. Ali Sabri used this incident to increase his influence.

<sup>29</sup> At the time of the parliamentary election in 1964, for example, there were over four million active members in the ASU but over six million eligible voters (Waterbury, 1983).

<sup>30</sup> One had to be a member of the ASU to be eligible for appointment of election to any cooperative board, regional or national assembly, or board of any union or professional association. In some instances, the right to exercise a profession (viz. journalists) was dependent upon ASU membership (Waterbury, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> During the pronounced socialist phase in the mid-1960s, the ASU relied on local schoolteachers, veterinarians, co-op officials, and other white-collar functionaries to

break the influence of local landowning groups (Richards et al., 1990; Harik, Oct. 1973-July 1974).

<sup>32</sup> Afaf Lutfi argues that "many Egyptians felt that all these changes (from the Liberation Rally to the National Union to the ASU) could best be described by the French saying: *Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose*. All these changes were window-dressing with no real attempts at mass mobilization or at setting a genuine representative apparatus (Al-Sayyid et al., 1985:122).

<sup>33</sup> But even if constituted, these are often convened; and if convened, they may perform only ceremonial functions, approving what has already been decided upon elsewhere (Harik, Oct. 1973-July 1974).

<sup>34</sup> Nasser complained that the ASU was unable to allocate responsibility in the various committees and on different levels of its structure; in short it was not able to create a political cadre of leadership on any level (Holt, 1968).

<sup>35</sup> Here we can add several interrelated weaknesses of the ASU, such as the leadership's practice of appointing ASU officials and the prevalence of "political careerism" in the organization which were criticized after June 1967. In addition, "during the first five years of its existence it became increasingly evident that the ASU was moving into an area of activity well beyond its formal responsibilities. Instead of fulfilling its political functions of policy-making and supervision, the organization was rapidly encroaching upon the government's administrative functions" (Dekmejian, 1972:153).

The report to the higher levels did not reflect an objective picture of public opinion. The lack of interest and commitment among large portions of the membership constituted a great problem. In May 1968, only 40% of the ASU members had paid their dues (Dekmejian, 1972).

<sup>36</sup> In *Kamshishe*, a minor ASU official was killed. Ali Sabri used this incident to strengthen his influence (Baker, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> The ASU was created to stimulate mass political activity, but without any strong ideology or genuinely popular appeal beyond an office in every town and a carefully constructed pyramid of committees, culminating in Nasser himself. The ASU was inevitably condemned to failure (McDermott, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> The ASU spoke in the name of all the people, but neither trusted nor consulted them (McDermott, 1988).

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However, during the demonstration in 1968, both students and workers demanded the abolition of the ASU and demanded a free assembly and vast internal reforms (Al-Sayyid et al., 1985).

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## The Political Role

<sup>41</sup> At the lower levels, the ASU had a substantial impact on political and social life. It offered an alternative to the traditional centers of power, especially in the villages. In all, the ASU encouraged political participation within carefully controlled and prescribed limits (Hopwood, 1982).

Harik argues that as a politically subordinate institution, the ASU is assigned an auxiliary political role-to recruit local leaders, support the regime, and watch and supplement the bureaucracy in implementing policy (Harik, Oct. 1973-July 1974).

<sup>42</sup> Owen argues that the ASU lacked both a clearly defined role and a coherent ideology. Also, three areas in particular remained ill defined. The first was the relationship between the party and other Egyptian institutions, notably the army, the bureaucracy and the professional syndicates. The second was the nature of the "alliance of working forces" that Nasser had said that the ASU should represent, but which continued to remain clearly undefined. The last area was that of ideology and, more precisely, what was meant by socialism (Owen, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> The ASU represents the latest attempt in the continuous, but frustrating, search by Nasser's regime for a formula of organized mass support, and a basis for permanent institutionalized political structure (Holt, 1968). Waterbury argues that the ASU was a form of a legal "monopoly" "representing" citizens (Richards et al., 1990).

## From “Revolution” to “State”

### Difficulties of Transition and Prospects for the Future.

*George Giacaman*

[Note: The present essay was written in late 1999, well before the outbreak of the 2000 intifada. Nonetheless, its analysis seems at least as accurate and pertinent as it did at the time. The Editors)

This paper deals with the problematic of transition in the Palestinian political system, from the as yet unfinished PLO phase, to a nascent phase in which the nation governs itself on its own land. We will not, however, be discussing the relationship with Israel, nor indeed the dramatic events associated with the resumed Palestinian intifada, except to the extent to which any other party affects the nature of the emerging system.

Ever since Oslo, many factors have impacted upon the Palestinian political system in the transitional era between rule by the national movement, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to that of autonomy and the quest for statehood. The entire period is a continuum between these two poles, and thus partakes of both. I will here be analyzing three factors, and concluding with a likely scenario for the future of the Palestinian political system.

The status of the PLO on the eve of Oslo and the establishment of the first Palestinian authority on Palestinian land was the prime factor in defining the subsequent political system. The characteristics of the organization's political structure left a clear imprint on the transitional system, most notably an excessive centralization in decision-making, which was further strengthened by the continuous erosion of the position of opposition groups



and their organizational base. These were unable to develop a practical political alternative to that of the leadership. This resulted in Fatah’s strengthened control over the political landscape as a whole, to which must be added its own increased internal centralization in the years leading up to Oslo, resulting from the death of Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir), Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf), and other top PLO decision-makers. The signature of the Oslo accords was a decision taken at the center, and the political system which emerged from the agreement in the shape of the Palestinian National Authority (‘PNA’) itself perpetuated this centralization.

A variety of factors thus contributed to the increasing hegemony of the leadership over the system, most notably within the decision-making apparatus. First of all, the restraining role previously played by the opposition was, as noted above, eroded. So too were internal restraints on the ruling party, Fatah, which had existed in the form of various committees, councils, or even particular military and political leaders. Parties were still involved in the decision-making process, but the leadership controlled the dominant portion of that process, both in the political and in the financial domain. This was also true at the administrative level, through the appointment of members of the bureaucracy and in the composition of the various councils, such as the Palestine National Council (PNC), the Central Council, and the Executive Committee.

The transition that took place around the time of the Oslo accords was not a qualitative as much as a quantitative one. It went against the rules as established over the previous quarter of a century. The opposition groups in fact connived in this transformation of the rules of the game, by attempting to reenter the political system under the new rules. One may give but one among a plethora of examples. The joint final communiqué of the meeting between Fatah and the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), published in *al-Ayyam* newspaper on September 29<sup>th</sup>,

1999, referred to the creation of a preliminary committee charged with “examining the appropriate mechanism for the creation of the future National Assembly based upon the regulations and bylaws of the PLO. The two sides agreed that the PLO institutions should continue to function according to existing rules”. No new mechanisms were to be created to go along with Palestinian political autonomy. This approach continues to prevail at the very time when talk on all sides is of the need to build an independent, democratic state. There is not even in this communiqué a reference to the mechanism of elections.

The second factor that affects the construction of the new Palestinian political system, is what one might call ‘the PLO example’, which amalgamates ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’, which, in other words, clouds the distinction between the organizations of the state and those of the society. The PLO combines two fundamental components, whose welding together can only be effected through coercion. Perhaps this integration of the organs of state and society, including parties, unions, councils, decision-making bodies and financial institutions, was needed at a particular time, when the entire effort went into saving a society threatened, through its dispersion, with extinction. But when the model was extended and reinforced, instead of being loosened, at a time when a type of territorial autonomous rule was being established, the authoritarian and constrictive nature of the system emerged ever more clearly. This has gone so far that, in the absence of indigenous, independently operating business sectors and owners of capital operating as a pressure group, Palestinian investors, indeed the market economy itself, are best represented by the World Bank headquartered in Washington, DC.

By definition, the space of the civil society begins where that of the state ends, although nowhere on earth is the space occupied by civil society entirely autonomous. Given the absence of a



state, and the continued dispersion of a significant portion of the Palestinian people, the PLO example examined above became a necessity, but a transient one. And today, the failure to move toward a clearer duality between society and state constitutes a potential threat to the social sphere, because of the increasing amount of space occupied by the Palestinian political apparatus, in the absence of solid, organized social units, such as unions, parties and mass movements. Only their growth could potentially provide a parallel pole mitigating the authority of the government.

