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ART&THOUGHT/FIKRUN WA FANN 97 MAPPING DEMOCRACY

GOETHE-INSTITUT

MAPPING DEMOCRACY

A GOETHE-INSTITUT PUBLICATION


الاختيار

EDITORIAL

MAPPING DEMOCRACY – THE THEME OF THIS ISSUE • 'Is there life after democracy?' asked the *Berliner Zeitung* on November 5th 2011, following the dispute over the planned Greek referendum about financial aid from the European Union. This farewell to democracy, while undoubtedly premature, reflected a far-reaching sense of political crisis which had seized the European public and which culminated in several weeks of debate about the viability of European democratic systems.

THE DIVERSE CONTEXTS OF DEMOCRACY • However, the narrative of democracy in crisis is only part of a far more comprehensive global discourse about the opportunities and drawbacks of the democratic principle and its implementation in reality. Democracy is being discussed in very different contexts at present; for instance, as the political system of the future in the Arab states of North Africa seeking a new political order after the overthrow of their dictators. For young elites democracy is seen as a guarantee of a change for the better, future opportunities, and political co-determination. This positive narrative of democracy contrasts with the almost simultaneous outbreak of waves of protest in Europe and beyond.

The financial crisis has revealed the apparent or real powerlessness of national governments with regard to those who run the global economy, and given rise to a not inconsiderable loss of confidence in political forces' capacity to steer what happens. This crisis led to the development of enormous potential for the mobilisation of social movements. Around the globe mostly younger groups in national populations formed communities of protest. This revolt also focused on economic powers that were felt to have excessive influence over political decisions, on limited future opportunities, in particular for the young, well-educated social strata, and on political elites generally regarded as discredited and corrupt.

THE LIMITS OF THE NATION STATE • The increasing calling into question of the classical nation state's claims to legitimacy is another element impacting on those developments. Trans-border political and economic dependences are on the increase; flows of migration and transnational diaspora groups challenge rigid concepts of national identity and the symbolism of the nation state; and international economic enterprises operate across national frontiers. The need for regulation, which cannot effectively be implemented within the framework of the nation state, becomes part of the political agenda – as in climate protection, the control of financial markets, and tax issues. Nevertheless, political praxis remains largely orientated towards the classical nation state. The reorganisation of political institutions is certainly under way, but it can barely keep up with mounting demands for regulation.

WORLDWIDE QUESTIONS • These starting points give rise to a series of questions that are being discussed across the world in highly diverse forms. Is the diagnosis subsumed into the term 'post-democracy' correct in its view that crucial spheres of Western societies have evaded political regulation and are determined by economic forces? Where are dependences, shared interests, and lines of conflict between politics and economics situated? What is the relationship between democracy, capitalism, and authoritarian systems? What interactions exist between a society's political culture and its economic knowledge, *i.e.* the way an economy is organised and conceptualised? Is democracy put under pressure by the experience of economic crises? To what extent is social peace dependent on the promise of mounting affluence? How can politics' loss of legitimacy be countered? What institutions are needed to take effective international decisions and make them binding? How can a political culture be created and cultivated so that participation and the rule of law are viewed as protective values, and a critical public mobilised against authoritarian tendencies?

Karima Al Shomely (U.E.A.),
from the series *Silence*, 2007.
From the book *Arab Photography Now*,
Berlin 2011
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Initially, movements like Occupy Wall Street do no more than express discontent. How can positive impulses towards political co-determination be derived from that? What do we expect from our society's political structure, and how must politics be organised to meet such expectations? What innovations and adaptations are required? Is more participation needed, or a greater focus on decisions by experts? What utopian plans exist for shaping our political systems? In view of the movements for radical change in North Africa and more recent protest in countries like Spain, Israel, Greece, and the USA, a multinational debate about these issues can establish connections that point beyond national discourses. Despite all the differences in the causes, motives and intentions underlying these movements, the concept of democracy does still play a part and is discussed in various contexts. It is these narratives of democracy that make apparent the expectations, hopes, and disappointments with this form of political system.

SERIES OF EVENTS • The Goethe-Institut, the Nemetschek Foundation, the Munich Kammerspiele theatre, and DRadio Wissen (DRadio Knowledge) are jointly organising a four-part series of discussions entitled 'Mapping Democracy' to take up these diverse issues and discuss them in a global context. Between November 2012 and April 2013 there will be four discussions, each with a different emphasis, and with a total of nine countries represented. On each of the four dates there will be simultaneous gatherings at three other places in the world, linked by video-conferencing. Artists, scholars, and cultural innovators will participate in dialogue with a local and an international public.

Each event will concentrate on one aspect of the relationship between democratic culture, economic knowledge, forms of social protest, and, in general, new and old forms of civic participation, thereby approaching the narratives of democracy and its forms in recent political praxis. Dialogue is being sought between Germany and parts of the world where discussion of democracy is particularly active at present in order to investigate the different aspects of current global discourse and reveal distinctive features and overlaps. With the participation of such cities as Cairo, Madrid, London, Beijing, Moscow, Budapest, Athens and New York, these events will link national discourses in global discussion, enabling direct international exchanges in front of an audience.

'Opening to the World: Mapping Democracy' will investigate today's discussion of democracy in all its ambivalence: democracy as both full of promise and in crisis, integrating and excluding society, and as a sovereign political system corrupted by private interests.

This issue of *Art&Thought/Fikrun wa Fann* reflects the programme of events in its own way by putting special emphasis on developments and historical contexts in the Islamic world, which is currently in the midst of a far greater and more fundamental upheaval than the West. Democracy is the key concept in all these processes of radical change. Even its opponents – as in Iran and Syria – cannot avoid holding elections and somehow invoking democracy. So let yourselves be inspired by this issue with its exciting journey through discourses on democracy.

The *Art&Thought/Fikrun wa Fann* editorial team
in conjunction with Goethe-Institut Science
and Current Affairs Division

MAPPING DEMOCRACY

CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF DEMOCRACY

A globally-linked series of discussions with participants from such countries as Spain, Egypt, Great Britain, China, Hungary, Russia, Greece and the USA

MUNICH KAMMERSPIELE
25.11.2012 · 13.01./24.02./14.04.2013

A series of events organised by the Goethe-Institut, the Nemetschek Foundation and the Munich Kammerspiele

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For the latest details about the programme of events, visit www.goethe.de/fikrun

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ART&THOUGHT
FIKRUN WA FANN
51st (11th) year, no. 97 (no. 22),
6/2012–12/2012
ISSN 0015-0932

Publisher:
Goethe-Institut e.V.
Editor-in-Chief:
Stefan Weidner

Publisher's Address:
Goethe-Institut e.V.
Dachauer Str. 122
D-80637 München
Germany

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Internet:
www.goethe.de/fikrun

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FSC® C004599
www.fsc.org

Editorial Board:
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Art&Thought is a cultural magazine published twice a year by the German Cultural Centre Goethe-Institut e.V. in English, Arabic (Fikrun wa Fann), and Farsi (Andishe va Honar).

Design & Layout:
Graphicteam Köln Bonn
Michael Krupp AGD

Printing:
Werbedruck GmbH
Horst Schreckhase

You can order the printed edition of our journal Art&Thought/Fikrun wa Fann at the Goethe-Webshop:
http://shop.goethe.de

Front cover:
Aerial view of crowd of people arranged in speech bubble.
Photo: Jürgen Ziemer/Getty Images

Back cover:
Aerial view of crowd of people arranged in speech bubble.
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Inside front cover:
Manal Al Dowayan (Saudi-Arabia): *Choice VI*, 2005.
From the book *Arab Photography Now*, Berlin 2011
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Inside back cover:
Manal Al Dowayan (Saudi-Arabia): *Choice II*, 2005.
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MAPPING DEMOCRACY

Playing elections in Afghanistan.
Photo: Martin Gerner

Cosmopolitanism acknowledges that humans are moral persons who have a right to be protected under the law because of the rights they enjoy, not just as citizens of a state or as members of a nation, but by virtue of the fact of their humanity. What does this mean for the sovereignty of nation states and the concept of democracy?

Seyla Benhabib

COSMOPOLITANISM AND DEMOCRACY
FROM KANT TO HABERMAS

Jürgen Habermas's 80th birthday in 2009 was an anniversary for me personally as well. It was exactly 30 years ago that I had arrived in Germany, in the autumn of 1979, as a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to study with Habermas at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg.

From the beginning, I considered Jürgen Habermas to be *the* relevant contemporary figure in the tradition of cosmopolitanism. For me, 'cosmopolitanism' means acknowledging that humans are moral persons who have a right to be protected under the law because of the rights they enjoy, *not* just as citizens of a state or members of a nation, but by virtue of the fact that they are humans. Cosmopolitanism also suggests that national borders in the twenty-first century are becoming increasingly porous and that justice within borders and justice beyond borders are interconnected, even if conflicts can and do arise between the two. From the outset, this human-rights-related cosmopolitan position gave rise in Jürgen Habermas's work to concerns with the 'inclusion of the other', regardless of national origins.

When seen in this light, however, cosmopolitanism seems hardly compatible with democracy. Democracy means constituting oneself as a *demos*, as a political community with clear rules that regulate relationships between the interior and the exterior. In a democracy, the constitution gains its legitimacy from the united and collective will of the people. As Article 20 of the German Constitution, the Basic Law, states: 'All state authority is derived from the people.' A democratic people accepts the rule of law because it considers itself both author *and* addressee of the law. This means that the citizen of a democracy is not a citizen of the world, but a citizen of a clearly defined political community, regardless of whether that community is a unitary state or a federal state, the 'European Union' or a 'confederation of states'.

How is this compatible with the cosmopolitan vision of a justice that does not stop at national borders? Or with the vision of porous borders over which the representatives of a people have little control? Is not the 'right to have rights', as Hannah Arendt put it, always the right of humans to be a member of an organised political community? Would it not be more correct to speak of 'cosmopolitanism *or* democracy' rather than 'cosmopolitanism *and* democracy'? And what is the link between cosmopolitan standards and hopes on the one hand and democratic constitutionalism on the other?

I would like to start with a brief historical overview of cosmopolitanism in the history of political thought before returning to the problem of the borders of the *demos* around which the conflicts between cosmopolitanism and democracy are most keenly felt.

COSMOPOLITANISM: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW • The word 'cosmopolitanism' is composed of the Greek words *kosmos* (the universe) and *polites* (the citizen). There are clear conflicts between these two terms.[1] Montaigne writes: 'Socrates was asked where he was from. He replied not "Athens" but "the world". He, whose imagination was fuller and more extensive than that of others, embraced the universe as his city, and distributed his knowledge, his company and his affections to all mankind, unlike us, who look only at what is underfoot.'[2] Whether or not Socrates did utter these words is disputed. Nevertheless, the story is also repeated by Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, by Epictetus in his *Discourses*, and by Plutarch in *On Exile*, in which he praises Socrates for the fact that 'he was no Athenian or Greek, but a "Cosmian"'.[3]

What does it mean to be a 'Cosmian'? And how can a 'Cosmian' be a democrat, when democracy for the Greeks could only be achieved in the city-state? Aristotle says that in order to survive outside the boundaries of the city-state, one has to be either a beast or a god. Since human beings, however, are neither the one nor the other, and because the *kosmos* is not the *polis*, the cosmopolite is not really a citizen, but a different kind of being. Cynics like Diogenes Laertius agreed with this conclusion and claimed that they were not at home in any city, but were equally indifferent to all of them. The cosmopolite is a nomad without a home; he lives in harmony with nature and the universe, but not with the city-state, from whose foolishness he distances himself. Some of the negative connotations of the term, with which we are familiar from later history – such as the criticism of 'rootless cosmopolitanism' – crop up already at this early stage.

Tahrir Square in Cairo, 23th November 2011. Photo: Rémi Ochlik/ IP3, Bureau 233.

Award-winning French photographer Rémi Ochlik was killed in shelling by Syrian government forces in the city of Homs on February 22nd 2012. He was 28 years old.

This negative version of cosmopolitanism as nomadism without belonging to a city-state contrasts with the more exalted Stoic theory according to which humans not only share *nomoi* – *i.e.* the laws of their respective cities – but also *logos*, that is the capacity to reason. In his *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius wrote: 'If we have intelligence in common, so we have reason (*logos*) …. If so, then the law is also common to us and, if so, we are citizens. If so, we share a common government. And if so, the universe is, as it were, a city.'[4] In the centuries that followed, the Stoic theory of an order that transcends the differences between the laws of various city-states and is instead rooted in the rationally comprehensible order of nature merges with the Christian doctrine of the universal equality of all in the eyes of God. The Stoic doctrine of natural law inspires the Christian ideal of the City of God, as opposed to the earthly City of Man, and eventually finds its way into the natural law theories of modern political thought as put forward by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant.

These negative and positive valences that are associated with the word 'kosmopolites' and which we initially encounter in Greek and Roman thought stay with us through the centuries: a cosmopolitan is a person who distances himself/herself either in thought or in practice from the customs or laws of her city and who judges them from the standpoint of a higher order that is considered to be identical to reason.[5] Immanuel Kant is the thinker who ultimately resurrects this Stoic interpretation of cosmopolitanism and gives the term a new slant in order to make it compatible with the requirements of a modern state based upon the rule of law. Kant shows us that cosmopolitanism and democracy, embedded in a republican constitution, are not incompatible and may in fact require each other.

FROM COSMOPOLITANISM TO WORLD CITIZENSHIP: IMMANUEL KANT • Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, which was written in 1795 on the occasion of the signing of the Treaty of Basel between Prussia and revolutionary France, has attracted increasing interest in recent years. What makes this essay particularly interesting, in view of conditions of political globalisation is the visionary depth of Kant's project for 'perpetual peace' among peoples that Kant formulated in three 'definitive articles'. These definitive articles are as follows. Firstly, 'The civil constitution of each state shall be republican.' Secondly, 'The law of nations shall be founded on a federation of free states.' Thirdly, 'The Law of Nations shall be limited to the conditions of Universal Hospitality.'[6] Kant explicitly uses the term 'cosmopolitan right' in his 'third definitive article on perpetual peace.' Being aware of the oddity of the term 'hospitality' in this context, Kant takes care to point out that 'it is not a question of philanthropy, but of right'. In other words, hospitality is not be understood as a social virtue, as the kindness and generosity one may show toward strangers who come to one's land or who become dependent upon one's act of kindness through circumstances of nature and history. Hospitality is a 'right' that belongs to all humans insofar as they are considered potential citizens of a world republic. Nevertheless, the 'right' to hospitality is an odd thing because it does not regulate relations among those subject to the same jurisdiction, but rather it regulates the interaction between humans who belong to different state structures and meet each other at the boundaries of these states.

According to Kant, 'Hospitality (Wirtbarkeit) means the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another. One may refuse to receive him when this can be done without causing his destruction; but, so long as he peacefully occupies his place, one may not treat him with hostility. It is not the right to be a permanent visitor (*Gastrecht*) that one may demand. A special beneficent agreement (*ein … wohltaetiger Vertrag*) would be needed in order to give an outsider a right to become a fellow inhabitant (*Hausgenossen*) for a certain length of time. It is only a right of temporary sojourn (*ein Besuchsrecht*), a right to associate, which all men have. They have it by virtue of their common possession (*das Recht des gemeinschaftlichen Besitzes*) of the surface of the earth, where, as a globe, they cannot infinitely disperse and hence must finally tolerate the presence of each other.'[7]

Kant differentiates between a permanent right of residence, which he calls *Gastrecht* and a temporary right of residence, the 'right of visitation,' *Besuchsrecht*. The right to be treated as a permanent resident can be granted by means of a voluntary agreement, by a 'benificient agreement' (*ein wohltaetiger Vertrag*) that would have to be specially concluded, because it goes beyond that which one owes to the other morally and what he is entitled to legally.

Kant's claim that people in need cannot be denied entry if this would cause their 'destruction' was included in the Geneva Convention in 1951 in the form of the principle of non-return (*non-refoulement*). This principle obliges signatory states not to force refugees and asylum-seekers to return to their countries of origin if, by doing so, they are putting the lives and freedom of these refugees and asylum-seekers at risk. Naturally, sovereign states can water down this principle by defining the terms 'life and freedom' as they see fit or get around it altogether by handing over refugees and asylum seekers to so-called safe third countries. Kant foresaw these attempts to balance moral obligations between duties towards those seeking help and one's own interests. The normative order of rank of these two claims – the moral obligation to third parties and one's own legitimate interest – is, except in the obvious threats to the life and limb of refugees who would be turned away, quite vague; in all other cases, the obligation to ensure the freedom and well-being of the guest allows for a narrow interpretation on the part of the sovereign, who need not consider it an unconditional duty.

FROM PUBLIC LAW TO INTERNATIONAL LAW TO COSMOPOLITAN LAW • Kant left us an ambivalent legacy. He wanted to justify the commercial and maritime spread of capitalism in his time insofar as it brought together the members of the human race into closer contact, without legitimising European imperialism at the same time. In his comments on Europe's attempts to invade Japan and China, Kant made it clear that the cosmopolitan right of visitation allows for peaceful, temporary residence, but not for the plundering, exploiting, conquest, and violent suppression of those in whose country one takes up residence.[8] In the eighteenth century, the differentiation between the 'right to be treated as a guest' and the 'right of visitation' in the context of the developments in European maritime imperialism was progressive; it is not so today. The foreigners' claim to civil rights must be guaranteed by the constitution itself and can no longer be seen as a 'contract of beneficience'. Naturally, the right to citizenship itself depends on the fulfilment of certain conditions that are defined in more or less detail by each democratic sovereign state. The 'right to naturalisation' is regarded as a human right guaranteed in Article 15 Paragraphs 1-2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In accordance with this article, 'Everyone has the right to a nationality' and 'No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.'