The third factor which impacts on the emerging Palestinian political system is the specific character of the PA political setup, in which there are multiple political power centers, all correlated with the Palestinian leadership through interconnected circles and political clientelism. Although there is a type of horizontal correlation between these centers, they derive their power and their legitimacy from vertical relations. This applies to the opposition as well as the ruling party. The former have long been negotiating to enter the political system under the umbrella of the PNA, through “national discussions” taking place within the PLO.

The fundamental question is whether factors such as those discussed above, as well as others, will continue to be operative in the phase which follows the eclipse of the historical leadership of the PLO. In order to answer the question, a key internal factor must be weighed against an equally essential external one. The internal factor deals with the person of Arafat, the external factor, with the requirements of regional stability. It is difficult to imagine the succession to Yasir Arafat, given his charismatic personality, political and historical legitimacy, and internal and external acceptability. None of the conceivable candidates for the succession seem to possess these qualities. This means that the vertical axis of which we spoke will inevitably be weakened.

But the countervailing, international factor, is likely to prevent the system from breaking down entirely, given the importance attributed to stability in the region, connected as it is to the international political system, in an era of post-cold war political and economic globalization. Indeed, one can expect that the international priority placed on regional stability will guarantee the continuation in one form or another of the political process within the Palestinian Authority.

The development of an independent market economy, and the strengthening of political stability, require separate legislative, judicial, executive, bureaucratic and administrative structures. This evolution is absent in Palestine, at a time when economic globalization calls for foreign investments. These are in turn conditional on the emergence of a clear set of laws organizing and facilitating such investments, as well as the need within the economy for the rule of law, and an independent judiciary, at least where economic matters are concerned.

A growing market economy cannot depend solely on monetary exchanges, in the absence of long- and short-term loans, payment facilities, in short a rational fiscal and monetary system. Finance capital is known to be 'cowardly', and it will therefore not accumulate in Palestine unless these guarantees and facilities are available. In a context where the proto-state exercises a monopoly on economic as well as political power, stagnation can only prevail. Investors must feel that their capital is protected from the state, by a system guaranteeing the rule of law. This requires that there should be an independent legislative branch making laws to which the executive branch would conform, at the very least in the economic domain. For the same reason, there needs to be an independent judiciary, to whose decisions the executive must submit. In the absence of such a system, economic



activities, among others, cannot hope to take place independently of centralized political decision-making. This is the way, in Europe in an earlier era, the bourgeoisie managed to create the preconditions for its economic dynamism, through the separation of powers and the establishment of a legal system which made the state the servant, rather than the master, of economic activities.

The PA has unconditionally espoused the free market as its economic base. But it refuses to build the structural and legal preconditions for the creation of such a market. This is a paradox. In the absence of a Palestinian bourgeoisie acting as a pressure group, given the weakness of local investments, the World Bank has, with its studies, recommendations and policies, essentially replaced the Palestinian Authority as the champion of the Palestinian market economy as opposed to a socialist system.

The economic crisis can only intensify in future, with the inevitable decline in foreign assistance, and the need to replace it by new investments. This scenario was clearly spelled out at the Tokyo conference of donor states, attended by the Palestinians. There can be no increased investments in the absence of the appropriate legislative and administrative infrastructure, and a rational bureaucracy working out of the ministries and governmental offices. This is just as true in the case of the type of emergent mixed economy, combining state capitalism and the market. A number of Palestinian investors, including notably Abdel Muhsen Qattan, in *al-Quds*, May 3, 1999 among others, have emphasized this point repeatedly.

The leaders of the PNA seem to feel that the most rational and appropriate system for Palestine is one that would resemble those of Jordan and Egypt. These two states combine a minimal level of rational bureaucracy, judicial independence and the rule of law, attempting to avoid contradicting the dictates of economic growth

and development in an era of globalization. At the same time, these systems grant political rights, accompanied by elections, but within limits which foreclose any possible basic change in the domestic system and in regional policy. The granting of only limited political rights does not, however, seem entirely to negate economic development and growth. The need for a rational bureaucracy thus can be seen to be essential to the successful adoption of a similar policy on the part of the PA.

The Palestinian National Authority, however, has not learned its lesson, nor has it begun its transition. This is probably because it has concentrated on short-term objectives rather than long-term requirements. It is clear, however, that the Palestinian political system cannot continue as it is without affecting the stability of the region, especially if Jordan is to play a political role in future final status agreements. There has as yet been no attempt to synchronize between Palestine and Jordan, be it at the political, economic, legislative or administrative level. This type of synchronization must be the result of Palestinian reforms, not the reverse. Elections are the chosen mechanism for effecting change in the political system and legitimizing any future new leadership, particularly in the event of the establishment of a Palestinian state.





## From Coexistence To Democracy: The Impossible Lebanese Transition

*Nadine Picaudou*

When we speak about political transitions in the contemporary Arab world, we aren't simply referring to some current or coming dynastic successions, even though the death of kings, be they monarchs or republican despots, helps to identify the issues at stake in Arab political communities today. The question of transition to democracy was derived from the analysis of the last European fascist regimes and means for getting rid of them, followed by a focus on the study of regime transformation in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Until now, such an analysis has not been much applied to the Arab world, strengthening the myth of its "exceptionality" as regards democratization.<sup>1</sup> Arab political systems are nevertheless confronted with the question of the exit from authoritarianism, which forms the common background of "transitology" studies, with one noteworthy exception, Lebanon, which is supposed to fall outside of such a perspective. The study of the Lebanese political system is usually confined to the specific question of plural societies and institutional patterns able to secure a smooth functioning of life in common. We are indebted to Arend Lijphart for developing the theory of the two paradigms of democracy: majority democracy versus what he calls "concordance" or "consociational" democracy,<sup>3</sup> the second alone being able to regulate conflicts in plural societies. Because it substitutes, for the free game of political competition, a strict power-sharing between autonomous segments and acknowledges the right to veto any decision dealing



with group security and group identity, consociational democracy is supposed to avert the risk of any one community dominating the others. Because it rejects the rule of majority and favors the permanent search for consensus within the elite, it is supposed to dispel the threat of breaking up the loosely integrated national communities. The specific achievement of the pattern of consociation therefore lies in its ability to ward off the two dangers of war and hegemony. If that is the case, we might be tempted to test the restored consociation in post-war Lebanon in the face of these two opposite risks, in order to analyze the perverse effects of these threats on the working of the Lebanese political system.<sup>4</sup> This might lead us to discover that Lebanon, beyond its own indisputable social and political specificities, could be a borderline case regarding some of the issues at stake in the transition to democracy in many Arab countries today.

### **Balance of Power vs. the Risk of Hegemony**

The Document of National Agreement passed in Ta'if in 1989 and the new constitutional law dated September 21 1990 set down as the only basis of Lebanese political legality a pact of coexistence ('aish mushtarak) . The legitimacy of the authority takes root in the agreement between the various communities and their firm wish to live together. Socio-religious pluralism is constitutionally secured through articles 9 and 10, which respectively protect the freedom of conscience and educational choice. But since article 57 grants the minority a veto on the decisions of the House and article 95 provides for a fair allocation of public charges between the communities, it is not only true that the state is accountable for pluralism but also that social pluralism is directly imbedded in the state structures. In this respect, the Second Lebanese Republic basically continues in the path set by the first one. Setting down the pact of communal

coexistence as the official basis of the state nevertheless induces major institutional reforms, which reinforce confessional entities. Communal authorities have their prerogatives strengthened: they are allowed for instance to appeal to the new Constitutional Council in the event of the infringement of basic freedoms or questioning of personal status legislation. Institutional reorganization is basically concerned with a communal balancing of powers, which expresses itself as much in the new allocation of executive functions as in the strengthening of legislative branch based on a strict parity between Muslims and Christians. The prerogatives of the Executive, formerly concentrated into the hands of the Maronite President of the Republic, are theoretically distributed now between the President and the Council of Ministers (article 17) but actually shared by the Maronite President and the Sunni Prime Minister. The first one no longer has the prerogative of forming the government, dissolve the parliament and take upon himself the responsibility of foreign policy. The whole Executive actually grows weaker owing to the strengthening of the powers assigned to the parliament and specifically the introduction of governmental accountability to an expanded House whose composition rests on the strictly equal representation of Muslims and Christians. The extended powers of parliament's Shiite leader, whose term of office was fixed at four years, just like the mandates of the MPs, tend to convert the Maronite-Sunni tandem into a "troïka", symbol of power-sharing between the three main confessions. Power sharing is being extended to the civil service through strict communal quotas for the allocation of the 120 highest administrative posts.

This reshuffle departs significantly from the pre-war Lebanese formula derived from the constitutional provisions and the non-written principles of the national pact of 1943. This pact endorsed the "Lebanese idea", basing it on a dual compromise Maronite-

Sunni inside the country, western-Arab outside. But the historical alliance of the Lebanese national movement with France nevertheless remained the ultimate basis of legitimacy for the Lebanese entity. The underlying reality was consequently that of a hegemonic Maronite center expressing itself through the presidential system of government as well as in the way the dominant community was monopolizing security functions. The main political rifts were themselves the result of a split within the Maronite elite between those who advocated a consolidation of Christian power and those who saw the need for establishing a new communal balance at the top.<sup>5</sup> The very nature of the electoral system, rooted in the basic mixity of Lebanese territory, nevertheless dictated the conclusion of trans-communal alliances. No doubt, here lies the reason why the elites worked so desperately hard to diversify their communal basis and the source of this “communitarian decency” which prevented any of them from claiming a monopoly on the state. The communal sharing of charges and resources fueled the permanent competition for the communities’ political representation between clerical hierarchies and secular elites as well as within the secular *élites* themselves.<sup>7</sup> The divisions inside each community, heightened by growing social diversification, opened some avenues for freedom and debate inside the social fabric itself. On that score, the myth of Lebanese exceptionality, picturing the country as a haven of democracy in the midst of an entire Arab world doomed to dictatorship, could be accepted by a major part of society even though some people considered it as the mere mask of Maronite hegemony.

The divisions inside communities would not only contribute to the regulation of confessional struggles, they would start to open avenues for state building. The principle of a national state assuming responsibility for the development of the country gave



rise to a wide consensus on the eve of the war but the issue at stake in the political struggles was mainly further power-sharing. In the context of an aggravated confessional polarization, this demand for *musharaka* leads on the one hand to the denunciation of Maronite hegemony, and on the other to continued clinging to vested interests. After fifteen years of a bloody conflict, post-war reorganization is based on the refusal of any kind of group domination that might sow the seeds of a new civil war. This is how the strict balance of powers constitutes a bulwark against the risk of hegemony. Communal representation, which used to be a mere functional mechanism, thus tends to become a value in itself.

The actual imbalance of power distorts the ideal balance fueled by the myth of a no-winner war, as can be seen through the boycott of the 1992 parliamentary elections by the Christian opposition. The latter demanded a Syrian military redeployment prior to the poll and criticized the electoral law that manipulated constituencies as a function of political cronyism. The extent of the boycott, in addition to the low rallying capacity of the Christian parties weakened by the war, distorts the meaning of Muslim-Christian parity in the new House. The renewal of parliamentary élites was to the Muslim communities' advantage and the Christian MPs, mainly elected by Muslim votes,<sup>8</sup> could not claim to stand for the interests of their community. The case of Pierre Dakkash, elected in the *caza* of Ba'abda in 1996 thanks to his alliance with Hezbollah, is an extreme example. The abstention of a significant part of the Christian dominant class actually prolonged the war through other means and the state, which traditionally embodied the ultimate guarantee of the Christians' security and freedom, henceforth poses a threat to a number of them. Under such conditions, the alleged institutional balance that lies at the root of the Second Republic is unable to mask the reality of a new hegemonic center, an outside one, the

Syrian state. Damascus seems indeed to be a principal partner in the inner part of Ta'if agreement, insofar as its military withdrawal was first dependent upon Israel's withdrawal from the south, the disappearance of an Israeli threat, and, most significantly, on the prior suppression of political confessionism. Moreover, the redeployment of its forces is constantly delayed by the alleged threat of a resumption of violence. As for the repeated violations of the constitution, be it the extension of the presidential term of office in 1995 or the amendments of the electoral law in 1996, they find their official justification in the "special regional circumstances" or the requirements of "national security".

While the institutional balance is distorted by abstention within the Christian camp and the pressure of Syrian hegemony, the post-war political system which is basically concerned with a fairer representation of the various groups, actually allocates power to communal forces deeply transformed by the war. Before 1975, the religious communities were not so much basic groups left over from a traditional and deeply segmented society as modern socio-political forces involved in a competition for state power. Consequently, they should be considered less as natural entities than as constructed pluralist groups, which brings them close to "imagined communities". War turned these communities, split by inner debate and conflict into monolithic and tribalized ones, subjected to the rule of militias, which became their exclusive spokesmen. Because they stirred up the underlying myths of the group in an insecure environment, the militias helped to homogenize the communities around an identity considered as the ultimate value of the group. Such tribalized communities are fighting nowadays for a state that amounts to a mere object of competition between the groups. Warlords converted into honorable politicians mainly apply themselves to make their constituency-related interests prevail in the fierce competition

for state power and resources, a competition which tends to blur the limit between private and public interests.

The fact that public policies seem mainly dictated by the competition between communities and circles of cronies, is nowhere more evident than in the reconstruction projects initiated under the two Hariri governments between 1992 and 1998. Whether in downtown Beirut or in the south-western suburbs of the capital, most people see the government's modernist language as a mere sign of the strengthening of Sunni interests in a new light, technocratic and neo-patrimonial at the same time.<sup>9</sup> The question of rebuilding the Christian villages east of Saida, Maronite and Greek Catholic, which were destroyed during the 1985 fighting between Amal and the Palestinians, provides another example of the issues of reconstruction in a confessionally mixed environment.<sup>10</sup> The project is officially part of the rehabilitation of south Lebanon, a field in which Nabih Berri and the Council for the South reign supreme. The fact that the Hariri Foundation is not involved conveys the impression that Hariri and Berri are sharing jobs and profits. But the allocation of public funds officially conducted on behalf of communal understanding gives rise to criticism in the concerned Christian circles, which protest against the positive discrimination in favor of Shi'as. Action in favor of national reconciliation is left to the militancy of some sectors of civil society. These include one of the few trans-communal associations such as the Garden of Peace, or communal circles involved in Islamo-Christian dialogue, such as the Circle for Dialogue and Development of the Greek-Catholic Salim Ghazzal. The latter works for the return of Christian refugees and leads a debate about ways to restore coexistence.

The economic and political reconstruction of post-war Lebanon takes root in a fierce competition between groups, without any



internal authority being able to regulate it, as if politics was nothing but war through other means. However, in a country haunted by the specter of confessional sedition, the institutional reorganization of coexistence, based on a new balance of powers, is still considered by most Lebanese as the only antidote for the resumption of violence. Thus the restoration of the National Pact and consolidation of state-power, a wish commonly expressed by Lebanese public opinion, mainly stems from the gritty will to secure peace. Under such conditions, one might wonder whether the safeguard of coexistence does not lie more in the haunting memory of war than in the stipulations of the constitutional text.<sup>11</sup> Post-war Lebanon therefore leads one to play down the significance of the political pact as a paradigm. This is contrary to the vision popularized through the studies of democratic transitions in Latin America in the eighties, according to which constitutions play a purely instrumental part in reconciling antagonistic interests and values instead of setting up a political community. In strongly polarized societies devoid of any unified political culture, where all the actors feel insecure, a mere constitutional codification of procedures fails to secure the association of the various segments and render compatible identities and projects which are in fact irreconcilable. The principle of negotiating non-substantial pacts exclusively meant to regulate political competition seems strangely unsuitable in a situation where the issues at stake deal with values making up the political community itself. Institutionalizing coexistence is not sufficient to open avenues for the state and the mere fact that democracy is still considered in negative terms, whereby no group dominates another reveals a dread of hegemony that stands in the way of state consolidation. Mere coexistence does not mean politics.