We have Kant to thank for the differentiation between public law, which regulates legal relationships between persons within a state, international law (*ius gentium*), which deals with the legal relationships between states, and cosmopolitan law (*ius cosmopoliticum*), which codifies the legal relationships between people who are not citizens of certain human communities, but members of a global civil society. By declaring that it is not just states and heads of states who are relevant players at the international level, but also citizens and their different varieties of community, Kant gives new meaning to the term 'cosmopolitan', namely the meaning of 'the citizen of the world.' The notion of world citizenship contains a utopian expectation of world peace, which should be achieved by increasing communication between people, communication that also includes 'le doux commerce'. The intensification of contact between people means that 'a transgression of rights in one place in the world is felt everywhere.'[9] First and foremost, world citizenship means a new global legal order within which humans enjoy certain rights simply by virtue of their humanity. (However, despite fundamental agreement with this principle, we should not forget that Kant's liberalism was much less robust than would be acceptable to us. In Kant's republic, women, servants, and apprentices without property are described as 'auxiliaries to the commonwealth' and their legal status depends on that of the male head of the household.)[10]

FROM WORLD CITIZENSHIP TO COSMOPOLITAN RIGHT: JÜRGEN HABERMAS • It is now widely accepted that since the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 we have enteres a phase in the evolution of global civil society that is characterised by the transition from *international* to *cosmopolitan* standards of justice. While norms of international law arise

either out of what is considered customary international law or through treaty obligations that are entered into by states and their representatives, cosmopolitan norms relate to individuals who are considered moral and legal persons in a global civil society. Even if cosmopolitan nomrs also originate through treaty-like obligations – such as the Charter of the United Nations and the various human rights conventions – what makes them noteworthy is that they bind states and their representatives, sometimes even against the will of the signatories who at later points may want to violate the terms of a treaty. This is a characteristic of many of the human rights agreements that have been concluded since the Second World War.

International public law has transformed international law in a decisive manner. It is perhaps too utopian to consider these changes as a first step towards a 'world constitution', but it is certainly more than just contracts between states that have been concluded. According to these human rights covenants, individuals have rights, not only as a result of their identity as citizens of states, but above all because they are human beings. Although states remain powerful players, the scope of their legitimate and legal decisions is increasingly restricted. We must rethink international law in the light of this global civil society, which is in the throes of growing but is still fragile and threatened by war, violence, and military intervention. These transformations of law affect how we understand the relationship between cosmopolitanism and democracy in our times. Our question no longer relates to cosmopolitanism *and* democracy or to cosmopolitanism *or* democracy, but instead to *democracy in the age of legal cosmopolitanism*.

This is where Jürgen Habermas' cosmopolitan arguments come in. In his essay 'The Constitutionalization of International Law and the Legitimacy Problems of a Constitution for a World Society', he argues that today 'any conceptualisation of a legal regulation of world politics must use individuals and states as the two categories of founding subjects of a world constitution as its starting point'. Habermas insists in particular that a judicial order as complex as today's international order 'must not be allowed to lead to a mediatisation of the world of states by the authority of a world republic, which would ignore the fund of accumulated trust in an intra-state sphere and the associated loyalty of citizens towards their respective nations'.[11] Instead we need mediating institutions as well as regional economic, security policy and other transnational organisations that on the one hand promote the cosmopolitan rights of the individual and on the other strengthen democracy within states themselves.

ECONOMIC COSMOPOLITANISM • This concept of a democratic cosmopolitanism in the tradition from Kant to Habermas has naturally had numerous critics. Defenders of economic globalisation, such as Thomas L. Friedman (at least with his earlier book *The World is Flat*)[12] reduce cosmopolitan standards to a minimal version of human rights, *i.e.* to freedom, equality, and property, and declare that these things go hand in hand with the spread of the free market and world trade.

In this respect, there is a notable closing of ranks among theorists of neo-liberal globalisation and neo-Marxist theorists of the Empire, such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. As is well-known, Hardt and Negri differentiate between imperialism and Empire in order to capture the new logic of the international system. While the word 'imperialism' relates to a violent, plundering, and exploitative system in which an imperial power imposes its will on another, Empire refers to an anonymous network of rules, regulations, and structures that are in the service of global capitalism. For global capitalism, it is essential that the individual right to exchange goods and services freely on the market is protected and, above all, that treaties are reliably observed (*pacta sunt servanda*). The Empire is the steadily growing power of capital, attempting to bring a growing number of areas on earth under its control.[13]

In the first half of the twenty-first century, which is marked by the most comprehensive economic crisis since the 1930s, neo-Marxist criticisms of global capitalism are sure to find new followers. Ironically, however, the sole super-power of the world, the Empire (*i.e.* the United States), has now lost its grip and has been overtaken by the global market. Under these conditions, we need to completely rethink the rules and regulations governing the global market and also push for adopting cosmopolitan legal standards in the field of economics. Today, cosmopolitanism has to advance many new and overlapping 'global governance' projects. The global economy has quickly become destabilised, for which the deregulation ideologies of the Bush administration and the selfishness and greed of the financial sector are partially responsible, as too are the collapse of social trust and the public supply systems in the United States – well-illustrated in the United States by the catastrophic failure of adequate government and public sector reaction to Hurricane Katrina.

This era of greed and selfishness within capitalist states is part of a global development. The development aid given by large industrial nations to poorer countries is in decline, and in Afghanistan, Central America, Burma/Myanmar, and many parts of Africa, governments are protecting their citizens less and less. 'Failed states' are leaving the field open either to warring ethnic religious clans, *maquiladoras*, or free trade areas in which citizens' rights as well as the social and economic rights of workers and farmers are abandoned. Against the backdrop of the desperate plight that the current economic crisis has caused in many developing countries, these rights will probably be further restricted in a devil's pact concluded in order to attract foreign investment and stimulate economic growth.

This means not only that stricter regulation of the financial markets and stricter controls are necessary to ensure that growth zones and free trade areas abide by international labour law, human rights and environmental standards, but also that a fundamental rethink is necessary about what *global distributive justice* means. In order to do so, we must rearrange the map of the world in our heads in such a way that interdependence among states with respect to the economy and environmental protection are no longer seen as temporary episodes in the history of nations, but as a decisive component of the Modern Age and the history of humanity. In other words, we have to become aware of the phenomenon of global interdependence that Kant, with his restricted knowledge in the eighteenth century, was already able to recognise as the double-edged sword of Western imperialism.

THE LIMITS OF THE DEMOS • The legacy of cosmopolitanism also requires us to rethink the widely discussed problem of 'boundaries' in democratic theory, sometimes also referred to as the 'problem of the constitution of the *demos*'.[14] While in the eighteenth century the West colonised the rest of the world, today 'the rest' of the world once again takes centre stage: migrations follow patterns of predictable displacement between the centre and the periphery. This means that the boundaries of the *demos*, as they have been defined since ancient times, are no longer a given. Global patterns of migration, which are subject to permanent changes, clearly show that peoples are constituted and reconstituted again and again over the course of history.

Robert Dahl points out that, as strange as it may seem, the decision as to *which* people can legitimately come together to form 'the people', and are therefore entitled to govern themselves in their own association, is a problem that has been almost entirely ignored by all of the great philosophers who have written about democracy. He concludes that the reason for this is that they assume that a people had already constituted itself. The *polis*, he points out, is what it is; the nation state is that which history has made out of it. 'Athenians are Athenians, Corinthians Corinthians, and Greeks Greeks.'[15]

There is no *democratic* procedure to democratically decide who should be part of the *demos* and who should not, because such a decision already implies a differentiation between those who are entitled to decide and others, who do not belong to the *demos*, and thus who are not entitled to do so. We face an unavoidable circularity. Although this logical problem of the circular argument concerning the constitution of the *demos* cannot be avoided, there are solutions that are more just and more intelligent than others. This is why, in our age, treating the guest not as a guest, but as a potential citizen and as member of society is an essential part of the legacy of cosmopolitanism.[16] Or, in the words of Jürgen Habermas, in an age of globalisation the 'inclusion of the other' has become a cosmopolitan obligation that does not stop at national borders.

Published in *Blätter für deutsche und Internationale Politik* 6/2009, 65–74. Reprinted here in a slightly revised version by courtesy of Seyla Benhabib and the *Blätter für deutsche und Internationale Politik*.

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Translated by Aingeal Flanagan

1 Darrin M. McMahon, 'Fear and Trembling, Strangers and Strange Lands', *Daedalus*, Summer 2008, 5–17, here 6; A. A. Long, 'The Concept of the Cosmopolitan in Greek and Roman Thought', ibid., 50–58.
2 Michel de Montaigne, 'Education of Children', *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965) 116.
3 Cited by de Montaigne, ibid., 7.
4 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, IV. 4, 52, as quoted in McMahon, 'Fear and Trembling: Strangers and Strange Lands', 9.
5 In the city-state, humans can be slaves or free; Christian, Jewish, or heathen; rich or poor. As cosmopolitans, on the other hand, we are all the same because of our ability to use our reason to understand natural laws. The cosmopolitan judges democracy using a standard that goes beyond the boundaries of the city-state. This can lead to alienation, to a dissolution of consciousness that Hegel inimitably describes as 'the unhappy consciousness, divided in itself' (G. W. F. Hegel, 'Phänomenologie des Geistes' (Phenomenology of Spirit, 1807), *Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden* (Hamburg, 1999), 122). Naturally, this negative assessment of the 'unhappy consciousness' of the Stoics and the early Christians remains incomprehensible unless we keep in mind Hegel's own 'enthusiasm' and nostalgia for the Greek *polis*, with which he was still struggling at this point in time.
6 Kant, Immanuel. (1795) 'Zum Ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf.' in *Immanuel Kants Werke*. Ed. by A. Buchenau, E. Cassirer and B. Kellermann. (Verlag Bruno Cassirer. 1923, Berlin); English edition, I. Kant, 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch.' trans. by H. B. Nisbet. in *Kant. Political Writings*. ed. by Hans Reiss, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) Second, and enlarged edition, pp. 99-108. I have discussed Kant's contribution to cosmopolitan theory more extensively in: Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others. Aliens, Citizens and Residents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 25-48.
7 Ibid., Kant 1923, 443. My translation.
8 For a closer examination of this subject, see Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others*, pp. 26-31. German translation: *Die Rechte der Anderen*, Frankfurt a. M., 2008.
9 Immanuel Kant, 'Zum Ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf' (Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay, 1795), *Immanuel Kants Werke*, Bd. 11 (Frankfurt a. M., 1977), 216.
10 Nor will I discuss in this context the continuing controversy about Kant's views of Jews and Judaism in his writings on anthropology and religion: it is still debated whether Kant believed that Jews could only be citizens in a republic by giving up their proper laws and traditions or whether Kant advocated for the Jews of Germany that Judaism could be considered a 'religion within the limits of reason' as well, which would be acceptable with its own rules of prayer, dietary rules etc. Cf. Hermann Cohen, *Innere Beziehungen der Kantischen Philosophie zum Judentum*, in *Juedische Schriften*, Hrsg. Von Brunno Strauss (Berlin 1924); Julius Guttmann, *Kant und das Judentum. Ein philosophiegeschichtlicher Exkurs* in: Nathan Porges, Joseph Becher Schor, *Ein Nordfranzoesischer Bibelerklaerer des XII. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig 1908), pp. 41-61; Joshua Halberstam, 'From Kant to Auschwitz,' *Social Theory and Practice*, xiv, 1 (1988), pp. 41-54.
11 Jürgen Habermas, 'The Constitutionalization of International Law and the Legitimacy Problems of a Constitution for a World Society', *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, 4/2008, 444–455, here 449. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Konstitutionalisierung des Völkerrechts und die Legimationsprobleme einer verfassten Weltgesellschaft Philosophische Texte. Studienausgabe in fünf Bänden* (Frankfurt a. M., 2009), 402–425.
12 Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat. A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giuroux, 2005).
13 Although the book was first translated into English in 2001 (Harvard University Press), the Italian version of *Empire* was written in the period between the Second Gulf War and the Bosnian War. The power of the United States gets a much more benevolent treatment here than it did in Hardt and Negri's subsequent book, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).
14 See Frederick G. Whelan, 'Democratic Theory and the Boundary Problem', J. R. Pennock and J. W. Chapman, *Nomos XXV: Liberal Democracy* (New York, 1983), 13–47; Robert Goodin, 'Enfranchising All Affected Interests, and Its Alternatives', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1/2007, 40–68.
15 Robert Dahl, *After the Revolution? Authority in a Good Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 61.
16 For a closer examination of this subject, see Seyla Benhabib, *Die Rechte der Anderen*, Frankfurt a. M., 2008, 196–205. Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others. Aliens, Residents and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Contrary to the generally held belief, it is extremely difficult to define exactly when someone is a democrat or what makes a democratic person. In order to develop democratic ideas, people first need the freedom to be able to imagine political alternatives. Before democrats can vote, they must first be able to develop the feeling of electoral freedom in their imagination and allow others to do so too.

Reginald Grünenberg

WHAT IS A DEMOCRAT?

AN ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THE DEMOCRATIC PERSONALITY

The question that forms the title of this article sounds very simple indeed, and one might think that there is a short and concise answer to it. But all attempts to come up with an answer promptly fail. Try it yourself! Explain in a few short sentences what a democrat is. Answers such as 'a person who lives in a democracy' or 'the kind of people who make up a democracy' are invalid because some democracies can cope with a large number of non-democrats and there are democrats in countries that are anything but democratic. Moreover, such answers are just an attempt to use the known to explain the unknown instead of explaining the unknown on the basis of what it is. A correct definition would also have to provide criteria that allow us to differentiate between democrats and non-democrats. See? Not as easy as it looks, is it? Okay, let's give it another try.

Go onto the internet and enter the term 'democrat' or even 'what is a democrat?' in German in the search engine. Aha: so they're members of some political parties who call themselves 'democrats'. Okay. That's not the answer either. Fine, let's give it one more go. Perhaps it's only us Germans who don't know what a democrat is. Try asking the question in English. After all, the English-speaking world is much larger and has always been one step ahead of the game in terms of democracy. But here too the results are disappointing.

This is all the more astonishing when we consider that here in the 'West' we not only hold democracy in very high regard, we also want to export it worldwide, and in so doing bring joy into other people's lives. Logically, this is understandable and is in line with the experience that a democracy needs a certain – as yet undefined – number of democrats to survive, but we still don't even know what a democrat is. Nevertheless, we want to democratise Iraq, Afghanistan, and – while we're at it – China too, not to mention the Arab nations that have just liberated themselves from their despots in such a spectacular and unexpected manner. We feel what it is like to be a democrat and we have an idea of what it means, but we can't put it into words. I will now have to disappoint you by saying that we will not be able to solve this definition problem here either, because the extent and consequences of it are much more far-reaching than this simple little question leads us to believe.

DEFINITION PROBLEMS • If we go up a level and look at the more general term 'political subject', the category to which the term 'democrat' belongs, we experience the same problem. Here too we could ask, 'What is a political subject?' Here too we don't have an answer at hand, and the internet is no help either. The whole thing just becomes more confusing, because according to Marxist theory the political subject is the working class; from Lenin onwards, however, it is the Communist Party. For the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt, on the other hand, the political subject was the dictator, who had the power to impose the state of emergency. This doesn't help us at all. If we move up to the next higher level of abstraction, we come to the *individual*. Using our intuition, we can assume that people are individuals and that, as such, they *can* at least be political subjects too, and as such they *can* also be democrats. However, if we then apprehensively ask 'what is an individual?', we are overwhelmed by a mountain of different philosophical, sociological, and psychological answers, none of which are of any help to us in this matter.

We will not be able to satisfactorily fill and complete the syllogistic chain *individual-political subject-democrat* with definitions here because we would only be explaining one mystery with another. There are, however, a few tantalising hints as to why these terms were either not focused on and defined or why they were *no longer* focused on and defined. Furthermore, I have developed my own approach to the middle term, the 'political subject', which I would like to discuss here. Perhaps, by the end of this article, we will manage to have at least a rough outline of what a democrat is.

Residents of Baghdad go to the polls.
Photo: Majid/Getty Images

Individualism emerged in the eighteenth century in an era of upheaval characterised by the civil revolutions in England, America, and France. It was the result of two things: firstly, the *actions* of enraged citizens, who were fighting for greater justice, self-determination, and participation in political power, and secondly, *treatises* in which the greatest minds of the day tried to show what this historically significant individuality means in detail. A variety of schemata for the individual were developed in a variety of disciplines, above all the individual as a complex 'subject' with astonishing horizons in *philosophy* (Descartes, Leibniz, Kant); then the individual as the object of education in *pedagogy* (Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi); as a player on the markets in *economics* (Smith); as a legally responsible entity in the *contracts of government and social contracts* (Locke, Hume, Rousseau); and finally, as a soldier who fights on the basis of his own convictions in *war* (Clausewitz). This development reached its pinnacle sometime around the year 1800 with the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant, in which most of the above-mentioned ideas were brought together to create a compact philosophy of civil republicanism and individualism. However, this also marked the end of the *Golden Age of the Individual*. Above all in Germany, which had not managed to have its own civil revolution, the speculative idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel – who wanted to 'outdo' and 'overcome' Kant – displaced concrete civil and philosophical individualism as a philosophical theme. Instead, either the foundation for a truth that would encompass both religion and science was sought in the abstract 'I' concept of the transcendental subject, or the world spirit was evoked, a world spirit in which all people were supposed to find peace, by means of dialectic 'sublation', beyond their disturbing individuality and in an all-overarching state. These attempts (including the Communist attempt) all failed, which has meant that since the middle of the nineteenth century, the philosophy of the subject – and with it the theme of individuality – has been increasingly discredited.

ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM • We are still noticing the after-effects of this to this day, insofar as a meta-theoretical dogma is predominant in all cultural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, without exception. This dogma declares that one can no longer assume the model of the thinking subject – and certainly not the concrete individual – as the carrier of actions. Today, there is no serious theory of action that still traces social, political, economic, scientific, or artistic action back to subjects or individuals and deals

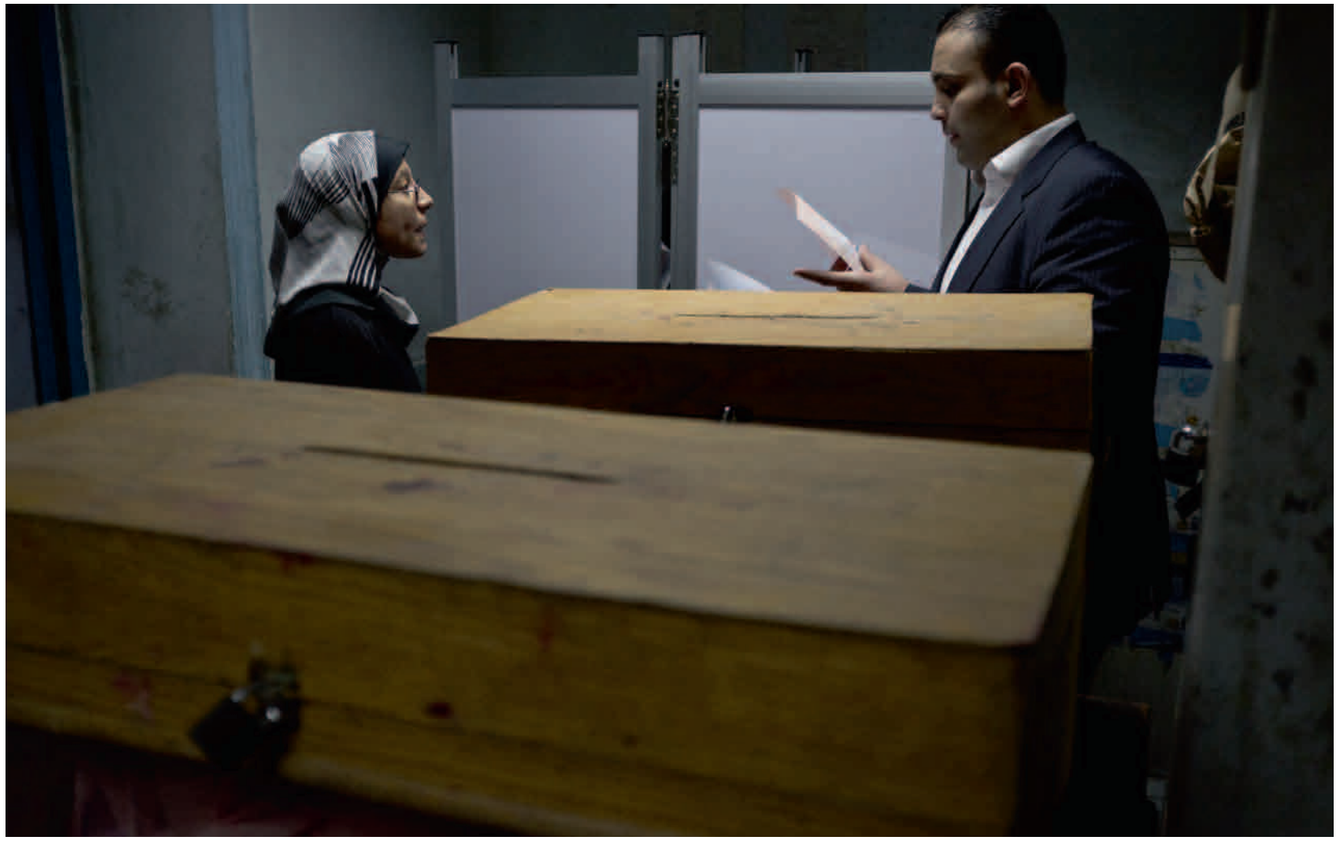
with their inner horizons. Instead, theories are developed exclusively on the basis of 'systems' and 'structures' (history, economics, psychology, political science, sociology), 'contexts' and 'discourses' (literature, art, philosophy). From this perspective, the question 'What is a democrat?' must sound like the reactionary attempt to revive a dead tradition, namely early bourgeois individualism and its 'naive' theory of action, which was based on the assumption of subjects of sound mind and bodily individuals. That being said, in modern – and in above all democratic – societies, the exploration of individuality should indeed be an important theme, because by making it so these societies would be focussing on their own, fundamental preconditions.

Astonishingly, it was the most radical but also the most brilliant and most sensitive system theoretician who highlighted this problem. 'The modern concept of the individual belongs, therefore, in a society that could thus consider itself called upon to reach some clarity about itself,' was how Niklas Luhmann began his assessment of the inadequate theoretical performance in this field in 1992. After all, 'after years of defocussing, it seems as if a re-focussing on the individual is beginning. However, the classics in this discipline [sociology] are hardly any help: with the *split paradigm* of personal/social identity or with superficial borrowings from transcendental philosophy they contented themselves with the word *subject*, and never bored down deeper towards individuality.'

Once one is aware of this meta-theoretical anti-individualism, one also understands the indignation of the academic world when the historian Daniel Goldhagen published his book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in 1996. In this book, the author refused to continue writing 'structure history' or 'social history' because structures and the social do not denounce and murder human beings. Instead, in accordance with the Anglo-American tradition of 'thick description' (Clifford Geertz), he examined the motives of the individual perpetrators. The impoverishment of the theory of action in sociology, which in this way he attacked in an exemplary manner, is the first reason why we cannot provide an answer to the questions 'what is a democrat?' and 'what is a political subject?', because we don't even know what their logical and historical predecessor, the individual, is.

The second and third reasons for this inability are both particularly prevalent in Germany. First of all, there is in this country a completely unbroken tradition of deriving the political from the state and never from the individual *as a* political subject. In good Aristotelian manner, the human is seen as a state-related animal (*zoon politikon*). The being is always deduced from the state order that is to be represented, the state order that the being has to support and to tolerate. The inner complexity of this being is completely ignored. Another German peculiarity is to judge the political subject solely using the standards of morality, or even to construct it altogether. Political philosophy in this country applies exclusively *normative* values to the political subject, *i.e.* it is not in the least bit interested in what it *is*, but solely in what it *should be*. This is immediately followed by noble calls for an orientation towards the common good and (completely misunderstood) solidarity. It is impossible to teach German thinkers that the normative – *i.e.* the morally structured *discourse* – can only ever produce an 'I must' and a 'we must', whereas in the case of the individual as a political subject, the cheeky 'I want – and others should!' rears its head. This *political moralism* is a thread that runs through the publications of most academically educated authors and the political comments pages and features sections of newspapers. Just think for a moment of the recently discovered 'ego-democrats' and 'enraged citizens' that the German press so likes to bang on about. The resulting *positive* concept of the democrat can only be that of an obdurate follower or a political saint. So it really is no wonder that we cannot actually define what a democrat is. After all, we know neither what an individual is, nor what constitutes a political subject. This is evidence of the inadequacy of political science, which has to this day not even come close to coming up with its own basic concepts. This applies equally

Ait Ahmed, the leader of the Front of Socialist Forces (FFS), returns to Algeria after a long absence. He remains loyal to the Rome agreement, signed with the FIS, and to the idea of dialogue. All opposition parties, including the Islamists, have been invited to the congress. November 1996. Photo: Michael von Graffenried, www.mvgphoto.com



Egyptians vote: A polling station in Cairo, Egypt, during the country's parliamentary election, Monday, 28th November 2011.
Photo: Rémi Ochlik/IP3, Bureau 233

to the concept of the political and to the concept of the political subject. Economics (Smith, Malthus, Ricardo, Schumpeter, Keynes *etc.*), sociology (Durkheim, Weber, Parsons, Luhmann), and psychology (Freud, Adler, Jung, Piaget, Erikson *etc.*) have all come up with sound concept structures that could be developed. This was not the case with political science, neither in Germany, nor elsewhere. *Because they know neither what they do, nor what they are talking about.*

THE ABILITY TO TALK ABOUT POLITICAL ORDER • Let us now turn to the constructive part, to see whether we can come up with something useful that does justice to the democrats, who are obviously out there and do exist. In my own academic work entitled *Politische Subjektivität. Der lange Weg vom Untertan zum Bürger (Political Subjectivity. The Long Road from Subject to Citizen*, 2006), I tried to pick up where the aforementioned Golden Age of Individualism left off and to further develop its findings. In short: *political subjectivity is the ability to reflect on public order.* This is what a human being must have in order to develop thoughts and judgements that could be qualified as *political.* The main philosophical task is to show what the terms 'reflection', 'public sphere' and 'order' mean in this definition. When coming up with this definition, I did not take any existing political orders as a starting point, but examined instead the intellectual power that allows human beings to *create* these orders in the first place so that they can then *participate* in these orders as individuals, political subjects, and ultimately as 'citizens' (as opposed to subjects). This is why the concepts 'public sphere' and 'order' are not just about the things that each of us finds ready-made in the world, but about how we, as *thinking and judging* beings, can allow these concepts to develop *in us* so that we can *reflect* on them. The 'public sphere' aspect in the aforementioned formula does not, therefore, refer solely to the empirical, civil public sphere such as the one outlined in Jürgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), with all its media, conversations, reading groups, parliaments, newspapers, and televisions (to which we today could of course add the internet, Twitter etc.), but also to a structural principle of our thought, namely when we discuss our interests, wishes, and ideals in a *thought* public sphere in which we can also confront ourselves with *imagined* opposing opinions.

Accordingly, the 'order' mentioned in the formula is not only the existing, given order, but the *order that we conceive in our minds* and, above all, *desire* (of the economy, political rule, customs, religion etc.). Only then can we compare it with the real order that exists outside ourselves and bring our approval or rejection into a real, empirical public sphere, *e.g.* in the form of conversations, political activities, the publication of books and newspapers, television appearances and – in democracies – participation in elections. So, a political subject is characterised by its ability to imagine that something could *be different to what it currently is.* In other words, a political subject has cognitive access to the concept of the *option.* In those cases where there is no such cognitive access, a *political* thought will never develop in a human being! For Europeans, who are so used to democracy, this might seem exaggerated. If so, it is only because they have forgotten how small the world-historical window through which they were themselves given access to this faculty of thought actually is. A theory of the political subject that is as universal as this should, therefore, be verifiable using ethnological observations and anthropological considerations. And indeed it is.

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ETHNOLOGY • Louis Dumont's studies of *Homo hierarchicus* (1966) are famous. He found the best example of this *homo hierarchicus* in India's caste society. In this society, there is – or was (the situation has changed in the meantime) – no trace of political capacity for reflection and no notion that the given order could be a different one. Even more informative are the works of the French sociologist, ethnologist, and anthropologist Georges Balandier, which receive too little attention. His very descriptive *Political Anthropology* (1972) is completely and utterly different to the normative, philosophical approach adopted by German political science. Balandier examined ethnological literature on the problem of the political and sought to combine it with his own empirical ethnological findings from his African research to create an ethnologically supported theory of the political. The objective of this theory was to do away with the prejudice that primitive peoples had no history and that many of them, especially those without any discernible forms of state, had no knowledge of any form of politics. The structuralist school in particular disputed that primitive societies had any historical-political dimension. Balandier's marked methodological awareness of the problem is noteworthy. As far as he was concerned, in order to ensure that a true 'world history of political thought' could one day be written, it was essential to re-pose the question as to the definition of the political. Balandier undertook a detailed comparison of the various definitions formulated in the works of earlier political anthropologists. While some anthropologists spoke of the political as being where family relationships end or where specific characteristics of space (territory, difference between the internal and the external) or action (reference to power instead of to authority) prevailed, others only considered the function of the political in the form of services to society as a whole (cooperation, integrity, decision-making, security). Balandier concludes: 'The political can be reduced neither to a "code" (such as language or myth), nor to a "network of relationships" (such as relatives or exchanges); it remains a comprehensive system that has not to date been formally addressed in a satisfactory manner.' For our purposes, what is decisive is that he sought to find evidence of the political or a form of political subjectivity in ethnological societies – and did not succeed in doing so. So there are forms of culture where a thought that can be qualified as *political* never arises and never can arise, because everything is rite, magic, and timeless order.

Christian Meier, a scholar of ancient history, did the reverse. His entire *oeuvre* is determined by the search for answers to two questions: 'How is it that the Greeks, and not any of the other cultures that existed before them or at the same time as them, developed democracies? And what constituted the political aspect of the Greeks, what characterised this political aspect as the specific/specifying life element in their society?' Elsewhere, he described this approach as an attempt at 'political ethnology'. This approach stipulates an awareness of the special, of the historical emergence, and the unlikelihood of the political. It seemed to Meier that it was this very aspect, *i.e.* the political, that set the Greeks apart from other peoples and cultures, by which he assumed that the political in other cultures was probably either non-existent or not very pronounced at all. No one formulated the above-mentioned cognitive concept of the *option* as a prerequisite for the genuine political thought of the individual better and more comprehensibly than Meier. The most important result of his research is the 'capability awareness' that developed in individual Greeks after this small Mediterranean state succeeded in defeating the huge Persian Empire with its million-strong army, contrary to all expectations.

I would also like to mention the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, another important authority on a historical-anthropological basic structure for political subjectivity, who investigated this question in the context of a religion-based culture. In his monumental four-volume work, *Critique of Arab Reason* (1984-2001), which examines the current deficits and delays in the Arab world on the basis of its own cultural sources, he describes a key, concrete situation with which most Arab children are familiar and have been for centuries: children reading and learning by heart the holy scriptures together in Koranic schools. Al-Jabri vividly demonstrates how the separation of the object that is read and the subject who is reading is not completed in the case of this kind of reading, which involves the interiorisation of the text. This condition is also facilitated by the fact that many Arabs who can read are only familiar with the Koran. This moved Al-Jabri to pose the following question: *who is reading whom here?* The official Arabic language (in contrast to the spoken Arabic dialects) has not changed in over one and a half millennia and has, during this time, been the guarantee of authenticity in Arab culture. Moreover, through the revelation and the canonisation of the Koran, it has also taken on a sacred character. In this cultural force field, the style of Koran lessons has led to a

fatal reversal: *now, the holy scriptures are reading the people*. This, according to al-Jabri, has resulted in an underdevelopment of the capacity for reflection and the inhibition of the individualisation of the reading subject. With this he is turning against a concept of tradition that is restricted to the repetition of history. He calls his hermeneutic method a 'disjunctive and simultaneously rejunctive reading' ('lecture disjonctive-rejonctive'). The subject should be able to separate itself from the text in order to identify the object character of the traditionally religious order and himself as an individual. It is only at this moment that reflection about alternatives to the prevailing order becomes possible. This means reflecting on the compatibility between the order that is symbolically embodied in the texts on the one hand (for example the order of criminal law, of the Islamic economy, or of the caliphate) and the individual *perspective* on this order on the other. Al-Jabri describes the 'rejunction' ('rejonction') as the 'explorative intuition' ('intuition exploratrice') that can encompass the 'reading and the read I' ('moi-lu et moi-lisant'). In particular, he describes the connection of the horizons of the individual and the order vividly because the reflection is not supposed just to release the individual, but make *genuine political orientation* possible for him as part of the social order.

THE THOUGHT AND THE REAL PUBLIC SPHERE • On the basis of these ethnological and anthropological observations, we can now say with some certainty that the political subject is a human individual who is capable of reflecting on public orders. But what is a democrat? What special kind of political subject is the democrat and what are the properties that distinguish the democrat from the non-democrat? There follows an initial attempt at answering this question. The democrat is someone who wants to see the *thought* public sphere, which he is capable of imagining, realised in the real public sphere so that he can – in conversations, media, parties, and parliaments – contribute his own idea of order without sanctions or fear of death. The motive for the democrat to get involved in this real public sphere is the fundamental opportunity that he can, through his actions, also make his political will part of the process of rule and legislation by joining a party, publishing in the media, setting up a new party, taking part in demonstrations and elections etc. The democrat schematises the real individuals who are his opponents in the real public sphere because they hold different opinions, not as *existential enemies*, but as *political opponents*. This also means that his ideas of public order are always characterised by a toleration of the opposition, because he himself could find himself in the opposition at any time. The democrat also abstains from hypostasising his ideas of order as timeless ontological truths and instead recognises them as personal, subjective interests that he would like to see implemented by the government in the structure that comprises government and opposition and therefore become generally applicable.

This is only a first sketch, an outline that makes it clear that we still have to discover and conduct more research on the democrat. Together with the considerations mentioned earlier, it also shows why there can be no simple answer to the question 'what is a democrat?', because no one is born a democrat. It is this very complexity that shows us how astonishingly beautiful and fragile this product of our spiritual and cultural evolution is, and also how many preconditions it entails.

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Translated by Aingeal Flanagan

Graffiti in Tahrir Square in Cairo, 27th November 2011. Photo: Rémi Ochlik/IP3, Bureau 233

While people in the Arab world are attempting to take the first steps towards true democracy, it seems that the established democracies of the West are being increasingly eroded. In this opinion piece, one of Germany's best-known authors analyses the current situation in central Europe – and is unsparing in his criticism.