### **Elite Consensus in the Face of the Risk of War**

The fact that war did break out poses in a radically new way the problem of the Lebanese political system. First because the conflict proved the failure of the pattern of consociation, powerless to secure elite consensus in a context of strong regional tensions connected to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Far from strengthening national solidarity, the outside threats increased the systemic centrifugal trends and sped up the local political forces' allegiance to powerful regional actors.<sup>12</sup> But the war mainly created this strange paradox according to which restoring peace requires the integration of warmongers into the political system. Restoring public order would actually have been unthinkable without disarming the militias and the amnesty law of March 1991, a prelude to the political conversion of warlords. The co-optation of militia officials within the government and the parliament through the nominations of May 1991 or their recruiting in the civil service in 1993-1994 introduced the fruits of war at the very heart of the post-war political system. Moreover, the selective and discretionary enforcement of the amnesty law is indicative of the political issues at stake. Some people cannot lay claim to it, neither the implacable enemies of Damascus, such as Samir Geagea, guilty of having repudiated the Ta'if process after accepting it, nor the former members of the South Lebanon Army. This is illustrated by the punishments meted out against some of them, after the Israeli withdrawal. The integration of militiamen within the political system necessarily weakens the élites' capacity to reach consensus, inasmuch as it increases the heterogeneity of the ruling class. The latter mingles heirs of the former oligarchy, warlords and "nouveau riche", without omitting the clerical hierarchies who take advantage of the discrediting of civilian élites. If normalization requires the integration of militiamen, it nevertheless legitimates violence as a means to



reach power and war as an instrument for political conflict resolution, when the illegitimacy of violence is one of the prerequisites of democracy. Above all it compels the political community to adopt a posture of amnesia. This is because the state power is unable to shape a collective memory of war likely to prevent conflicts to come<sup>13</sup> and finds itself forced to restate the classical theme of “a war for others”. This posture, in the post-war context, turns the Palestinian into a suitable expiatory victim, giving the illusion of a strengthened national identity.

The fact that war broke out also allows the government to hold up the bogey of a new explosion in order to justify the choice of unprecedented repressive policies as if the assertion of state power expressed itself through a new authoritarian order without any concern for consensus. As a matter of fact, the reorganization of the broadcasting scene following the wartime media anarchy originates with the indictment of Samir Geagea after the attack that occurred on February 24, 1994 in a church of east Beirut. It was soon after this event that the government suspended the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) before it banned news broadcasting from private media under the alleged threat of “confessional violence”. The 1994 law on TV and radio, which came into force in the autumn of 1996, brings in an unprecedented state control over media, broadcasting channels and financing alike. Six TV channels alone are allowed to broadcast political news; five of them, among which R. Hariri’s FTV, N. Berri’s NBN and M. Murr’s MTV, are close to power. The sixth one, al-Manar channel, the organ of Hezbollah, only owes its survival to a decision by Syria.<sup>14</sup>

The new infringements on freedom of expression nevertheless rallied a lot of people in support of the protection of public freedoms. In addition to media professionals, the movement was



joined by members of CGTL, the main trade-union in the country which issued a strike order in the autumn of 1996 and representatives of the political opposition, from the Christian right to Hezbollah and the leftist parties. Fighting for the rule of law went through other ways these last few years, such as exposing the many irregularities of the electoral process. These included the manipulation of constituencies on behalf of stars in the ruling élite, Syrian pressures in the drawing up of lists, sundry acts of intimidation at the time of polls. Fighting for the rule of law actually corresponds to various strategies: for a part of the Christian opposition, it is a way to avoid the perverse effects of the 1992 boycott, to reintegrate themselves into the political game and indirectly fight Syrian rule. Such is the case of the members of the National Bloc, as well as influential individuals like Metn House representative, Nasib Lahoud or Boutros Harb, a northern delegate who came back to parliament in 1996 in spite of the Syrian veto. In June 1998, he organized a sit-in by the House in order to denounce the Tabarja executions, which he considered indicative of a “political management of the death penalty”, from an authority merely aiming to show that it had taken public order in hand again. Standing up for law also rallies new actors coming from trans-communal civil society associations. These include the likes of the Collective for Local Elections, the Movement for People’s Rights, the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, al-Muwatin group or the Green Forum, an ecologist association which rallied against the Metn quarries illegally opened during the war.<sup>15</sup>

But as soon as the prospect of a real breakthrough on citizenship questions the basis of the socio-political system, the bogey of civil war soon reappears and the upholding of consensus is only secured at the cost of the concealment of the issue at stake. This

is what happened when the matter of optional civil marriage was raised in the spring of 1998. A few months before ending his term of office, President E. Hraoui proposed to the Council of Ministers<sup>16</sup> a new project liable to gather the advocates of civil marriage, an old project dating back to a French High Commissioner's decree in 1936. People wondered about the reasons that led a President discredited by the extension of his term of office in 1995, to raise such a tricky matter. Was he anxious to prove his ability to rule? Or was he desirous of leaving behind a modern image of himself? Or was he deliberately challenging the Maronite Patriarch who despised him? In any case, the President had nothing to lose and initially benefited from the support of Damascus. But the ensuing debate was so scathing that the project was finally put on hold after a long talk between Asad and the Lebanese troika in April 1998. The Muslim religious hierarchies were the first to go on the offensive against civil union.<sup>17</sup> Meeting in Dar al-Fatwa, the Sunni Mufti M. R. Qabbani and the President of the Higher Shiite Council, M.M. Shamseddin, published a common communiqué. In it they stated their flat refusal of any project of optional civil union, insofar as "it damages the basis of Muslim doctrine and faith" and the Mufti declared later on in an interview that "civil union allows the forbidden and forbids the allowed". The Maronite hierarchy outdid the Muslims in the same field. In his Sunday homily of March 22, 1998, Mgr. N. Sfeir notably declared that "civil union infringes church teachings and he who concludes it will be denied the secret of confession". Some isolated voices were audible inside clerical circles, among them that of Archbishop Khodr or M. al-Amin, a magistrate in the Ja'fari court who stated that "Islam allows one to contract a marriage in a civil court". Most of the clerics, however, reacted in an extremely violent way that expressed their traditional dread of the secularization of social



bonds. In addition to that, civil union, even optional, opens the way to inter-communal marriage, questioning in the long run the communal organization of society. Personally threatened in their power and resources, the religious hierarchies worked on fueling intellectual disarray equating the suppression of communalism with religious denial. But the debate soon raised new issues, more openly political.