Ingo Schulze

TAKING ONESELF SERIOUSLY AGAIN

ASKING THE SIMPLE QUESTIONS IN A DIFFERENT WAY

I haven't written an article for about three years, because I don't know what else to write any more. It's all so obvious: the abrogation of democracy, the increasing social and economic polarisation of rich and poor, the ruination of the welfare state, privatisation, and with it the economisation of all areas of life (education, the health system, the public transport system etc.), the blindness towards right-wing ext Rémism, the drivel in the media that jabber incessantly so as not to have to address the real problems, open and covert censorship (sometimes as direct rejection, sometimes in the form of 'quotas' or 'formats'), and so on and so forth …

Intellectuals are silent. We hear nothing from the universities, nothing from so-called intellectual guiding lights; a brief, solitary flicker here and there, then all is dark once more.

I can only repeat the platitude: profits are being privatised, losses socialised. And I wish I could come up with counter-examples.

When you are served the same insanity day after day as something that is meant to be self-evident, it is only a matter of time before you start believing that you yourself are sick and abnormal. I shall attempt to summarise a few thoughts that seem to me to be important:

1. To speak of an attack on democracy is euphemistic. A situation in which the minority of a minority is permitted – that is to say, it is legal – to seriously damage the common good for the purpose of their own enrichment is post-democratic. Society itself is at fault, because it does not defend itself against being looted; because it is not capable of electing representatives who will look after its needs.

2. Every day we hear that governments must 'reassure the markets' and 'win back the trust of the markets'. By 'markets' they mean above all the stock exchanges and financial markets, that is to say: those agents that speculate in their own interest or in the interest of others in order to make the greatest possible profit. Aren't these the same people who have relieved the body politic of inconceivable billions? The highest representatives of our people should fight to gain *their* trust?

3. We are outraged, and rightly so, at Vladimir Putin's use of the term 'guided democracy'. Why didn't Angela Merkel have to resign when she spoke of 'market-conforming democracy'?

4. Capitalism does not need democracy; it needs stable conditions. The reactions to the referendum that was announced in Greece and to its swift retraction make clear that functioning democratic structures can act as a counterweight to and brake on capitalism, and that they are also perceived in this way.

5. With the 2008 economic crisis, if not before, I believed that our society possessed enough of an instinct for self-preservation to protect itself effectively. Not only was this an error: that hope has transformed itself into its very opposite.

6. With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, some ideologies acquired a hegemony that was so undisputed that it came to be taken for granted. One example of this would be privatisation. Privatisation was seen as something unconditionally positive. Everything that was not privatised, that remained public property and was not subjected to the pursuit of private profit, was deemed ineffectual and not customer-friendly. This created a public atmosphere that had to lead sooner or later to the self-disempowerment of society.

7. Another ideology that has flourished out of all proportion is that of growth. The Chancellor had already decreed years ago that 'without growth, everything is nothing'. It is impossible to speak of the euro crisis without speaking about these two ideologies.

8. The language of the politicians who are supposed to represent us is no longer capable of conceiving reality (I have already experienced something similar in East Germany). It is a language of self-certainty that no longer tests and puts itself into perspective with reference to any counterpart. Politics has degenerated into a vehicle, a bellows to fan the flames of growth. Growth is seen as the only

source of salvation; every action is subordinated to this goal. The citizen is reduced to a consumer. Growth in itself means nothing whatsoever. The social ideal becomes the playboy who consumes as much as possible in the shortest possible time. A war would bring about a massive increase in growth.
9. The simple questions: 'Who benefits from this?', 'Who earns money from this?' have become indelicate. Aren't we all in the same boat? Don't we all share the same interests? Anyone who doubts this is a class warrior. The social and economic polarisation of society has taken place amid vociferous avowals that we all share the same interests. You only need to walk through Berlin. In the better quarters the few unrenovated houses are usually schools, nurseries, old people's homes, offices, swimming baths or hospitals. In the so-called problem districts the unrenovated public buildings are less remarkable; there, poverty is evidenced by people's missing teeth. Today the demagogic pronouncement is: all of us have lived beyond our means; everyone is greedy.
10. Our society was and is being systematically driven to the wall by the people's democratically elected representatives, in that it is being robbed of its revenues. The maximum tax rate in Germany was lowered by the Schröder government from 53% to 42%; business tax rates (business tax and corporation tax) were almost halved between 1997 and 2009, from 57.5% to 29.4%. No one should be surprised that the coffers are empty even though our gross domestic product increases year after year.
11. The money given out on the one hand is the money that is lacking on the other. The money that then remains with the wealthy has not – if we believe the statistics – been put into investments, as was hoped, but into more lucrative business on the financial markets. On the other hand, all over Europe welfare benefits are being cut to distribute bailout packages to banks that have lost money through bad investments. The 'legitimate resources of social democracy are being [...] consumed by this stupendous redistribution to the benefit of the rich' (Elmar Altvater, 2011).
12. A story. What was once sold to us as the antithesis between East and West Germany is now presented to us as the antithesis between states. In March I was presenting a translation of one of my books in Porto in Portugal. A question from the audience caused the atmosphere, which until then had been one of general friendly interest, to switch abruptly. Suddenly we were just Germans and Portuguese sitting opposite one another in hostility. The question was an ugly one: whether we – meaning me, a German – were now succeeding in doing with the euro what we didn't succeed in doing back then with our tanks. No one in the audience dissented. And I suddenly reacted – which was bad enough – just as I was supposed to, *i.e.* as a German. Nobody was forcing anyone to buy a Mercedes, I said, affronted; and they should be happy if they were getting loans cheaper than those made to private customers. I could practically hear the newspaper rustle between my lips.

In the uproar that followed my riposte I finally came to my senses. And, as I had the microphone in my hand, I stammered in my imperfect English that I had reacted as stupidly as they had; that we were all falling into the same trap if we, as Portuguese and German people, reflexively sided with our own flags as if we were at a football game. As if this were about Germans and Portuguese, and not top and bottom, that is: about those who had brought about this situation in both Portugal and Germany, and had made money out of it, and were continuing to make money out of it.
13. Democracy would be if politics were to intervene in the existing economic structure by imposing taxes, laws and checks and forcing the players in the markets, above all in the financial markets, to follow a path that is compatible with the interests of society. It all boils down to the simple questions: who benefits? Who earns money from it? Is it good for our society? Ultimately the question would be: what kind of society do we want? That, for me, would be democracy.

I will stop here. I would like to tell you about the others, too: about a professor who said he had returned to the standpoint of his worldview when he was fifteen years old; about a study by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich that examined the inter-relations of companies and came up with the number 147: 147 companies that had divided up the world between them, the fifty most powerful of which were banks and insurance companies (with the exception of one oil company); I would like to tell you that it is a question of taking oneself seriously again and finding like-minded people, because you can't speak another language on your own. And about how I felt the desire to speak up again.

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This article first appeared on 12th January 2012 in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Translated by Charlotte Collins

Egyptians wait outside a polling station in Cairo, Egypt, to vote in the country's parliamentary election, Monday, 28th November 2011. Photo: Rémi Ochlik/IP3, Bureau 233

The revolutions in the Arab world have taken the vast majority of observers by surprise. When seen from the sober perspective of political science, the development that led to these events is, however, eminently comprehensible. According to Kai Hafez, although it is evident that people in the region are striving for democracy, it is questionable whether this democracy will be a liberal one.

Kai Hafez

A NEW WAVE OF DEMOCRATISATION

POLITICAL UPHEAVAL IN THE ARAB WORLD

It is strangely ironic to begin a lecture on democratisation processes in the Arab world with one of Samuel Huntington's slogans. The American academic, who is now no longer with us, became world famous as a result of his theory about the 'clash of civilisations'. According to this theory, the Islamic world and China are counter-poles to Western order and culture. This image of incompatible cultural contradiction has always been wrong because it is built on a very simple view of cultural theory that takes no account of either internal differences within civilisations or common ground between different civilisations. Huntington's concept was a simple – and therefore very popular – way of explaining a world order that had been robbed of its ideological templates at the end of the East-West conflict. More interesting than the actual work itself was the success of Huntington's book, which was a hit first and foremost outside the academic world. Huntington was translated into all kinds of languages, sold

millions of books, and was in great demand as a political adviser. He was even invited to address the German parliament. For over two decades, he cultivated the notion of the exceptionalism of the Islamic world, a notion that included its supposed democratic inability. The current upheaval in the Arab world has impressively refuted such ideas.

WAVES OF DEMOCRATISATION • Although *The Clash of Civilizations* was heavily criticised within the academic community, in this sphere Samuel Huntington was well-known for completely different work, among other things for his 'waves of democratisation' theory in which he described the march of democracy at a global level. According to Huntington, democracy had spread in waves: initially in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century, then after the Second World War, and then again in a third wave, which began in the 1970s, in southern Europe, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Huntington was as right about the 'waves of democratisation' as he was wrong about the 'clash of civilisations'. He quite rightly asserted that democratisation rarely emerges in a single country on its own, but often spreads to other countries in the same geographical area, infecting entire regions. We are now seeing a similar wave-like spread of revolutionary democratisation processes in the Arab world too. It began in Tunisia, spreading swiftly to other countries such as Yemen, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. There have also already been demonstrations in Jordan and Morocco. It is still unclear whether this is a regular 'wave' or not. After all, Tunisia is the only state to have held free elections so far and to therefore be considered a true democracy, while other countries are still in the middle of the transition process, have so far failed to topple their regimes, or – as is the case in Egypt and Libya – are still on the path of transition to democracy. In any case, we are certainly at the start of an Arab wave of democratisation, and the fact that the spark is causing the fire to spread is all too clear. In the English-language academic world, this process is occasionally referred to as 'contagion'. However, these are all just metaphors that are supposed to help us understand complex processes. Of course, it goes without saying that such metaphors never fully address all aspects. While 'waves' seem unstoppable, democratisation processes can indeed come to a standstill. The image of 'contagion' seems more appropriate here because it is something that can be fought. That being said, the concept also has very negative connotations and is, for that reason, less popular.

Typical of the political development in many Arab countries over the past year has been the fact that people have been demonstrating for the overthrow of regimes and for participation and democratisation. The resulting social and political movements encompass different generations and classes. The dynamic in every country is somewhat different: the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt progressed largely without bloodshed and using the means of non-violent resistance; as is in part also the case in Yemen. In Libya, Bahrain, and Syria, on the other hand, violence prevailed or continues to prevail. It is possible to explain why things have developed differently from country to country. This paper seeks to draw up a kind of interim report on the Arab revolutions by comparing their progress and constellations.

Two brief preliminary theoretical remarks are necessary at this point. Firstly, in the field of democratisation research in political science, transformations are generally divided up into three basic phases: the authoritarian phase, the transitional phase, and the consolidation phase. In view of the fact that little can at present be said about the consolidation of a democracy characterised by elections and the freedom of assembly and speech in the Arab world, this paper shall focus exclusively on the first two transformation phases. In this context, it will examine the constellation of forces that prevailed before the start of the revolutionary uprisings. The transition phase will itself be divided up into two different sub-phases, namely the period leading up to the overthrow of the regime and the period between the overthrow of the regime and the holding of the first elections. Secondly, any purposeful reflection on political upheaval must take into consideration the classical areas of political and social theory: political systems (the system-theoretical approach), socio-economic base (political economics), values and political culture (normative democracy theory), and players, namely parties, social movements and media (action and public theory). Transformation theory should combine all these sectors and not isolate individual sections of the opposition or the state.

BEFORE THE REVOLUTION: AUTHORITARIAN STATE, AUTHORITARIAN SOCIETIES • Before the events of the so-called 'Arab Spring', three different types of political system prevailed in the Arab or Islamic world: democracies such as those in Indonesia, Turkey, or Lebanon; hard autocracies such as those in countries like Syria, Tunisia, Libya, or Saudi Arabia; and soft autocracies such as those in Egypt, Jordan, or Morocco. Soft autocracies are forms of rule that are fundamentally dictatorial but nevertheless feature certain liberal tendencies. Countries such as Egypt and Jordan differed from countries like Syria and Libya in that they were ruled by an authoritarian centre, but nevertheless brought forth two major movements in the past two decades: the emergence of certain opposition parties and forces that have been granted limited freedom and the formation of a media audience that has been made possible by relatively liberal media policies. For one and a half decades now, the Arab television channel Al Jazeera has been associated with an increasingly pluralist Arab public, in the course of which hundreds of television channels have been set up and the Arab youth in particular have been able to open up new areas of communication on the internet. Technological changes built up such pressure on the Arab regimes that some of them decided, right from the word go, to adopt a relatively liberal strategy. After all, there was no way they were going to get a handle on the proliferation of satellite dishes and internet connections. In other words, soft autocracy demonstrated a creeping erosion of state power and a gradual strengthening of civil society.

Tahrir Square in Cairo, 24th November 2011.
Photo: Rémi Ochlik/IP3, Bureau 233

The autocratic Arab state was – and still is to this day in many countries – a weak state in many areas, a fact illustrated by their socio-economic development. The outward appearance of the strength of the Arab state is based on the loyalty of the military, on unity parties, and on serving specific groups in society. However, as populations in many Arab countries exploded, the proportion of people benefiting from this system steadily diminished. The authoritarian state not only had to withdraw more and more from the public sphere, it also became increasingly absent as a social player, especially in new urban megacities such as Cairo. Egyptian slums, for example, grew uncontrollably; the Mubarak regime was barely able to keep even basic infrastructure in good condition; large swathes of social life were based on citizens organising themselves in networks. Nevertheless, even before the overthrow, there were a number of dynamic developments, especially in the middle class. After all, in addition to social impoverishment, cities like Cairo also had and still have gigantic shopping malls and construction projects on the outskirts of the city. In short, there was evidence of both the proletarianisation of the inner cities and the very opposite.

The question as to whether the Egyptian middle class grew or not during the Mubarak era is nevertheless very difficult to answer. It did grow, and at the same time it did not. The establishment of new enterprises – *e.g.* in the field of telecommunications – created new affluence. However, in proportion to the rapidly growing population, one got the impression that the middle class actually continued to shrink. Even during Egypt's authoritarian era, the question was whether the small middle class would be able to topple the dictatorship on its own. Even the European democracies were not created by the middle class alone; think, for example, of the German Revolution of 1918–1919 when German workers posed the question of socialisation. In Egypt too and in other Arab countries there have been repeated worker uprisings in recent years. However, the industrial sector in Arab countries is too small for the workers alone to be able to bring about political changes. In addition to the middle class and the working class, the lower middle class is, therefore, of particular importance, especially the large proportion of university graduates in many Arab countries, who have a formal education, but no social prospects.

EXPLOSIVE SOCIAL SITUATION • Overall, with the exception of the oil monarchies, the social situation in authoritarian Arab states was and is as a rule very explosive across all classes. The social contract that seemed to exist in some countries in the post-war period, *e.g.* under the banner of Arab socialism, has become increasingly obsolete. The old political science formula, whereby democracy can only first be successfully established at a high socio-economic level,

The results of local elections in Algeria in 1997 were challenged by all opposition parties. November 1997: Demonstrators are surrounded by riot police outside the headquarters of the Assembly for Culture and Democracy (RCD). They are accusing President Zéroual of electoral fraud. Photo: Michael von Graffenried, www.mvgphoto.com

has long been outdated, as well-known examples, such as India, are impressively demonstrating. It is not a question of a certain level of affluence, but an increased degree of social tension, disparities, and displacements.

However, a purely economic interpretation of the current Arab revolution is insufficient because economic pressure can also lead to fascism. So how has the Arab world succeeded in bringing forth a democracy movement despite its ongoing economic crisis?

To answer this question, one must examine the development of political culture, which was, in accordance with Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilisations in particular, constantly misunderstood. People like to forget that in the twentieth century Arab states and Iran did indeed have experience – albeit only short-lived experience – of democracy. Iran went through a constitutional revolution in 1907, and Egypt was an electoral democracy between the two world wars and for a short time after the Second World War (1919–1952). Although both the king and the former British colonial power exerted considerable influence on this democracy, it is safe to say that Egypt in particular does indeed have a certain experience of democracy. The Wafd Party, which still exists to this day, has been in existence since this era of early Egyptian experiments. National women's suffrage was introduced in Egypt in 1956 only a few years after countries like France (1945) or Italy (1946) and decades before Switzerland (1971-90).

Numerous political opinion polls and empirical political cultural surveys over the past ten years have shown that the majority of people in Arab countries are in favour of democracy. In other words, we needn't be at all surprised by the recent democracy-oriented upheaval in the Arab world. We have known for decades that Arab populations want two things: democracy and religion. We will return to the latter later on.

Overall, Arab political culture was and is in an entirely unusual transformation position that has often been overlooked in the West because it does not fit the usual stereotypes of the Arab Islamic world. While transformation researchers generally assume that a democratic political culture gradually develops after a system change as a result of education, among other things, this is happening and has happened at a much earlier stage in the Arab world, namely during the authoritarian phase. The modern, cross-border media of the West, and most particularly the pan-Arab media, have contributed to a communicative change. The Arabs have not been isolated and cut off in recent years – as was predominantly the case in the former Eastern bloc – they were well informed and were in a position to develop their political values even at a time when the authoritarian Arab state was still firmly in control. We are also familiar with similar developments in European history, for example in the age of the European reformations, which would not have been possible without the invention of book-printing by Gutenberg and the spread of Protestant scriptures. In recent decades, the sense of a new beginning, the strength, and the new self-confidence that were emerging in the Arab world have been tangible in the media and on the internet.

THE OPPOSITION'S ABILITY TO HANDLE CONFLICTS • All the structural requirements of an eroding authoritarian state, high social pressure, and pro-democracy political cultures are not, however, enough if there are no players and forces in society to turn these pressure factors into productive, political actions. This is why political science looks intensively at the ability of opposition forces to handle conflicts. Only opposition forces that are capable of handling conflicts can transform structural requirements into effective political transformation. But in what

state was this ability to cope with conflicts in Arab countries before the political upheaval of the Arab Spring? And how is it that regimes were successfully toppled in some countries but not in others?