The Sunni hierarchy, through the Court President, considered that the project “aims at encouraging the communities to question their position towards the National Pact and their loyalty to Lebanon, insofar as this loyalty was granted on the basis of recognized historical communal entities”.<sup>18</sup> This hardly veiled threat of questioning the Sunni loyalty to Lebanon in case the country’s communal structure would be undermined bordered on blackmail and was intended to lay down pre-requisites for membership in the national community. The debate quickly shifted to the matter of political confessionalism, whose suppression was advocated by the Ta’if Document. The Maronite hierarchy merely raised once again the stock oabout how to suppress communalism in the minds, this process being itself dependent on the restoration of a national agreement. For most of Maronite élites, the main risk lies in the suppression of political confessionalism without previous secularization of personal legal status. Such a prospect, advocated by most Muslim officials, revives the fear of an Islamic domination that would turn the minority into a new kind of dhimmi. The post-war context only compounds the feeling of being threatened. The confessional system, once considered a means for safeguarding Maronite hegemony, turned into a means of mere political survival for the Christian élites, providing them with minimum guarantees in terms of social status and political representation. The prospect of suppressing the communal allocation of powers is quite as



unacceptable for the Druze, who ever since 1983 have demanded the establishment of a senate representing the six main communities in the country, under the chairmanship of a Druze. This institution would deal with such basic issues as peace and war, budget and development choices, constitutional amendments, changes in the nationality code or personal status legislation.<sup>19</sup> The minorities and all the groups afraid of becoming minorities are inclined to take refuge in the communal framework while the majorities can easily free themselves from it. This is how the revival of the consociational ideal should be understood, as a reassuring pattern for groups going through an experience of disillusion and vulnerability, who fear the enforcement of the rule of the majority which would condemn them in the long run to wither away.<sup>20</sup>

The fear of demographic minorities to be reduced to the status of permanent political minorities actually rests on a static understanding of the political system as a zero-sum-game between groups holding a limited stock of political resources, the victory of one group meaning the corresponding defeat of the other. The very notions of political majority and minority are actually meaningless since one does not speak in terms of individuals, but of groups rooted in the segmentations of society themselves directly imbedded within the political system. In such a situation, choices are mainly dictated by the structures of power allocation as clearly shown in the debate on civil marriage and suppression of political confessionalism. The Lebanese case inclines us not to underestimate the pressure of structures upon actors as soon as communal splits merge with the means to gain state power and resources. It therefore encourages the observer to question the validity of "rational choices paradigm", popularized through transition studies which tend to emphasize the actors' strategies without taking in consideration the

determinism of structures.<sup>21</sup> The suspension of the civil union project finally exemplifies the way problems dealing with basic group values are being kept out of the debate. The most controversial matters cannot be expected to be part of the quest for élite consensus. Concealing the issues at stake remains a prerequisite for maintaining peace. Here lies one of the main weaknesses of consociation pattern. The more open and progressive understanding of concordance democracy suggests in this respect that one should distinguish between economic and political matters, open to debate and free competition, and sensitive fields dealing with education, language or religion which should stay under the control of the various communities.<sup>22</sup> But the project of civil marriage, liable to open the way to the questioning of political confessionalism, proves how difficult it is to separate the two fields. Negotiating and compromising over matters connected to basic values actually touches on the core issue of democratization.

As soon as the debate directly questions the status of groups in the political arena, democracy may easily turn into a corrupting force which threatens the very roots of the system when it does not jeopardize the social organization itself. The most authoritarian Arab regimes are those in which state power was seized by a private clan under the cover of national integration and economic development. In these cases, society is inclined to understand any policy of conciliation as a sign of weakness on the part of the dominant 'asabiyya and to view democratization as merely substituting one hegemony for another. In the opposite case of politicized identities competing for control of a weak state, democratic procedures unleash clashes on values that touch on the very identity of groups and cannot be expected to leave room for any accommodation. Without a minimal consensus on the basic norms of the political community, democratization may

contribute to the unleashing of violence. Far from democracy being a well-honed instrument for peace in pluralistic societies,<sup>23</sup> peace seems to be one of the pre-requisites of democracy. For democracy is not expected to establish law, it might even be characterized by the uncertain quality of its points of reference.<sup>24</sup> Democracy without citizenship is no more than a set of procedures for peaceful conflict regulation. It is purely instrumental and unable to define the legitimate object of the competition it organizes. One of the main obstacles in building democracy in the Arab world lies in the joint necessity of building a sovereign and legitimate state and extending at the same time democratic values and procedures. Ill-consolidated or weakened states are faced with the specific requirements of participation characteristic of “the democratic age” and its “the passion for equality”. These states lack a public sphere, in the sense of a set of rights and duties able to weather social splits and overcome vested interests.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the actors of civil society are inclined to turn the state into a mere instrument for satisfying their needs, a place for sharing resources. It is therefore in the autonomy of politics from society that lies the possibility of a genuine pact, not the pact of everyone with everyone, but “the pact of everyone with all”. In this respect, “restoring civility” in post-war Lebanon<sup>27</sup> will not be enough to open avenues of common interest and shared meaning. The ideology of coexistence, rooted in the legitimate desire to drive away the evils of war, will inevitably delay the inescapable integration of fitna into the core of the political community. For the political bond is specific in that it entails both identification and conflict and the “paradox of politics”, according to the philosopher P. Ricoeur, lies in the necessary connection between sovereignty and domination, rationality and violence.<sup>28</sup> Given these conditions, the main issue confronting Lebanon today lies not so much in the question of



transition from coexistence to democracy as in the consolidation of a state able to go beyond the mere fact of pluralism and build citizenship. Over and above the specificities of Lebanese society and the strong outside pressures to which the country is subjected today, Lebanon's example is full of lessons for the study of political transitions in the Arab world. The most decisive among them is probably the reminder that there exists narrow path between war and group hegemony. It does not, however, simply go through institutionalized communal coexistence and a strict balance of power between groups, but rather, through a radical separation between social segmentations and the means to gain state power, that is to say, the de-politicization of identities.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> On this point see M. Camau, "Voies et moyens de la banalisation d'une aire culturelle: approches du politique dans le monde arabe et musulman", in *Cinquième Congrès de l'Association française de science politique (ASFP)*, Aix-en-Provence, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the key reference, G. O'Donnell, P.H. Schmitter, C. Stemmata and L. Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule. Prospects for Democracy*. Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977. By the same author, "Théorie et pratique de la loi de la majorité: la ténacité d'un paradigme imparfait", in *Revue Internationale de Sciences Sociales*, n°129, Paris 1991.

<sup>4</sup> On this point also see E. Picard, "Le communautarisme politique et la question de la démocratie au Liban", in *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, vol. 4, n° 3, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> On this point see G. Salamé, "La démocratie comme instrument de la paix civile au Liban", in *Démocraties sans démocrates. Politiques d'ouverture dans le monde arabe et islamique*, Fayard, Paris, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> The expression as well as the general argument are taken from A. Beydoun, *Le Liban. Itinéraires dans une guerre incivile*, Karthala-Cermoc, Paris-Beirut, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> On this point see the analysis conducted by E. Picard on the paradigm of 'amiyyat in Maronite history, in "Les dynamiques politiques des chrétiens au Liban. Changement et crise de leadership", in *Monde arabe Maghreb Machrek*, n° 153, July-September 1996.

<sup>8</sup> For further details see J. Bahout, "Les élites parlementaires libanaises en 1996. Etude

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de composition”, in J. Bahout et C. Douaihi, *Vie publique libanaise. Expression et recomposition du politique, Les Cahiers du Cermoc*, n° 18, Beirut, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> See M. Harb el-Kak, “La reconstruction de la banlieue sud-ouest de Beyrouth: une négociation entre Etat et acteurs politiques”, in E. Huybrechts et C. Douaihi (dirs.), *Reconstruction et réconciliation au Liban, négociations, lieux publics, renouement du lien social, Les Cahiers du Cermoc*, n° 23, Beirut, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> E. Bonne et Y. Jebahi, “La reconstruction des villages de l’est de Saïda: liens avec la ville et enjeux communautaires”, in *Reconstruction et réconciliation, ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> H. Gourdon, “Consociation et consolidation: les politiques constitutionnelles de la transition”, in *Cinquième Congrès de l’ASFP, op. cit.*, Aix-en-Provence, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> An important debate brings together the advocates of “a war for others” who view Lebanon as a hostage of regional conflicts and those who ascribe ultimate responsibility for the war to the internal weaknesses of the Lebanese political system.

<sup>13</sup> On this point see “Coût des conflits internes et construction de la mémoire collective au Liban”, in *Actes du Premier Séminaire international de la Fondation libanaise pour une paix civile permanente*, Cyprus, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> See M. Chaoul, “Les enjeux de l’audiovisuel: réel, fictif ou fiction réaliste?”, in *Vie publique au Liban... op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> K.Karam, “Les associations: défense de l’environnement et recomposition d’un nouvel espace public”, in *Reconstruction et réconciliation..., op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> 21 votes in favor of the project, 6 against and one abstention; a poll which expresses as much the interplay of political loyalties as the actual positions on the question of civil union.

<sup>17</sup> For a good summary of the debate and the sources of the following quotations, see *al-Muwatin*, n°42, April-June 1998.

<sup>18</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 21 March 1998.

<sup>19</sup> See H. Hamadé, “Sénat et système confessionnel au Liban”, in *Cahiers de l’Orient*, n° 52, 4<sup>e</sup> trimestre 1998.

<sup>20</sup> E. Picard, “Les dynamiques politiques des chrétiens...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> See N. Richani, *Dilemmas of Democracy and Political Parties in Sectarian Societies. The Case of the PSP in Lebanon (1949-1996)*, Macmillan, London, 1998.

<sup>22</sup> See Th. Hanf, “Le Liban en perspective comparée”, in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 1990.

<sup>23</sup> It is the position of G. Salamé in “La démocratie comme instrument de paix civile...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> See J. Leca, "La démocratisation dans le monde arabe: incertitude, vulnérabilité et légitimité", in *Cinquième Congrès de l'ASFP, op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> This definition is taken from M. Camau in "Trois questions à propos de la démocratie dans le monde arabe", in *Démocratie et démocratisations dans le monde arabe*, Cedej, Cairo, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> The expression is taken from P. Ricoeur in "Le paradoxe du politique", *Esprit*, n° 250, 1957.

<sup>27</sup> J. Hannoyer, "Economies de la violence, dimensions de la civilité", in *Guerres civiles. Economies de la violence, Dimensions de la civilité*, Karthala-Cermoc, Paris-Beirut, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> In "Le paradoxe du politique", *op. cit.*





## Lebanon and the Palestinian Refugees after Ta'if: From War to Coexistence

*Graham Usher*

In his speech marking the 10th anniversary of the Ta'if Accords, Lebanese President, Emile Lahoud, said that one of the successes of Lebanon's post-war reconstruction was that it had enabled Lebanese to distinguish "brothers" from "enemies".

The question as which of the two designations applies to the Palestinians in Lebanon may be debated. At the rhetorical level, of course, they are "brothers" - fellow Arabs in the common struggle against Israeli occupation of Arab lands. And they are steadfast (with the Lebanese) in their refusal to accept any solution of their refugee status other than the return to their homes in what was Mandate Palestine but is now Israel.

But at virtually every other level they are enemies. They provide the necessary demonology that allows Lebanon to pass over all the unanswered questions thrown up by the civil war. Thus it is now almost folkloric in Lebanon that the Palestinians were a cause - if not the principal cause - of the war and Israel's 22 year long occupation of their country. Refusal to countenance their permanent resettlement in Lebanon, in Arabic towteen, is one of the very few political issues on which virtually all Lebanon's political confessions can unite. The Palestinians thus play the symbolic role of an indigestible sect that helps hold together what is still a sectarian system. Beyond this, they provide both a constituency and a site over which at least three national powers contend, always for their own ends, often in conflict with one another.

### **Lebanese government policies**

The Lebanese government pursues three basic policies - two declared, one undeclared, and all with roots in the past:

The first is rejection of towteen. This is not just part of the folklore. It is written into the Lebanese post-war constitution. It is also, increasingly, becoming a part of the Lebanese “track” of the peace process. All Lebanese leaders insist that rejection of towteen would be one of the “preconditions” for any peace agreement with Israel.

The second is the resurrection of the vision of Palestinians - and especially those who live in the camps - as a “security problem”. This in itself marks a return to government policies that obtained in Lebanon prior to the PLO’s “liberation” of the camps in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hence, the heavy Lebanese army presence around each of the 12 main camps in Lebanon, the often arbitrary arrests of Palestinians whenever tensions grow, and the petty harassment of Palestinians at the airport and border-crossings. All of which confirms the widespread Lebanese perception that the camps are hotbeds of criminality and/or sedition. Yet, alongside this, there is also the notion that the camps are still a contested space, a space apart from Lebanon proper. One of the few leftovers from the PLO’s revolutionary era is that the Lebanese army does not enter the camps and Palestinian popular committees still operate within them. This perhaps explains the Lebanese authorities’ passive complicity in allowing Fatah to reassert itself in various camps, notably ‘Ain Helweh. Devolving power to Fatah to deal with the Islamists in the camps and keep a lid on things during this particularly turbulent period is a way of maintaining control without assuming responsibility. It is Lebanon’s greatest fear that it will be foisted with permanent responsibility for the Palestinians in its midst.



The third is an undeclared policy of quietly encouraged emigration. Unlike their compatriots in Syria, Jordan and the occupied territories, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are barred from employment in no less than 75 occupations. They cannot renovate or rebuild their shelters in the camps. And they are supplied with no services other those offered by an ever more cash-starved UNRWA and an ever dwindling number of NGOs. In the eyes of many Palestinians in Lebanon, the aim of these restrictions is transparent - it is to make life so unlivable as to force them to leave. And the policy seems to be working. According to UNRWA, there are around 360,000 registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. According to Palestinian researchers in Lebanon, the real number of refugees actually resident in the country is about 220,000, and perhaps even less. In other words, all those who could leave have left or have become naturalized.

### **Syrian policies**

Syria pursues a double-barreled, perhaps slightly contradictory policy towards the Palestinians:

As the main power in Lebanon, Syria clearly shares the notion of the Palestinians as a “security problem” and colludes with it, though with different aims in mind: the first is to prevent any return of what Damascus calls Arafatism in Lebanon. This is less to block the physical return of Fatah to the camps. It means rather the suppression of any revival of the Palestinians as an independent political or military force in Lebanon, as again an actor in the Lebanese theatre. Hence, Syria’s continued denial of any representative status for the PLO in Lebanon, and continued sponsoring of “its” Palestinian groups in Lebanon - Abu Musa, Ahmad Jibril and Sa’iqa - particularly in the northern and middle

camps. Finally, there is Damascus' continued hosting, or at least co-hosting of the PLO's opposition factions, a rapprochement greatly facilitated of course by Arafat and Fatah's embrace of Oslo.

On the other hand, a "controlled" Palestinian community in Lebanon provides Syria with a conduit to Palestinian national politics, both there and in the occupied territories - a conduit that may prove vital during the period of the final status talks. This would help to explain Syria's apparent toleration of Fatah's re-entry to 'Ain Helweh and other Lebanese camps. It would also explain Syrian Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam's "advice" to the PLO opposition factions that they should put away the gun, return home and become "political parties". Both steps clearly enhance Syria's influence on the Palestinian track of the peace process, nowhere more than on the matter of refugees, in which both Lebanon and Syria have a vested interest.

### **PLO/PA/Arafat's policies**

These can be broken down into two phases, at least in the perception of most Palestinians in Lebanon. The first was abandonment. This does not just refer to the PLO's financial abandonment of many services to the Palestinians in Lebanon - a decline that started in 1982 but reached its trough following the 1991 Gulf war. It was also the sense of political and national abandonment, implied in the Madrid Conference but massively exacerbated by Oslo - where Arafat signed an agreement with Israel without getting recognition of even the principle of the right to return or any reference to UN Resolution 194. There was also the abandonment implied by the Palestinian leadership's shift in discourse away from demands for return and to demands for "statehood". Finally, there was if not the abandonment then at least the obsolescence of the PLO and its increasing confusion

with and de facto replacement by the PA - a “national” authority that is empowered to represent Palestinians only from the West Bank and Gaza and not “wherever they reside”.

The second phase is the apparent resurrection of the PLO through the National Unity discussions and Fatah’s return to dominance in ‘Ain Helweh. But given the so far formulaic nature of the National Unity dialogue and the wholly militaristic nature of Fatah’s re-entrée, many Palestinians in Lebanon see Arafat’s “return” as less about assuming responsibility for their fate than about representation in the final status talks. In other words, they see Arafat’s move to represent Palestinians in Lebanon mostly as a means to prevent other representatives from emerging, whether Syrian backed or in the form of a Palestinian refugee movement that arises independently of Arafat, Fatah and the PA.