If they exist at all, political parties are generally only semi-legal in most Arab countries. Existing as they do under authoritarian rule, the manifestos of most political parties – whether they be Nationalists, Islamists, or Socialists – are not, in many cases, clearly democratic in their orientation. Some parties adopt a minimalist approach, acting almost like 'bloc parties', such as the ones that existed in the former GDR, and allowing themselves to be co-opted for the rituals of pseudo-democracy: sham elections and sham parliaments. Others are one-man parties with relatively little institutional structure. In recent decades, political parties in the Arab world have not, as a rule, enjoyed a very high standing; young people in particular turned their backs on the outdated structures and sought new forms of political activity.

The Islamists have always been an exception to this rule. A small part of this group dedicated its energy to the armed underground struggle, while larger organisations – such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Morocco's Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD), Egypt's Al-Wasat (a centrist party), Yemen's Islah (Reform Party), Jordan's Islamic Action Front, Kuwait's Islamic Constitution Movement, and Bahrain's Al-Wifaq (The Accord) – took on a certain degree of radicalness on the matter of secularism, thereby giving themselves an air of anti-authoritarianism, which nevertheless did not move them to attempt to overthrow the regime. Islamists in authoritarian states were and still are engaged in active social work; they broke into the vacuum, filling the gap left by the weakening authoritarian welfare state. The state often came down harder on the secular opposition than on the Islamists because the state could use its opposition to the Islamists to justify its authoritarian rule, particularly to theinternational community. Ultimately, however, this strategy failed: the state's monopoly on secular representation merely served to strengthen the religious opposition.

It is essential to understand this specific problem on the margins of world society. While secularity – in Europe, for example – brought an increase in freedom from repressive church and institutions, the authoritarian Arab state imported it into the region and made it a constituent part of a repressive ideology of oppression that lasted for decades. This explains why turning against secularity and sympathising with the Islamists often had and still has a certain anti-authoritarian charm. For this reason, the question as to whether Islamists are compatible with democracy can only be answered on a case by case basis. A study conducted by the international affairs think tank Carnegie Endowment for International Peace speaks in this context of ideological 'grey zones'. For the people in the organisations of Islamism in the Arab world, the separation of powers, political parties, and parliamentarianism are acceptable at all times. In this sense, they are anti-authoritarian and channel the will of the people in the Arab world to participate, people who are fed up of the corrupt mismanagement of dictatorial regimes and want to shape their societies themselves. The main problem for Islamism is not institutional democracy or the threat of an Iranian-style religious dictatorship – a system in which theologians rule, which incidentally did not exist in this form before the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran – but in fact the question of secularity. For Islamists, equality for the members of different religions or the equality of men and women before the law stands in direct contradiction to their religious system of values. In this respect, it is justifiable to refer to them as 'fundamentalists'.

In the camp of political Islam, however, there are now movements such as the Egyptian Wasatiyya, the Islamic Centrists (*wasat* means 'centre' in Arabic), for whom secularity is no longer a problem and who openly stand for a reformist Islam. The 'Christian-Democratisation' of Islam has, therefore, already taken place in certain areas; in others it has yet to begin and will not do so for quite some time yet. In this respect, it is quite justifiable to speak of moderate Islamists, who played an important role in the run-up to the overthrow of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and are still doing so in countries like Morocco and Jordan. The rejection of secularism is a radical battle-cry for these groups, who would like to create the framework for an 'Islamic democracy'. Whether they will succeed in this endeavour depends not just on themselves alone. The reason for this is that despite all Islamism's success in opposition, the Islamists were not and are not capable of toppling regimes on their own. What was missing in the decades before the recent revolutions was an alliance that spanned the various camps, including population groups many of which are secular.

So what conclusions regarding the requirements for a democratisation of the system can we draw in the light of the events of the Arab Spring? The authoritarian Arab state was or is in parts a weak state, and political culture has developed much more dynamically than the political systems in the Arab world. Mass media and all possible forms of new media appeared as new political players and assumed the role of substitute political parties, which – and this was the major deficit prior to this – despite all previous attempts to form an opposition, had shown themselves to be only partially capable of forming alliances and managing conflicts.

TRANSITION PHASE 1: BEFORE THE REGIMES WERE TOPPLED • With the events of the Arab Spring, new players have entered the Arab stage: the social and political movements. The genius of these movements is that they are capable of overcoming past ideological divides, above all those between secularists and Islamists. For the uprisings of the Arab Spring, which spread from Tunisia to large parts of the Arab world, the lack of party-political slogans is typical. People do not go out and demonstrate for a specific political orientation; they are united against their respective dictators. This kind of ability to form alliances has only existed in very basic form in the Arab world over the past decade. The Kifaya movement in Egypt in the middle of the last decade is one example. It organised smaller demonstrations and succeeded in uniting secular and Islamic forces. However, the overall alliance policy was weak, and Arab dictators succeeded over and over again in playing the various opposition forces off against each other. Since the start of 2011 this has been a thing of the past. Political movements have formed across the boundaries of political camps, uniting different classes and generations. Despite the fact that the Arab population is very young, it would certainly be insufficient to describe the Arab upheaval as the revolution of the young. Although young people are often on the frontline – as is the case with all revolutions of global historical import – here, people from all generations came together to oppose authoritarian regimes. It is safe to say that without the participation of a large part of the Egyptian middle class, for example, members of which took to the streets in increasing numbers in the early days of the Egyptian Revolution, the Mubarak regime would never have been toppled. Perhaps for the first time ever in Egypt's recent history, people were happy about the country's population explosion. While such rapid population growth is normally considered the main cause of social impoverishment, in this acute period of upheaval it helped to smother the authoritarian regime.

The genius of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and also the Libyan resistance (although it was less successful – see below), was not only its spontaneous alliance formation, but also its ability to organise on an *ad hoc* basis. The wholly inexperienced yet somehow skilled non-violent resistance movement really stood out. When measured by historical standards, Tunisia and Egypt were – despite a number of victims – bloodless revolutions. They were characterised by disciplined mass protests. Think, for example, of the huge groups of demonstrators on Tahrir Square praying amid the tanks, sit-ins, and blockades. Religion did not play a dominant role. However, in those instances when it did rear its head, it was not fundamentalist and aggressive, but highly liberal and civilised.

Many so-called 'social movement organisations' made a major contribution to the new political processes of collectivisation. Social movements are certainly not chaotic formations; they are instead shaped by spontaneously formed units of actors, whereby in this case it was above all the internet that played a significant role. Facebook groups and other communities organised the protest via the internet. However, just like the term 'youth revolution', the term 'Facebook revolution' is one of the myths of the Arab Spring. It is highly controversial, even among Arab bloggers. The internet was important during the upheaval in Tunisia and Egypt, especially in the early days. Then, however, the regime shut down not only the internet but also the entire mobile phone network. This did nothing to stop the dynamism of the protest. Outside Tahrir Square in Cairo and in numerous other Egyptian cities small groups of demonstrators formed, just as they had in Tunisia. The groups' propaganda was spread by word of mouth, calling people out of their homes. In other words, very traditional forms of assembly communication developed, forms of the kind that people have been practising for millennia. We like to overlook these processes and focus instead on technical innovations and the new media, which are frequently shaped by the West and in this respect seem to give us our own role in these globally significant developments. However, one must remember that democratic upheaval was possible without the internet twenty years ago in Latin America. In the Arab world too, while the internet did jump-start the transition, the revolutions quickly developed their own dynamic.

Nor should the fact be underestimated that without the use of major media it would not have been possible successfully to mobilise the populations of Tunisia and Egypt. Once the internet had been blocked, the television channel Al Jazeera transformed the storm of protests into a

veritable tsunami; Al Jazeera brought the middle classes out of their homes and onto the streets. So all in all a relatively typical sequence of events can be identified in the political upheaval that has taken place so far. Initially, small revolution media were of major importance; they got the ball rolling. Then the major media took on the regime. Once the regime had been successfully overthrown, the transnational pan-Arab media suffered a relative loss of significance and people increasingly turned back to their national media, where they hoped there would now be an increase in freedom of speech. Overall, however, it is clear that the Arab Spring was only made possible by the fact that political players, who had been isolated until that point, formed new social movements and political alliances and that these found ways of uniting Arab civil societies against the dictatorship by using old methods of communication and new media.

But why did people in countries like Tunisia and Egypt manage to do what people in states like Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen could not and what people in Libya could only manage with Western assistance? The answer to this question lies in the fact that the starting point in the various areas of transformation (state, economy, values, opposition) often varied hugely. The media circumstances were also entirely different. Before the outbreak of the revolution, Egypt was already the hub of the Arab blogger movement. The situation in Libya and Syria with their very restrictive internet policies, on the other hand, was very different. In addition, not all Arab uprisings were afforded the same level of attention by the pan-Arab television stations. Al Jazeera, for example, did not report on the uprising in Bahrain because despite the freedom enjoyed by this broadcaster the domestic politics of the Gulf emirates remain taboo.

Moreover, social conditions in the various countries differ hugely. The so-called 'rentier economies' of the oil-rich states have brought great affluence to large parts of the populations. Also, social pressure on the native population is comparatively small, even though Shia minorities often constitute a neglected underclass. However, the rentier economies show that the American maxim of 'no taxation without representation' can also be turned on its head, because in those cases where states do not impose substantial taxes the people's urge for a greater participatory role in power is obviously very limited. Another social difference between the Arab states is the ratio of population size to the surface area of the country. Egypt, for example, is similar in size to Libya, but has ten times the population mass. For Libya, this created unfavourable conditions for a spontaneous uprising across the country. Moreover, Arab dictators in some states – such as Bahrain and Syria – can play the religious-ethnic conflict card. In Bahrain, for example, the Shia population protest has dominated in recent decades; in Syria, Kurds, Alawites and Sunnis can all be played off against each other; in Libya, clan loyalty remains strong. In other words, a consolidated nation state is a favourable condition for a successful uprising. Should democratisation succeed in Yemen, it would possibly be the first example of democratic change being possible in a society that is heavily shaped by clans. For clans too, democracy is frequently the only way to achieve a peaceful balance. Moreover, so-called neo-patriarchal societies should not just be seen in a traditional light. In these countries, it is not only traditional ties that bind; people are also members of modern institutions and work in modern professions. This means that their social orientation can indeed be complex. The 'sheikh with the mobile phone' also symbolises the interface between tradition and the modern age.

Egyptians vote: a polling station in Cairo, Egypt, during the country's parliamentary election, Monday, 28th November 2011. Photo: Rémi Ochlik/IP 3, Bureau 233

One of the conditions that can facilitate or impede revolutions in the various states is the state military culture, which varies hugely from country to country. In Egypt, for example, the military monitored the development of the uprising; opportunistically, it came down on the side of the people once it realised that they were going to be able to bring down the Mubarak regime. In Egypt, the military was and is considered an institution of the people, an institution that holds career opportunities for people from the lower classes too, unlike the Egyptian police, whose hierarchies were much more loyal to the regime. In countries such as Libya, Yemen, or Syria, on the other hand, the military is closely linked to the respective authoritarian regime; it is systematically kept at a distance from the people by allowing itself to be saturated by minorities such as the ruling Alawites in Syria or foreign legionaries in Libya.

However, the theory that different political cultures exist in the Arab countries, whereby the monarchies in Morocco and Jordan in particular are more stable because they are considered more legitimate by the people, is largely incorrect. Firstly, there have already been demonstrations in these countries. Secondly, the majority in these countries certainly want to manage at least the transition to a real constitutional democracy, and this would – by all political science standards – be a real regime change, because the existing monarchies might to a certain extent be considered 'enlightened', but they are certainly not democratic and in any way comparable with the political system of constitutional monarchy such as the one that exists in England. Even though the majority of people in Morocco and Jordan would like to keep their kings, they would like them to be representative figures, symbols of the state and the nation – and perhaps even of religion – but not as the patrons of corrupt governments.

TRANSITION PHASE 2: BEFORE THE ELECTIONS • As history has shown, democratisation is a long-term process. Decades separated the start of the French Revolution from the actual establishment of the French democracy. The democratisation of institutions often faces opposition from the frequently strong 'persistent forces', the remnants of old elites that cannot be eliminated from the ruling apparatus because the system would otherwise collapse, but who are frequently opposed to democracy or do not at least act in the spirit of democracy because they fear negative consequences for themselves. Germany had a similar experience during the Weimar Republic, when large parts of the institutions were riddled with opponents of democracy who were loyal to the monarchy.

Where do Tunisia and Egypt stand now, following the overthrow of their dictatorships? It is difficult to keep abreast of developments in this respect because things are happening so fast. That said, the following key thought should serve as the *leitmotif* for an interim report: the success of the overthrowing of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt was based on the interaction between social values and attitudes on the one hand and opposition players and movements on the other, all of which were held together by the communicative band of the media. This was the only way to ensure that sufficient social pressure could be exerted on the already tottering political systems. Where one of these elements gets lost in the process of transition, the state can sense a 'second chance' and the opportunity to start a counter-revolution.

So, is the high pressure for transformation being maintained in Egypt and Tunisia? To anticipate a conclusion, it is safe to say that after the euphoria of the winter and spring of a year ago many observers in the West already seem to have returned to being excessively pessimistic. That said, many of the developments in Tunisia and Egypt are not unexpected; the transition to democracy is a rocky road, as illustrated by other regions in the world, especially Latin America. Nevertheless, we are still in the cycle of a transformation that may not be ideal, but is certainly largely normal. The section that follows will once again investigate this transformation by focusing on the various different areas of change.

As far as the situation of the state is concerned, Tunisia has already managed the transition to democracy by holding parliamentary elections. The situation in Egypt is somewhat more difficult because the military is still in a position of power despite the elections that have taken place there. In the autumn of 2011 it was only as a result of the vehement pressure exerted by the 'Egyptian streets' that the military was made at least to promise to bring forward the presidential elections from the middle of 2012, which should then be the date on which power is finally handed over. To date, the military's performance has been mixed. On the one hand, the former president, Hosni Mubarak, was arrested and appeared in court, and a number of good measures were initiated. As a result, almost no representatives of the old regime remain in the Supreme Military Council. Moreover, the juridical assessment of the Mubarak era has begun. When one considers that Chile, which can be seen as a similar example, took decades to do this, things in Egypt are developing relatively swiftly. Egypt's ruling party was dissolved and many corrupt members of the elite have already left the country. On the other hand, however, there are indications of a possible counter-revolution: revolutionaries have been arrested and sentenced by military tribunal, and

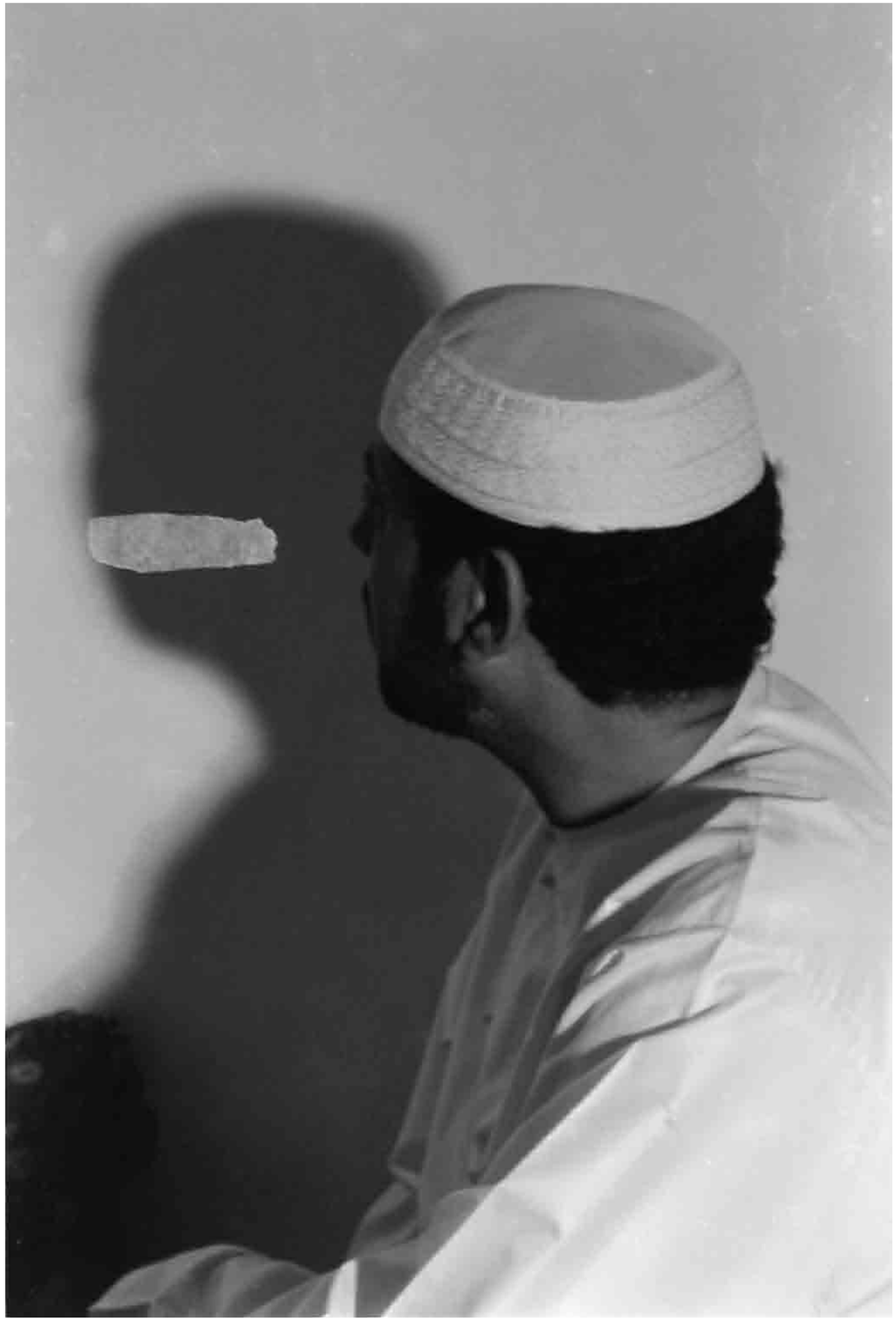
Amnesty International is accusing the interim government of systematic torture. The role played by the military during the attack on the Israeli embassy in Cairo and the attacks on Copts is dubious in the extreme. The military also ordered the storming of Al Jazeera's offices in Cairo. The tensions between the social and political movements and the military are growing. There is possibly even a certain paradox here, whereby the early juridical reappraisal of the dictatorship intensified both the fear felt by Egypt's old elite and the Egyptian military's tendency to put obstacles in the path of democracy. Even though it might run contrary to people's moral understanding, perhaps it would be worth sending out signals of a possible amnesty. After all, the building up of new democracies is certainly more important than settling scores in the short term.