### **The current crisis/ “conspiracy” in Lebanon**

It is clear that these different national agendas may occasionally coincide or contradict each other. The signs now are that they are in contradiction. There are I think two reasons for this:

First, Arafat’s drive for representation was bound, sooner or later, to come into conflict with the “security” agenda of Lebanon and Syria’s desired hegemony over both. Arafat has his own interests - and, increasingly, his own “external” allies - which may mean that his way of controlling the Islamists in ‘Ain Helweh may not square with Lebanon and Syria’s. Arafat wants to be the Palestinians’ representative with the Lebanon and Syrian governments. He cannot be seen to be Syria and Lebanon’s “representative” to the Palestinians.

Second, there is the so-called “war of the tracks”, Israel’s repeatedly successful ruse of playing the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks off each other. I think there is a genuine Lebanese



and Syrian fear that any Framework Agreement between Israel and the Palestinians will give implied credence to the Israeli-driven notion of resettlement as a solution to the refugee question. And if there is no agreement with Damascus, it is clearly in Syria's interest to ignite a little "controlled instability" in south Lebanon and it may turn to the Palestinians (as well as others) to engineer this. Given Damascus' absolute suspicions, Arafat and Fatah would be a dangerous ally for such an enterprise, with the risk that "controlled instability" could rapidly become outright disorder, as has often happened in Lebanon's past. But there are always methods (including the arrest or assassination of Fatah activists loyal to him) for delineating the limits on Arafat's potential influence in South Lebanon, and reminding him who is the ultimate enforcer there.

### **Conclusion**

Needless to say, none of this actually serves either the national or civic aspirations of the Palestinians in Lebanon. Nor do the touted "solutions" to the refugee question currently on offer:

The establishment of a truncated Palestinian "state" in the West Bank and Gaza with citizenship granted to the controlled few allowed to return in exchange for Palestinian refugees receiving permanent residency rights in Lebanon. Given that Israel would agree to this only in exchange for a Palestinian *de jure* or at least *de facto* renunciation of the right of return, this would mean for Lebanon *towteen*, and would be resisted. And if there were no withdrawal from the Golan Heights, it would be resisted by Syria also.

Deferring the refugee issue until some undefined future. At best, this would mean perpetuation of the status quo in Lebanon and, at worst, it would be an invitation for further Lebanese pressure on the Palestinians to emigrate.

Against these utterly bleak scenarios, I can see only one possible positive development, at least in the short term. And this is for the Palestinian progressive and democratic forces not only to demand but activate the revival and democratization of the PLO. At the very least, this would staunch the increasing national fragmentation of Palestinian refugees between their various "host" countries. A democratized PLO would also give the refugees at least some independent say in their own fate.

Without this, the only alternative I can see is what we have: increasing Palestinian alienation from all the political factions, increasing personal despair and, in Lebanon, flight. And flight - in David Hirst's phrase - means "the death of a dream". But that dream was once the lifeblood of contemporary Palestinian nationalism - which was not about statehood, or not just about statehood. It was about recovering the land to enable the right and the choice of return.





## Italy: The Never-Ending Transition

*Guido Moltedo*

The last decade of the twentieth century was a transitional period for Italy, from an institutionalized political set-up, paradoxically precarious but solid at the same time, to one which is today unsettled. This phase, lasting very long and still continuing to this day, has been named the “never-ending transition.”

It is a decade which, though in different and unpredictable ways, seems to resemble more and more (and here is another paradox) the historical period immediately preceding it. This period is the 50 years following the war, which ought to have been archived by now, judging from the events of the restless years between 1989 and 1993. Those years seemed at the time to be marked by irreversible historical change. Today, in retrospect, we have the impression that they were only the beginning of a period of great instability. After all, which is the most unstable country in the Western world if not Italy?

If we mean by instability the frailty of the executive power, then Italy is a pathologically unstable country. Since 1945, and until today, more than 60 governments have come and gone, an average of more than one per year. Despite this, Italy's extreme instability was based, until 1989, on a very strong political system and solid power structure. The Christian Democratic party was, since World War II and with no interruption thereafter, the party of the relative majority and a pivot for all subsequent coalitions: center, center-left, center-right and center-left again.

A constellation of medium-to-small size parties rotated around the Christian Democrats like “satellites” and was never a threat to their centrality of power. The precarious state of the executive resulted from clashes within this majority and fights amongst lobbies and power groups; it was never the result of rotation with the opposition parties. If we just look for a moment at the men who led Italy in those years, we notice that they were always the same characters, in an endless swapping of power roles. Giulio Andreotti, for instance, is the perfect example: seven times Prime Minister and countless times Minister. Here we therefore had maximum instability within a framework of absolute stability.

When talking about Italy in the last 50 years—a period now called “the First Republic”, political analysts have been using an oxymoron, “one party/multi-partyism”. This describes a particular regime based not on one party but on a number of parties constantly in power, never rotating with the opposition. It was a democratic regime of course, if this is defined by the regularity, freedom and honesty of elections. But it was a regime nonetheless, in the sense that the opposition (represented by the largest Communist party in the Western world, which was also the largest Italian party after the Christian Democrats) never had a chance of assuming the reins of power, except at a local or regional level.

Indeed, the Communist Party, ever since the immediate post-war period, ruled non-stop over important regions, such as Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria (the so-called “red regions”) and important cities and towns, foremost among them Rome, Genova, Naples, or Turin. But it never led the national government, nor participated in it directly with actual ministers.

The Italian Communist Party had been the main local protagonist in the struggle against and liberation from Fascism and Nazism,

and had participated in drawing up the post-war constitution. Nevertheless, it was seen as a political force tied to the Soviet Union and, as such, ineligible to govern a Western country, a member, what was more, of the Atlantic Alliance. The formula used to indicate this particular state of exclusion was "*conventio ad excludendum*". Only towards the end of the 1970s, when the Italian Communist Party had become too strong to be kept out of power-over 30% of votes-was a quickly aborted political operation thought out. But it ended tragically and is looked upon today as the fatally flawed "historic compromise" between the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party.

The agreed formula was as follows: no direct participation by the Communists in what was nonetheless a rather large coalition government, but parliamentary support on their part to a government led by the Christian Democratic Party. The architect of this move, the CD leader Aldo Moro, was kidnapped in 1978 by the extreme-leftist "Autonomous" movement the Red Brigades, and assassinated after 55 days in captivity, an episode in Italian history which is still surrounded by mystery. The fact is that the partial attempt to admit the Communists to the country's government ended in bloodshed and was not repeated.

The "Italian case," as political experts used to call the anomaly of Italian democracy, was therefore marked by the existence of a "virtual wall" or "invisible wall," not any smaller or thinner than the real one dividing Germany. This was the wall built (but in this instance on the "Western" side) to keep out the "Red menace". This German-Italian parallelism should not come as any surprise, since Italy and Germany had in common the Second World War defeat. Nor should it surprise us today that the fall of the Berlin Wall should, outside of Germany and in Eastern Europe, have had the strongest repercussions in Italy.



The “First Republic” did not, however, simply give birth to these “two Italies”, divided by an invisible wall. The double reality was intertwined with a further division, another wall that historically crosses the country, the one between North and South. In contemporary Italy, left and right are fierce enemies, not just competitors as in various Western democracies, and the North and South are not separate parts but belong to the same whole, ever more distant and divided, sometimes appearing to be on the verge of splitting apart. These divisions are also a dangerous historic inheritance. When Italy still was not a nation, territorial rivalries always overcame the drive towards national unity. Even the struggle for liberation from fascism has been described as a civil war.

The decades-long duration of an anomalous political situation reinforced these divisions, even though social and economic development (“the Italian miracle”) did not jeopardize the country’s extraordinary evolution, which saw it become a protagonist of the European unification process and one of the world’s greatest economic powers. This again is an Italian paradox, difficult to understand through the normal tools of political analysis.

The First Republic has been described as an “unaccomplished democracy” and a “stalled system.” The prolonged lack of rotation between the two opposing political sides within which a context of division and socio-political polarization were very strong, provoked pathological side effects which not even this decade, the one following the fall of the Berlin Wall, managed to heal.

First of all there is corruption. The “impasse” of the political system became a true state “hazard.” Governing élites were convinced, by now, that their power had no limits, since the opposition was not allowed access to the pinnacle of government and state. Public

resources, in terms of budget and wealth, were considered a private domain, in the end, as a result of the unchanging power structure. The business world-especially big business, which in Italy is still in the hands of a few families-would make deals with government parties and especially with their leaders, national and local, not just because they had no choice, but also because they were taking advantage of the situation.

Companies such as Fiat or Pirelli for decades benefited from a particularly advantageous climate, like few other European firms, because they could rely on economic policies cut to measure for their own needs. Already in the 60s, Italy had the most developed motorway network in Europe, second only to Germany, a crucial infrastructure for the development of Fiat and its affiliated companies. Other advantages were protectionist, fiscal and credit-based.

In addition to these private monopolies, public enterprise was very strong and widespread, as in no other Western country. The Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI) was and still is an enormous conglomerate of firms, active in all sectors of the economy, from banks to the food industry and motorways, from shipyards to television production and distribution. ENI, a petroleum giant, is also an enterprise with public capital, as are many important banks. This vast and articulated economic and financial complex had a crucial reference point in government parties. For instance, the choice of the highest executives used to be made by parties in the government coalition, which would share positions according to their electoral weight.

There was real symbiosis between government parties and public enterprises. Government parties were therefore also financially powerful. At the same time, the practice of patronage was widespread and deeply rooted, especially in southern regions.

Parties and notables acted not only as political mediators, but also as economic ones between voters and the state. This mechanism was costly. Finances were obtained through protection money which business operators were compelled to pay to politicians (local or national administrators) if they wanted to work with or for public institutions. No wonder the public debt had reached amazingly high levels in the 80s. In 1993, in the middle of the "Clean Hands" campaign-the big judicial operation against political corruption-it was estimated that the public debt had reached 1,700,000,000 lire.

The fall of the Berlin Wall had an immediate effect on the Italian political situation. The end of the Soviet Union in practice cancelled the Italian Communist Party's *conventio ad excludendum* and, amongst other things, the party decided to change its name in 1989. At the same time, the prolonged deadlock of the political system and the escalation of corruption prevented government parties from undertaking any regenerating process, and led them to rapid collapse. Their strength, more and more tied to the exercise of power, disappeared, especially in the North, where strong signs of secessionist tendencies were beginning to show. The state's inefficiency, the weakness of the administration and of public infrastructures, stopped the rich northern regions from competing with the European and global markets. This led to a generalized outcry against parties, and to the constitution of the Northern League, an openly secessionist party.

In this context, almost by accident, starting from a marginal episode of political corruption-the arrest in Milan of the socialist businessman Mario Chiesa on 17 February 1992-the large-scale judicial operation called *Mani Pulite* ("Clean Hands") began. Within a short period of time, 851 politicians and entrepreneurs, 148 members of parliament and 447 others were indicted for



crimes of corruption. The country lived in a climate of both liberation and great confusion. Parties that had seemed destined to govern forever were dissolved. The Christian Democratic Party was shattered and gave life to a multitude of little parties. The Italian Socialist Party crumbled, while its leader, Bettino Craxi, Primer Minister during the 80s, became the symbol of political corruption and fled the country to escape prosecution and incarceration. Only the heirs of the Italian Communist Party were left standing. And on the opposite side, the heirs of the Italian Social Movement (the MSI), an openly neo-fascist party, always outside of government, changed its name to the National Alliance and formally renounced its ties with fascism. From the ashes of the old government parties, Italian television magnate Silvio Berlusconi, with extraordinary speed, created and developed his own party, *Forza Italia*.

A process of transition thus characterized the decade between 1989 and 1999, with Italy moving from a consolidated, but only superficially solid system to a new, still poorly defined one. The first years of transition were particularly difficult. Italy seemed to be constantly on the verge of breaking down, threatened by the danger of secession and by a series of notices of intended prosecution against politicians who had formerly governed the country. Power seemed more in the hands of judges than of politicians. These were very delicate years, which shaped politics throughout Europe. During that time, however, a series of so-called "technical cabinets" run by non-political figures, such as former governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Ciampi, later president of the Republic, managed to pay off most of the state deficit and to create the conditions for joining the single European currency.

After years of instability and confusion, new political forces took shape but it was a very contradictory process. The National Alliance Party, though proclaiming its detachment from fascism,

had no international credibility. Its first participation in a center-right government in 1994 (alongside Berlusconi) caused various protests around the world. *Forza Italia*, on the other hand, raised doubts about its compatibility with the basic principles of democracy, as its leader was also the owner of the main private Italian TV channels. The question of Berlusconi's conflict of interests remains unresolved today, when he has once again assumed the reins of power.

These two parties held the majority, though they could not represent a political majority in Parliament, partly because of an as yet incomplete electoral reform. The current rules, which have replaced the proportional representation of the First Republic, are a cross between the proportional and the majority system. This is thought to be one of the main causes of the political impasse of those years. The one in place now has allowed the center-left to recruit experienced political professionals from the old Italian Communist Party, thanks to a greater technical capacity and greater distribution across the country, of such professionals. Yet another advantage for the center-left was the presence of the Northern League, a right-wing party refusing to join forces with the center-right because it was afraid to lose its own secessionist identity once it had joined a coalition with "nationalist" parties such as the National Alliance. So, while the center-right claimed (not wrongly) to have a political majority among the voters, the center-left clung to a majority in the Parliament until the year 2000.

It has been observed by several commentators of different orientations that the "judges' revolution" (*Mani Pulite*) brought about the type of change which ought rather to have been the result of political and not judicial action, which is by its nature, and certainly in its appearance, more democratic. Because of its quality and intensity, the "revolution" carried the public off in a collective emotional catharsis, which could by its nature not last

very long-no complex country can live in a situation of permanent turmoil-and did not produce profound changes.

In fact, after *Mani Pulite's* most intense months, First Republic political figures regained more and more space and power, and so did the old political ways. Within *Forza Italia*, which seems to have all the characteristics of modernity-the "plastic" leaders' party-there is a strong presence of high officials from the defunct Christian Democratic and Socialist Parties.

The other critical aspect of the decade of transition was the absolute priority given to institutional and electoral reforms. The question of new norms virtually monopolized the political debate, though a solution was not found. There was a widespread conviction, on the left and on the right, that the impossibility of the rotation between opposing sides during the First Republic had not only been due to the Cold War (the so called K factor, from *Kommunism*, meaning the presence of a strong communist party linked to the USSR), but also to the proportional electoral system. This is probably the most democratic electoral system of all from the point of view of political representation. But for the same reason-because it allows the formation of a large number of parties, even parties representing as little as a 1% of the vote-it causes problems. Government in such a system is always the result of coalitions, and even a very small party can exert decisive political pressure within a coalition. The results are pathological instability and the frequent recurrence of crises.

Institutional reforms and rules were widely debated during the decade of the nineteen-nineties, but the only result, as noted above, was a new electoral system which is in fact a compromise between the uninominal (75%) and the proportional system (25%). This compromise contributed to the impasse of the Italian political and institutional situation. The number of political parties doubled in those ten years.



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## Italy: The Never-Ending Transition

Within this framework, Italy's historical instability continues to mirror, in some ways, an elastic economic-political system, which is at times an advantage as compared to the rigidity of other Western countries. A certain grade of "anarchy" can even be advantageous in the era of "flexibility." Although self-comforting and optimistic, this notion offers only very limited perspectives. The European Union poses ever more and ever tighter political conditions on Italy (and on its other members). Moreover, on the economic and geo-political fronts, globalization has also brought with it new limitations. The right wing Berlusconi - Bossi - Fini government elected in the year 2000 simply confirms the present analysis, and the danger is that if the situation is perpetuated, Italy, a rather major country, may end up being governed in effect by external political and economic entities. This is a plausible danger, if the "endless transition" does not finally culminate in an authentic transformation.

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