Nevertheless, the risk of a military junta forming is extremely slim in Egypt. The military will not want to run the country itself in the long run; Egypt's problems are too complex for that. However, as yet it is unclear how the Egyptian military will develop. While the Turkish military was for decades an anti-democratic guardian of Atatürk's secular order, the Egyptian military certainly does not have such a strong secular streak, which means that it is more likely that it will turn itself into a guardian of a democratic order, even though this will not be a purely secular democracy because the Islamists are to form a majority government. Unfortunately, it was not possible to pass a secular constitution before the parliamentary elections: the transition reforms of the so-called Bishri Commission in the spring were no more than half-hearted and questionable. Islamic law (*sharia*) remained the source of legislation; it is unlikely that pure secularity will be established in the medium term. When Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, visited Egypt in the summer of 2011, he not only received an incredibly warm reception, there was also open criticism of Turkey's secular course. In other words, as the guardian of an 'Islamic democracy', the military would be fairly certain of having the conservative parts of the population on its side.

The behaviour of the political players in Tunisia and Egypt is still very difficult to assess at the moment. There were and still are problems regarding the freedom of the media in Tunisia and Egypt. Although many new media have been approved in Egypt, television remains markedly close to the state. There are, however, new independent television channels, such as Al-Tahrir TV, which have very quickly gained popularity. Paradigmatically, a new entertainment show on Egyptian television shows how things have changed: a woman from Cairo's slums has become a new cooking celebrity. This new form of entertainment makes social questions more transparent than was previously possible. Call-in sequences where the cook chats and argues with fellow Egyptians and during which she vehemently defends the dignity of poverty show the extent to which the public sphere has become more liberal. In Egypt's cartoon culture there is widespread criticism of the military chief Tantawi. Nevertheless, the same criticism can land you in front of a military tribunal. During democratic transformation, there must be a shift away from small to large media after the regime has been toppled; in Egypt, however, this shift has been partially blocked. People must be allowed to talk about the future of the country in the major media. However, large parts of the Egyptian press, television, and radio landscape are still very heavily influenced by the state. A new government and a new Egyptian parliament must rigorously remove all obstacles on the road to freedom of speech; this is the yardstick by which they will be measured.

BUILDING UP A PARTY-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE • It is important that the party-political landscapes in Tunisia and Egypt become more diverse and consolidated. The decentralised structures of the social movements were good for the first transition phase: they made the opposition unpredictable and made it difficult for the regime to put up resistance. However, they are only partially useful for the second transition phase and for the holding of democratic elections. Persistent forces of an old regime have never succeeded in reforming a system under their own steam. The same is true of these social movements; a functioning parliamentary platform is required. To date, the Islamists are the most organised political forces in Tunisia and in Egypt; in both countries they can look back on a long organisational history. The dilemma currently facing both countries is that, on the one hand, secular parties need a longer period of development in order to prepare themselves for elections; on the other, elections have to be held as quickly as possible in order to rob the old regimes of any chance of staging a counter-revolution. Although numerous parties have been established in both countries, it was the Islamist forces that got the majorities in the parliamentary elections of 2011.

Ultimately, it is currently old political parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt that are benefiting from the first parliamentary elections. As already explained above, this is certainly no reason to fear an Islamic dictatorship. The Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt have not only openly declared their support for democracy, they don't have any leadership figures like Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini. Nor are these countries oil-rich states with independent resources; they need closer ties to the West so that they can boost the gross national product and consolidate their national budgets through economic assistance and tourism. It must be said quite clearly at this point that the formula for 'liberal democracy' contains two things: the liberal idea of human rights, and the democratic order. However, these are not identical, because the core of a democracy is made up of only three things: free elections, the freedom of assembly,



Karima Al Shomely (U.E.A.), from the series *Silence*, 2007.
From the book *Arab Photography Now*, Berlin 2011

and freedom of speech. But what does one do in a situation where the majority decides in favour of the unequal treatment of religions, or in favour of a legal distinction between men and women? It is relatively safe to assume that, although they are not 'liberal democrats', the main Islamist parties in the Arab world can be seen as democrats. It will be up to the secular forces in these societies to fight step by step for these rights of equality within the framework of the democratic order, as was the case in Western democracies, where in many cases there is to this day no equality for religious minorities. One need only think of the privileges enjoyed by the Christian churches in Germany.

At the present time, the main threat to democracy is not from the Islamists, but from the 'persistent forces' in and behind the military. We must be very careful not to fall victim to the military's scaremongering. For decades Western states supported authoritarian structures in the Arab world out of a fear of Islamic states. Often, however, they did so out of opportunistic greed for profit, whereby the Islamists served as a useful scapegoat for Western foreign policy makers and authoritarian heads of state in the region.

For the ongoing development of Arab democracies, two things are of decisive importance: firstly, the parliament must be pluralistic, and secondly, social movements must remain active as an extra-parliamentary opposition. Despite repeated eruptions of violence in countries like Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, it was the fact that it was not the political systems that were driving the people but the people who were driving the political systems and trying to improve them that was so fascinating, a fascination that also infected the Western world (*cf.* the Occupy movement). It is, however, quite unlikely that the social movements in Arab countries will collapse like the social movements in the GDR did after reunification. After the spontaneous uprising developments of last year, a considerable professionalisation of the Tunisian and Egyptian social movements is identifiable. Activists are now the customers of advertising agencies; tiny political communities are demanding basic democratic rights. Demonstrations and demands made to the transitional governments in Tunisia and Egypt to drive democratisation forward are, therefore, less the alarm signals of democratic failure and much more the positive indications of the vigilance of Arab societies. These societies do not want to miss the unique historic opportunity that has presented itself to them. Yet once again the transition to democracy unfortunately faces a key dilemma: on the one hand, the formation of political parties is important in order to shape the institutions of democracy; on the other, the continued existence of social movements is necessary.

Both processes partially hinder each other because either there is not at present enough energy to establish secular parties, or this energy has not been adequately channelled.

NEW PROBLEMS IN THE TRANSFORMATION PHASE • For the ongoing development of democracy in the Arab world, it is not only decisive that the social and political movements remain active and that the media and political parties continue to develop, but also that the bond between the democracy-oriented majority of the Arab population and the newly-emerged social movements proves stable. At this point, it is essential to point out that for many Arab citizens political transformation not only means progress and hope, it is also associated with considerable personal sacrifices, because it often initially means a decline in day-to-day standards of living. With transformations, it is very often the case that while the old political systems no longer work, the new political systems are not fully in place. This can result in dire economic situations and can also cause increased security problems and result in rising crime. With all due admiration for the youth movement on the internet and the activists in the social movements, who have been doggedly holding out in central places such as Tahrir Square in Cairo, it is important to emphasise once again that they would not have succeeded in toppling the regime had it not been for the mobilisation of large swathes of the population in the decisive days of the overthrow. However, surveys and different shapers of public opinion in both Tunisia and Egypt indicate that many citizens are 'irritated' not only by their interim governments, but also by the social movements' desire to demonstrate. Assumedly, most people are not post-ideological, but neo-ideological in their orientation. They don't want grassroots democracy; they want proper representative democracies. They are calling for a new state, but one with the old moral securities. It would be fatal for the Arab processes of democratisation were the broad majority of the population and political culture as a whole to turn their backs on the revolution and the social movements.

The decisive pressure on the authoritarian state could only be achieved by a close alliance between the different political and media players and by populations reaching a consensus on values. This means that protesters too have to proceed with care. Perhaps a little less extra-parliamentary activity and a little more party work would on occasion be helpful. The worst that could happen would be if a gulf were to open up between the social movements and the majority populations. Ultimately, however, such a development is very unlikely.

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This updated text is based on a lecture given by the author at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Marburg on 24th November 2011. The German version with complete notes is available at the website of the University of Erfurt: http://www.uni-erfurt.de/ fileadmin/user-docs/philfak/kommunikationswissenschaft/files_ publikationen/hafez/HAFEZ_2011_Red%20Marburg%20Langversion.pdf

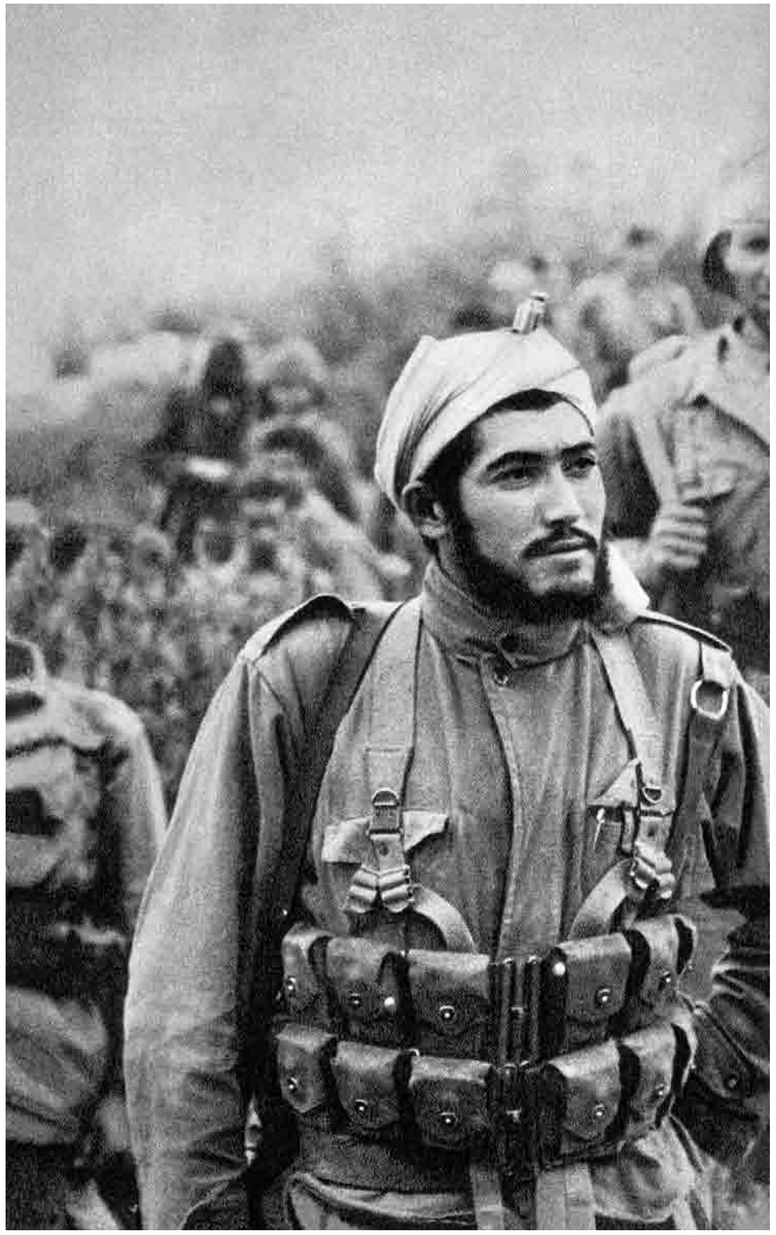
Translated by Aingeal Flanagan

The history of Algeria in many ways exemplifies the problems of the Arab world today. Algeria has produced some eminent writers and artists, but our prizewinning author fears that the inflexible power structures in his country mean that there are still many difficulties to be overcome in the pursuit of democracy.

Boualem Sansal

LITERATURE AND DEMOCRACY: THE ALGERIAN EXAMPLE

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FOR THE PEACE PRIZE OF THE GERMAN BOOK TRADE



Algeria during the the war of independence in the Fifties. Photo: Dirk Alvermann. From the book: *Algerien*, Steidl Verlag, Göttingen 2011.

First I would like to say thank you: to you, ladies and gentlemen, for the distinguished honour you have done me by coming to see me, and to the German Publishers and Booksellers Association for the princely honour you have done me in awarding me your prize, the *Friedenspreis*, one of the most prestigious distinctions of your great and beautiful country. In the context of today's world, your gesture is particularly moving and heartening; it testifies to your interest in the efforts we, the peoples of the South, are making to free ourselves from the evil and archaic dictatorships in our countries in a once glorious and enterprising Arab-Islamic world that has been insulated and stagnant for so long that we have forgotten we have legs, that we have a head and that legs can serve to stand, to walk, to run, to dance if we so choose, and that with a head we can do something inconceivable and magnificent, we can invent the future and live it in the present in peace, liberty and friendship. It is an exhilarating and redemptive ability: we invent the future even as it invents us. Mankind is very fortunate to possess such a faculty, to be able to live according to its own will within the unfathomable and indomitable fabric that is Life. In fact this is a banal truth; it is discovering it which is surprising. Life is a constant, a revolutionary invention, and we are living poems, romantic and surrealist, carrying within us eternal truths and infinite promise. To truly see us one must look below the surface. The free man has no choice but to act like a god, an audacious creator who constantly forges ahead, for otherwise he sinks into the non-being of fatalism, of slavery, of perdition. Camus, the Franco-Algerian rebel, urged us not to resign ourselves, words we believe now more than ever. In a time of terror and hope

Azfoune, Kabyle. In distress and anger, Algerian intellectuals and journalists who are threatened with death cry, 'A state that accepts that its elite lives in hiding is not a state.' Photo: Michael von Graffenried, www.mvgphoto.com

All photos by Michael von Graffenried in this issue are taken from the book *Inside Algeria*, Aperture, New York 1998.

courage is our only option, because it is what is decent and right; this is why we look to the future with confidence.

I am particularly indebted to the *Friedenspreis* jury for considering my work to be an act of political commitment which, as you say in your official statement, 'encourages intercultural dialogue in an atmosphere of respect and mutual understanding'. This has a particular resonance for me at a time when a wind of change is blowing through our Arab countries, bringing with it those humanist values, born of freedom and hence universal, which are the bedrock of my commitment. Literary merit, however great, is, I believe, worth little unless it is in the service of a great cause, the promotion of a language, a culture, a political or philosophical vision. I would like to believe that what we do, we writers, filmmakers, poets, philosophers, politicians, has contributed, if only in some small way, to hastening this Arab Spring which makes us dream, makes us impatient as we watch it unfold, driven as it is by the spirit of freedom, of newfound pride and of courage, facing down every threat and, so far, thwarting every attempt to hijack it; and if I have contributed to it in some small way, it is only as one among many Arab intellectuals and artists who are infinitely more deserving. Some have achieved great fame and their name alone can bring a crowd to its feet.

In this church, in 2000, you honoured my compatriot Assia Djebar who has done much to broadcast the obvious fact that, even in Arab-Islamic countries, woman is a free creature and that unless women are fully possessed of their freedom there can be no just world, only a sick, absurd, vicious world that cannot see it is dying. I can tell you that her struggle has borne fruit: in Algeria, the resistance, true, deep-rooted noble resistance, is essentially the preserve of women. During the civil war of the '90s, the 'black decade', as we call it, when women were the prime targets not only of the Islamists but of the other camp, of the government and its supporters who saw them as the root of all our misfortunes and used the full force of the law and of propaganda to crush them, they resisted magnificently and now, in coping every day with a difficult present, they are fashioning the future. Besides, they are, as always, our last resort.

With your permission at this point I would like to turn for a moment to my wife, who is sitting in the front row between our dear hosts Gottfried Honnefelder and Peter von Matt. I want to look her in the eye as I thank her: dear Naziha, thank you for everything, for your love, your friendship, your patience and for the quiet courage you have shown down the years through all the ordeals we have come through, and God knows they were painful: the civil war, the descent into the absurd, the growing, systematic, sterile isolation. This prize which honours us is rightfully yours.

I would also like to thank my distinguished predecessors, the laureates of this famous prize, the Friedenspreis, who have taken the time to come and attend this imposing ceremony, among them Karl Dedecius and Friedrich Schorlemmer. Seeing them sitting here in front of me I feel as nervous and intimidated as a pupil in front of his teachers.

My thanks, too, to my publishers and friends who have made the trip to Frankfurt and who are in the hall tonight: Antoine Gallimard, who presides over the fortunes of Les Editions Gallimard; Katharina Meyer, the director of Merlin Verlag. I salute my German translators, Regina Keil-Sagawe, Riek Walther and Ulrich Zieger, who are here today. Without them, who would have read me? It is to them I owe my readership in Germany. I hope my other publishers will forgive me for not mentioning them by name, I have so little time. I owe them much and I thank them all.

In passing I would like to say that I regret the fact that the Algerian Ambassador to Germany is not with us, because today, through me, it is Algeria, the country and its people who are being honoured. That empty chair saddens and worries me. I see in it an ominous sign; it means that my situation in Algeria will be no better even as I bring home a peace prize. If they can hear me, I would like to reassure my compatriots, and to tell them that we are not alone, that in this crowded hall are men and women who believe in us, who support us, among them great writers whose voices carry far. One day that voice will reach them and instil in them that fillip of courage necessary to take on a tyrant. I thank them with all my heart.

THE PEACE PRIZE AS BOTH RESPONSIBILITY AND BURDEN • I would now like to go back to those things I wanted to say, things that are dear to my heart. The first takes me back to the now unforgettable day earlier in 2011 – May 10th to be precise – when I received a letter from Germany, from president Gottfried Honnefelder, announcing the incredible, unthinkable news that I had been chosen as the laureate for the 2011 Peace Prize, a prize which since its inception in 1950 has honoured people of great standing. In all honesty, I was dumbstruck. I thought there must have been some mistake, a whole catalogue of mistakes that meant that I, a humble writer, an accidental militant, a 'hack', as those in official circles in Algeria call me, was being awarded this prestigious honour, a distinction, I can assure you, I had never dreamed of for a moment. It was a serious shock, one that left me beset by anxious, existential questions which plagued me all summer and still plague me to this day. *If I was indeed the man to whom the Peace Prize was being given, then I was already a different man … and I didn't realise it!* I was suddenly afraid that people would accuse me of ambivalence, false modesty, cynical ambition, naïve inconsistency; I am an easy-going man and I might unwittingly be guilty of one or other of these failings. Yet I am simply myself; unremarkable, and, truth be told, a rather timid man. But is it possible to remain unchanged with the weight of such a prize on one's shoulders?

This is your prize, ladies and gentlemen of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association; you know its power to change – I would say *to transfigure*, for the change is instantaneous, it happens in the moment the announcement is made, as though by magic – those upon whom you bestow it, you know how it can intimidate them, can change them or make them realise that over time they have already changed and that their work now belongs to a different order, one greater than the position they imagined they held as writers, philosophers, playwrights, *etc.*, it makes them realise that they were working for some higher cause, for peace, and not merely to satisfy the narcissistic need to write. We truly discover ourselves through the eyes of others. It is a phenomenon of relativity: we live through ourselves but it is through others that we exist, it is through their questioning gaze that we become conscious of our existence and our importance. Standing here at this lectern facing you, I am both myself and someone else, a man I did not know, whom I still do not know, the man you have chosen to receive the 2011 Peace Prize. The prize creates the merit, undoubtedly, just as the function creates the organ. I served peace unwittingly, now I will serve it consciously, something which will require of me other skills, I don't know what they might be, perhaps the sense of strategy and prudence that is as indispensible in the art of peace as in the art of war. The Peace Prize is like the hand of God, like a magician's wand: the moment it touches your forehead it transfigures you and turns you into a soldier of peace.

You can imagine how bewildered I was by the news. Flattered, but bewildered. It was a quantum leap into another world, that of a fame that is greater than you, where the individual disappears behind the image people have of him. A world of great responsibilities which demands ambitions of equal greatness. They say life reveals like developing fluid; every day we become a little more … what we already are. Only at the end will we know what we were at the beginning. Relativity again. Believe me, I had my doubts: *I'm being given a peace prize?* I thought – I who have lived with war my whole life, who talk only of war in my books and who, perhaps, believe only in war, because it is always there blocking our path, because, after all, we exist only because of war, it is war which makes us cherish life, it is war which makes us dream of peace and strive to find it; sadly, as it happens, such is the history of Algeria down the centuries that we have never had the choice between war and peace, but only between war and war, and what wars they were, each forced upon us, each all but wiped us out until the last, the long, savage war of liberation against colonialism from 1954 to 1962 which, as massacre followed massacre, we discovered was like a matryoshka doll: nested within the war of independence with its air of nobility was another war, a shameful, cruel, fratricidal war; we fought the colonial powers and we fought each other, FLN against MNA, Arabs against Berbers, the

Boualem Sansal
Photo: Markus Kirchgessner

religious against the secularists, thereby preparing the hatreds and divisions of tomorrow, and within that war was still another war, the insidious and odious war waged by the leaders of the nationalist movement in their race for power, leaving the future of freedom and dignity for which our parents had taken up arms no chance.

And yet, after eight years of war came peace. But it was a curious peace; it lasted for only a day, long enough for a *coup d'état*, the first of many, for on the day after the declaration of independence, July 5th 1962, the freedom earned in blood was stolen from the people, brutally, contemptuously, as one might steal money from the poor, and so began the dark, tragic, endless trench warfare that pitted the people against an invisible army, an omnipresent political police supported by a sprawling bureaucracy against which we could do nothing. Only through patience and cunning could we resist, survive.

The liberation did not bring liberty, still less civil liberties; it brought isolation and shortages. It was a bitter pill to swallow. Then, in 1991, without so much as a pause in which to assess the psychological damage inflicted by that long and humiliating submission, we were pitched into the worst of all wars, a civil war, an indiscriminate barbarity foisted on us by the Islamist hordes and the military police complex which left hundreds of thousands dead, left the people destitute, and which sundered the miraculous bond that holds a nation together. Now this barbarism has declined; the protagonists (the 'Turbans' and the 'Peaked Caps' as we call them in Algeria) made a lucrative deal: they shared out the land and the oil revenues between them. These mafia-like arrangements were enacted under cover of impressive legislation likely to win over even the most difficult Western observers, and their stated aim was civil harmony, national reconciliation, in short: complete, fraternal, blissful peace. In reality this peace was merely a stratagem to reward the killers, finish off the victims and with them bury truth and justice forever. They proved themselves to be master strategists; they succeeded in seducing Western democracies, and this – the realisation that there was no Good, no Truth to be found anywhere – was what finally finished us.

The Turbans seduced them first, in 1991, making much of the supposed legitimacy conferred on them at the ballot box – elections which in fact were rigged – a legitimacy they had been robbed of by the military. When their true, horrifying, hateful, treacherous nature was later revealed, it was the turn of the Peaked Caps, decked out in their military medals, to seduce the Western democracies who were clearly easily charmed or who sinned in the name of realpolitik. The military made much of their power to protect Western countries from Islamist terrorism and illegal immigration, which, like the dramatic rise of the black market, were simply by-products of their disastrous leadership. And so, in this new international division of labour, random torture and murder were sanctioned in our country. Roles were assigned: the South became the lair of the invader, an expedient bogeyman; the North a beleaguered, threatened paradise, and – the height of madness – our dangerous, insatiable dictators were elevated to the rank of Guardians of World Peace, benefactors of mankind, the same rank conferred on Bin Laden by millions of indolent souls in what in the Middle East is called the 'rue arabe' – the 'Arab Street' – and in the West 'problem areas'.

As for the Algerian people, worn out by ten years of terror and lies, they were served up the kind of peace that bears no resemblance to peace: silence, that bland soup that prepares for oblivion and futile death. It was that or war, more war, always war. We too allowed ourselves to be seduced because we were exhausted and com-

pletely alone. We too committed sins of omission, because no one had told us that a country requires a minimum level of democracy for peace to become a credible alternative, that for that rudimentary peace to flourish and truly benefit everyone other ingredients were required: a little wisdom in the heads of the children, a little virtue in the hearts of old people inured to suffering, a little self-restraint from the rich, a little tolerance from the religious, a little humility from intellectuals, a little honesty from government institutions, a little vigilance from the international community. In a country that has known only dictatorship, military and religious, the very idea that peace is possible means submission, suicide or permanent exile. The absence of freedom is an ache which, in the long run, drives one mad. It reduces a man to his shadow and his dreams to nightmares. The painter Giorgio de Chirico said something troubling: *There is much more mystery in the shadow of a man walking on a sunny day than in all religions past, present and future.* It is possible, it may even be true, but in the pain of a man reduced to his own shadow there is no mystery, only shame. Those who are not free will never respect another, not the slave, whose misfortune Réminds him of his own humiliation, nor the free man whose happiness is an insult to him. Only the pursuit of freedom will save him from hatred and resentment. Without that conscious pursuit, we are not human; there is nothing true in us.

RICH COUNTRY, POOR PEOPLE • This is my country, ladies and gentlemen, miserable and torn apart. I don't know who made it that way, whether Fate, history, or its people; I would be inclined to say its leaders, who are capable of anything. My country is a collection of insoluble paradoxes, most of them lethal. To live in absurdity is debilitating; one staggers from wall to wall like a drunk. For the young, who must find a future, who need clear landmarks to guide them, it is a tragedy; it is heartrending to hear them baying at death like wolves in the darkness.

The first paradox is that Algeria is an immensely rich country and the Algerian people are terribly poor. It is as maddening as dying of thirst in the middle of a deep lake. What is not squandered is guaranteed to be lost to corruption. The second paradox is that Algeria is a perfectly constituted democracy, with political parties of

Algeria during the war of independence in the Fifties. Photo: Dirk Alvermann. From the book: *Algerien*, Steidl Verlag, Göttingen 2011.

every possible stripe, including some peculiar to itself, a press that is as free as it can be, a president elected according to law and all sorts of institutions whose stated business is justice, transparency, the separation of powers, public service, and yet at the same time the everyday reality of the people is the cruellest despotism, the famous Oriental Despotism which nothing down the centuries has succeeded in humanising. The third paradox, and to my mind the worst since it is the cause of incurable mental disorders, is this: Algeria has an extraordinarily rich and rewarding history, it has lived cheek by jowl with all the civilisations of the Mediterranean and has loved, embraced and valiantly fought with each of them: the Greek, the Phoenician, the Roman, the Vandal, the Byzantine, the Arabic, the Ottoman, the Spanish and the French, but at independence, when the moment came to rally the people, including those most recently arrived, the Pieds-Noirs, to marshal their talents and move forward, it erased its memory at a stroke; in an inexplicable *auto-odi*, an act of self-hatred, it renounced its ancestral Berber and Judeo-Berber identity and everything it had learned over thousands of years of history and retreated into a narrow history which owed much to mythology and very little to reality. The reason for this?

It is the logic of totalitarianism. The Unity Party system wanted *their* religion, *their* history, *their* language, *their* heroes, *their* legends, concepts dreamed up by a select group and imposed by decree, and propaganda and threats guaranteed the condition necessary for these stillborn fables to work: a terrified populace. The struggle for the recognition of our identity was long and painful, repression resulted in the deaths of hundreds of activists, especially in Kabylie, a region that has always been indomitable; torture and imprisonment broke thousands of people and drove whole populations into exile. True to its own logic, repression was extended to French-speakers, Christians, Jews, the laity, to intellectuals, to homosexuals, to free women, to artists, to foreigners; anyone, in fact, whose very presence might threaten this illusory identity. The sweeping pageant of human diversity became a crime, an insult to identity. The struggle is not over, the hardest part still lies ahead: we must free ourselves and rebuild ourselves as an open, welcoming democratic state which has a place for everyone and imposes nothing on anyone.

You know all this, ladies and gentlemen, and you know that it is this violence, this endless persecution, this appalling interference in our private lives that led to the rebellions in our countries which have erupted, one after another, like fireworks. These events have brought many tragedies but we accept them because at the end of the road there is freedom.

For having written these things which everyone knows, my books are banned in my country. This is the absurdity dictatorship feeds on: my books are banned but I, who wrote them, still live in the country and am free – at least until further notice – to come and go. If a sword of Damocles hangs over my head, I do not see it. And if my books still circulate in Algeria, it is thanks to the invisible and highly dangerous work of a number of booksellers. In a letter addressed to my compatriots, published in 2006 under the title *Poste Restante: Alger*, I wrote the following: 'But for the fear of pushing them to breaking point (I am talking about the intolerant), I would tell them I did not write as an Algerian, a Muslim, a nationalist, proud and easily offended; had I done so I would have known exactly what to write, how to be discreet. Instead I wrote as a human being, a child of the earth and of solitude, distraught and destitute, who does not know what Truth is or where it lives, who owns it, who apportions it. I seek it out and, truth be told, I seek nothing, I do not have the means, I tell stories, simple stories about simple people whom misfortune has pitted against seven-armed thugs who think themselves the centre of the universe, like those who loom over us, grinning crudely, those who seized our lives and our possessions and who, in addition, now demand our love and our gratitude. I would like to tell them that the bureaucratic, sanctimonious police state they support by their actions troubles me less than the embargo on thought. Granted, I am in prison, but my mind is free to roam; this is what I write about in my books, and there is nothing shocking or subversive about it.'

In *The Rebel*, Camus says: 'To write is already to choose.' And that is what I did: I chose to write. And I was right to do so; the dictators are falling like flies.

THE REVOLUTION AND THE CONFLICT IN PALESTINE • With your permission I would like to conclude with a few thoughts concerning the Arab rebellions and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia we all feel it: the world is changing. What in the old, sclerotic, complicated, doom-laden Arab world seemed impossible has happened: people are fighting for freedom, committing themselves to democracy, throwing open doors and windows, they are looking to the future and they want that future to be pleasant, to be simply human. What

is happening, in my opinion, is not simply the overthrow of ageing, deaf, dull-witted dictators, nor is it limited to Arab countries; it is the beginning of a worldwide change, a Copernican revolution: people want true, universal democracy without barriers or taboos. All that despoils life, impoverishes, limits and distorts it has become more than the world's conscience can bear and is being vehemently rejected. People are rejecting dictators, they are rejecting ext Rémists, they are rejecting the *diktats* of the market, they are rejecting the stifling domination of religion, they are rejecting the pretentious and cowardly cynicism of *realpolitik*, they are rejecting Fate even though it has the last word, they are rejecting polluters; everywhere people are angry, everywhere they are rising up against those things that harm this planet and mankind. A new consciousness is emerging. It is a turning point in the history of nations – what you called 'Die Wende' when the Berlin Wall came down.

In this atmosphere of open rebellion, more and more of us refuse to accept that the oldest conflict in the world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, should carry on and devastate our children and our grandchildren. We feel impatient; we do not want these two great peoples, so deeply rooted in the history of humanity, to spend even one more day as hostages to their petty dictators, to narrow-minded ext Rémists, to those mired in nostalgia, to the worthless blackmailers and agitators. We want them to be free, happy, living in brotherhood. We believe that the spring which began in Tunis will come to Te Aviv, to Gaza, to Ramallah, that it will make its way to China and beyond. This wind blows in all directions. Soon Palestinians and Israelis will be united by the same anger; this will be 'Die Wende' in the Middle East and the walls will fall with a joyous roar.

But the real miracle would not be that the Israelis and the Palestinians might one day sign a peace treaty, something they could do in five minutes on the back of an envelope and which they have come close to doing more than once; the real miracle would be if those who have set themselves up as patrons, tutors and advisors to these two peoples – worse, who have set themselves up as bloody-minded prophets – stopped imposing their fantasies on them. The Holy Wars, the endless Crusades, the incessant Oaths, the Geopolitics of Origins are long gone; Israelis and Palestinians live in the here and now, not in some mythical past they have no obligation to revive. The demand for recognition of a sovereign, independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders submitted by president Mahmoud Abbas to the United Nations struck a pointless blow, we all knew that; but even in failure it may turn out to be a decisive blow, as decisive as the self-immolation of the young Tunisian man Bouazizi which set the Arab world alight. For the first time in sixty years, the Palestinians acted entirely according to their own wishes; they went to New York because they wanted to, they did not ask for support or permission from anyone, neither from the Arabic dictators we are burying one by one, nor the Arab League which no longer booms like a war drum, nor some mysterious backroom Islamist Grand Mufti.

It is an extraordinary event: for the first time the Palestinians behaved like Palestinians in the service of Palestine and not instruments in the service of a mythical Arab nation or a sadly all-too-real international *jihad*. Only free men can make peace, and Abbas came as a free man, and perhaps, like Sadat, he will pay for it with his life; there are many enemies of peace and freedom in the region and they feel cornered. It is sad that a man like Obama, the magnificent link between the two hemispheres of our planet, did not understand this and seize the opportunity which he has been watching for intently since his famous speech in Cairo.

Israel is a free country, of that there can be no doubt, a beautiful, vast, amazing democracy, which, more than any other country, needs peace; the ceaseless war, the constant state of alert it has lived with for sixty years is unsustainable. It too must break with ext Rémists and with all the lobbies who, from the safety of their remote paradises, advocate intransigence – fruitless, of course – and ensnare the country in equations that are impossible to solve. In my opinion, we have to get away from the idea that peace is something to be negotiated; though the terms, the forms, the stages can be negotiated, peace is a principle, something to be publicly announced in a solemn manner. You must say: Peace, Shalom, Salam, and shake hands. This is what Abbas did in going to the United Nations; it is what Sadat did in going to Tel Aviv. Is it a dream to hope that Netanyahu might do the same, that he might come to the UN, or go to Ramallah and announce the principle of peace?

BOUALEM SANSAL, born in 1949, is one of the bestknown contemporary Algerian writers. He writes in French. His books have been translated into numerous languages, e.g. *An Unfinished Business* (Bloomsbury).

Translated from the French by Frank Wynne

In 2012 Algeria is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its independence from the colonial power, France. Following a brutal colonial war, Algeria became a haven for revolutionaries from all over the world; but after the bloody civil war of the 1990s there are few signs of the Arab Spring blossoming in Algiers.

Susanne Stemmler

SUITCASE CARRIERS, RED HAND, BLACK PANTHERS

A REVIEW OF ALGERIA FIFTY YEARS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

May 8th 1945 is the central historical event at the heart of the novel *Nedjma* by the Algerian author Kateb Yacine. It is a different May 8th to the one we are used to celebrating in Germany. In the Algerian town of Sétif, following the German surrender, thousands of Algerians gathered spontaneously to demonstrate for their rights. Many of them had not only fought as soldiers on the French side against Nazi Germany, they had also fought for France in the First World War, and were now demanding *libération* for themselves as well. The demonstration in Sétif, in which Kateb Yacine also participated and was arrested, and which he describes in *Nedjma*, went down in history as the day of the massacre of tens of thousands of Algerians perpetrated by the French security forces. What anti-fascists and the international community celebrate as the 'Day of Liberation' does not represent liberation at all for Algerians, but rather the beginning of a long period of bloody repression and systematic torture. Many Algerians died in French internment camps. It was the start of a struggle for independence, of a brutal colonial war that lasted from 1954 to 1962. In the process France, the land of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, still living off the legend of the *Résistance* to Nazi Fascism and very far from addressing its past in the form of the Vichy regime, revealed itself as deeply racist with regard to the 'natives' of the country, who were regarded as inferior in terms of civilisation. For Kateb Yacine, the only appropriate way of talking about this period of physical and psychological violence, which he himself experienced, is not chronologically but cyclically structured narrative fragments. The novel is held together by the search the three main characters all share: for Nedjma, who is a woman, but also the future de-colonised Algeria.

> *Labourers, workers, merchants, sun. Many people. Germany has surrendered. Couples. Crowded cafés. Bells. Official celebration; war memorial. (…) Opposition rally of the people. Enough promised now. 1870. 1918. 1945. Today, the eighth of May, is this really victory now? (…) An official of the Sûreté, hidden in the shadow of an archway, shoots at the flag. Machine gun fire. (…) The bodies are displayed in the sun. Since 8th May fourteen people from my family have died, not counting those who were court-martialled and shot.* (Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma*, 1956)

So the historic date 1945 preserves memory like two sides of a medal: liberation for one means oppression for the other. This fateful temporal synchrony would later result in specific, almost forgotten histories, both German-Algerian and internationalist, and these are the subject of the following article.

SAVAGE COLONIAL WAR • As a Réminder: in 1830 France occupied Algiers, Oran and Bône. Bit by bit it conquered the whole of Algeria and in 1848 declared it to be French territory. It was divided up into three *départements*, and was thus bound to France significantly more closely than, for example, the protectorate of Morocco or the colony Senegal. The people were subjected to a policy of dispossession, expulsion, resettlement, internment, and linguistic enforcement that attempted to eradicate the identity of the Algerian people. Malek Alloula, born in Oran in 1937, remembers: 'We spoke Arabic at home, but in the French-speaking school we only learned the history of France; Arabic was a foreign language for us in our own country.'

The events of Sétif sparked off the Algerian revolution, which began on November 1st 1954, led by the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) and the *Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN). The war in Algeria reached as far as France: on October 17th 1961 French security forces killed almost two hundred Algerians at a demonstration in Paris; some of the corpses were thrown into the Seine. On February 8th, also during a demonstration in favour of Algerian independence, nine people were killed at the Metro station Charonne. On July 5th 1962 Algeria became independent.

Benjamin Stora, a historian and expert on the French colonial wars, mentions the Algerian war of independence in the same breath as the war in Indochina as the 'most bitter war of decolonisation in the twentieth century'. This traumatic history, from systematic and institutionalised torture, executions and rapes by French officers throughout Algeria to the murder of Algerians in Paris, has only been addressed in France in the past ten years. At the beginning of this century, the Algerian war was downplayed in France as 'operations to restore order', whereas in Algeria it was called a 'revolution'. But in Algeria too, constructing memory beyond post-colonial glorification is a difficult thing to do. Many Algerians still have problems with Albert Camus, for example, the son of a poor settler family in Algeria and an anti-colonial who waxed lyrical about a cosmopolitan Algeria.

Albert Memmi aptly summarises the psychodynamic of colonialism when he writes that a master-servant interdependency exists between the colonised and the coloniser. Stora substantiates with figures this theory of a common traumatic Franco-Algerian history. The Algerian war affected some six to seven million men and women personally: the French soldiers and their children; the 'pieds-noirs', *i.e.* the European settlers from Algeria and their children; the Jews of Algeria; and the Algerian Muslims and their (French-born) children, the 'beurs'.

So French colonialism and the post-colonial period continue to have repercussions right up the present day, because they sparked off huge waves of migration. After the end of the Algerian war, a million *pieds noirs and harkis*, Algerians who had fought on the side of the French against their own compatriots, resettled in France. For more than fifty years not only have Algerians been immigrating to France, their children and grandchildren have also been born there and are thus for the most part French citizens, who are nonetheless often subjected to anti-Muslim racism.

That, then, is Franco-Algerian colonial history in a nutshell. In France, only a few intellectuals, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, opposed colonialism and spoke out in favour of Algerian independence – often endangering their lives in so doing.

GERMAN-ALGERIAN SOLIDARITY • In post-war Germany the Algerians' anti-colonial struggle for independence became a point of political identification for the Left. Former resistance fighters, concentration camp prisoners, Communists, Trotskyites, young Socialists – all were united by the 'Algeria project'. In his eponymous 1984 book, which is still the only one of its kind, Claus Leggewie depicts the acts of solidarity by the so-called German 'suitcase bearers', and aptly calls these lone fighters – still far from constituting a 'movement' – the first internationalists: long before the anti-Vietnam movement, and long before the pro-Nicaragua solidarity of the 1980s. His book offers unique insights, taken from interviews, into illegal money transfers to the Algerian liberation front, concealed weapons production, and counterfeiting rings in stuffy post-war Adenauer Germany. According to Leggewie, this had the effect of combining 'the "classical" worker's movement of the Weimar era with anti-Fascist combat experience and anti-colonial dedication'. One who played a central role in West Germany as the hinterland of the FLN was 'Ben Wisch', the Social Democrat SPD member of parliament Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, who infuriated his comrades in the French socialist sister party in so doing.

'Algeria is everywhere' – this was the title of Hans-Magnus Enzensberger's inaugural speech for the first exhibition, put together by students, about the atrocities committed both by the French and also by the FLN in Algeria. For a small group of German activists and intellectuals this much was clear: Germany was an accomplice in this war, and it was a historical duty not to allow any concentration camps to exist anywhere at all – *and* with this we are back at May 8th. The director Volker Schlöndorff, who during his time as an exchange student in Paris saw with his own eyes the reprisals against Algerians, made his first short film *Wen kümmert's? (Who Cares?)* in 1960 about Algerian soldiers who had deserted from the French army, fled to

Algeria during the war of independence in the Fifties.
Photo: Dirk Alvermann.
From the book *Algerien*, Steidl Verlag, Göttingen 2011.

Germany, and were being hunted by the 'Red Hand' of the French secret service.

After independence, there were hopes for a new Algerian 'project'. And this was not only an idea of the Left; internationally, too, Algeria – like other formerly colonised countries – became a projection screen for socialist utopias. As with many 'young' African nations freed from foreign domination, Algeria too was confronted with the question: what should we orientate ourselves towards? Towards the West, to the United States; or towards the East, in the direction of the Soviet Union? The former head of the FLN, Ben Bella, became president in 1962: he aspired to an Arab socialism similar to that of Nasser in Egypt, and looked to the Soviet Union. In 1964 the FLN became the party of state and government. Algeria wanted to follow its own path, a socialist one, but not like that of other models, such as Cuba, for example. In 1974 they signed a labour recruitment agreement with East Germany, and many Algerian students were sent to the German Democratic Republic. And so today – another piece of German-Algerian history – there are many Algerians in former East Berlin, as well as the descendants of East German-Algerian couples in search of their fathers, who were expelled.

A GREAT PAST, AND A MISERABLE PRESENT • In the 1970s Algeria became a place of great symbolic importance, but also an actual place of exile, for persecuted 'revolutionaries' from all over the world; from Africa in particular, but also from North America. As part of the 'rediscovery' of the African continent and Black nationalism, people in the United States were reading Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and his analyses in *Black Skin, White Masks*, which establish the connection between 'white supremacy' and colonialism but also address the psychological traumas of those colonised. Fanon thus became an important initiator of the Blackness and Black Power movement in the US. The psychiatrist from Martinique worked in a psychiatric clinic in the Algerian town of Blida, before himself joining the FLN. In July 1969 the Pan-African Cultural Congress took place in Algiers, and was opened by President Boumedienne; one prominent guest was Eldridge Cleaver, the information minister of the Black Panther Party, who had fled via Cuba from the United States, where he was a wanted man.

The Black Panthers opened an office in the heart of Algiers and organised an exhibition – they felt an affinity with the Algerian revolution; that they were fighting for similar anti-imperialist goals. In 1970 the office became the International Section of the Black Panthers, which was the contact point for members of the radical Black civil rights movement who had fled the United States, and was awarded diplomatic status.

Meanwhile, today, in the fiftieth year after independence, there are hardly any signs of the Arab Spring blossoming in Algeria. Since the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) won the elections in 1991, which were invalidated by the military, a total of 150,000 people have died in the civil war, among them countless civilians and intellectuals. The state security forces instigated a brutal crackdown. Today, in a period of what only looks like domestic peace, Algerians are tired of fighting. They may observe the democracy movements in the neighbouring Arab countries with fascinated interest, the Algerian newspaper *El Watan* may organise debates, and so on; but in Algeria a strange quiet

Woman showing the ink on her finger as proof she has voted on election day in Pujehun, Sierra Leone. Photo: Kelly Fajack/Getty Images

reigns after all the years of struggle for independence and the terror of the 1990s.

Yet here, as in other Arab countries, one could find similar grounds for a pro-democracy movement. Youth unemployment is high, and mafia-style authoritarian structures prevail. But by making the concession of passing a new political parties act, President Bouteflika succeeded in keeping the peace. We must wait and see what happens in 2012, because the president wants to allow international observers in for the coming parliamentary elections. Algeria too will have to change.

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Translated by Charlotte Collins

The success of the Ennahda Movement in Tunisia has aroused considerable anxiety about Islamisation of the country, but its election programme provided no reason for such fears. Nevertheless this movement, which is now in government, still has to find its own way between the demands of radical secularists and those of radical Islamists.

Lutz Rogler

THE ISLAMIC ENNAHDA MOVEMENT

HOW DEMOCRATIC IS THE NEW POLITICAL DAWN IN TUNISIA?

A year or so after the start of the 'Arab Spring', tremendous disillusionment or even disappointment have spread among the media in Germany and other Western countries. After a euphoric welcome for the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, prolonged and deadly struggles in Yemen and Syria have dampened expectations that other authoritarian regimes in the Arab world would quickly succumb to mass pressure. Then last autumn, after democratic elections in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt demonstrated the political domination of Islamist parties, more and more people started viewing the initial hopes of rapid democratic change as being premature, or even spoke of the revolutions having been 'stolen'. It seems as if, in the view of many observers and commentators, Islamist electoral successes are merely to be evaluated as a retrograde step or as a danger for post-revolutionary strivings for freedom and democracy.

Uncertainty about the Islamist movement's electoral victory and distrust of the government it now heads are particularly evident in Tunisia. After President Bourguiba's policy of secularist modernisation (until 1987) gained the country the image of being a progressive 'exception' in the Arab world, from the early Nineties onwards propaganda by Ben Ali's dictatorial regime portrayed Tunisia as a model of how to successfully combat religious 'obscurantism' and 'ext Rémism'. Both the Western public and Tunisia's secular and leftist opposition were thus only mildly critical of the regime's merciless suppression of the Islamist movement, and even supported this as an expression of the state's modernist orientation.

However, after the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime by the revolutionary mass movement of January 2011, a completely new historical era began for the country's most important Islamist movement, Harakat Ennahda. For the first time ever since its foundation in the early 1970s, Ennahda could legally develop organisational structures and become socially active without any interference by state bureaucrats. On March 1st 2011 it received official permission to form a political party, almost thirty years after the unsuccessful attempt in June 1981 to establish an 'Islamic Movement'. Nevertheless, last year, when the first Ennahda exiles, including chairman Rashid al-Ghannushi, had just returned to Tunisia, no one in the movement anticipated that within twelve months its secretary-general, Hamadi al-Jabali, would be heading a coalition government based on the outcome of democratic elections.

THE ISLAMISTS' NEW ROLE • In the elections for a constituent assembly (October 23rd 2011), Ennahda gained 89 out of 210 seats (around 41%), far outstripping the other political groupings. During the envisaged transitional period of one year, when the constituent assembly is charged with drawing up a new constitution and functioning as the legislature, the Islamist movement has been able to achieve an importance that hardly anyone had reckoned with – obviously not even within Ennahda itself. Also, in mid-December Tunisia's transitional President, Munsif al-Marzuqi, charged the secretary-general al-Jabali with forming a government. In the coalition government established soon after that (with two other former opposition parties alongside Ennahda) the Islamists provided the Foreign, Interior and Justice Ministers, as well as filling other posts.

The question – much discussed during the pre-electoral period – of whether the Islamist movement would play a decisive part in the post-revolutionary Tunisian political landscape thus received a surprising and clear-cut answer. It is in fact truly surprising that, after twenty years of absence from the country's political life and unprecedented state persecution of its members, Ennahda was capable within just a few months of both redeveloping its organisational structures and mobilising such a wide range of voters – including young people who could hardly have known the movement from their own previous experience. Remarkable too is the reintegration, obviously without any major problems, of hundreds of members after years of exile, mainly in Europe.

On the other hand the movement's basic policies after the revolution are scarcely surprising – at least not for those who have followed Ennahda's ideological development in recent decades, with its orientation towards radical change through rapid creation of democratic (and above all democratically legitimated) institutions, and its striving for consensus with other political forces in the country, including – indeed, especially – secular and leftist parties. Taking into account what the movement declared as early as 1996 in a programme setting out objectives for the period following Ben Ali's dictatorship, the present coalition government really does seem to be an implementation of that concept of a joint 'front' of the most important opposition forces against the regime which fell in January last year. Furthermore, in 1981 the movement had first attempted to embrace the pluralistic political order then coming into existence, and in 2011 it similarly refrained from urging the idea of establishment of an 'Islamic state' or calling for 'application of *sharia*'.

PROGRESSIVE ELECTION PROGRAMME • Ennahda supports the principle of a democratic 'civic' state and rejects a 'religious' state in the form of a theocracy. It thus adopts the same position as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Morocco's Justice and Development Party. In its programme published a few weeks before the September 2011 elections, the movement summarised its political objectives as entailing freedom, democracy, and 'Power to the People'. It is therefore striving for a republican system which implements justice, freedom, and stability, and rejects despotism and corruption. Here the movement expressly proclaims support for the involvement of all political forces in drawing up a new constitution as 'the culmination of the Tunisian revolution'. The details of this programme for a new political order in Tunisia make clear Ennahda's commitment to a broad-based social system. Freedom, justice, and development are stated to be the central values of state and society. Human rights and individual and collective freedoms are to be guaranteed – especially freedom of belief and thought and the rights of religious minorities. Torture is to be banned.

In addition, Ennahda proclaims its support of independence for civic society, the principle of pluralism and peaceful transfers of power, separation of powers, and an independent legal system. The functions of legislation and control are to be exerted by a parliament consisting of a single chamber, which is also responsible for possible changes in the constitution and election of the president of the republic. The latter's five-year term of office can be extended only once.

In the preamble to this programme, the republican system is described as the 'best guarantee for democracy and utilisation of the country's wealth for the people's well-being'. Respecting human rights is also mentioned here, explicitly by opposing 'discrimination for reasons of gender, skin colour, ideology, or wealth while strengthening equal rights for women in education, employment, and participation in public life'. Proposals for a 'democratic political system' establish a direct connection with the post-colonial regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. At issue here is 'eradication of the historically-established roots of autocracy which allowed the independent state to deviate from its (true) mission'.

A careful reading of Ennahda's election programme shows that the experience of decades of autocratic rule and its dictatorial expression in politics, the economy and culture clearly underlies the emphasis on the establishment of a constitutional and civic state in which citizens should be protected – by both strong institutions and an active civic society – against arbitrary state action. The principles of 'good governance' are several times linked with 'human dignity' and the demands of comprehensive economic and social development. The programme's sections on economic and social policy are also more detailed than those devoted to the political system, thereby emphasising commitment to making a clear-cut break with the practices of the former regime.

Leaving aside the question of the extent to which the election programme's guidelines really do constitute realistic starting-points for solving Tunisia's economic and social problems in the period ahead, this text (just like many declarations by Ennahda's leaders before and after the elections) offers no reason for doubting the movement's seriousness regarding orientation towards real democratic change or for distrusting a government under its leadership. Also, in its political dealings since the successful revolution Ennahda has at no time deviated from the principle of establishing consensus with other political and ideological forces about the essential steps and processes leading to democracy.

DISTRUST AND MISREPRESENTATIONS • Nevertheless, a number of Tunisian politicians repeatedly fuel doubts about the credibility of Ennahda's 'democratic discourse', and misrepresent the movement as demonstrating provisional pragmatism in order to retain power or even as explicitly resorting to deceit-

Martyrs' Square, Algiers. FIS electoral rally. The child is crying and shouting 'Allahu Akbar' (God is great). Shortly after the photograph was taken, this six-year-old boy passed out on his father's shoulders. December 1991. Photo: Michael von Graffenried, www.mvgphoto.com

fulness. It is claimed that the party's real objective consists of using its new position of power within the state to implement the long-term Islamisation of Tunisian society, thereby reversing the achievements of 'modernity', particularly women's rights and freedom of opinion and belief. Maintaining that Islamists only employ democratic rhetoric and processes in order to take over state power and then establish their own anti-modern religious dictatorship is a long-established tactic in Tunisia. Secularising intellectuals frequently make reference to historical experiences in Iran, Afghanistan, and Sudan.

Nonetheless, current fears on the part of intellectuals, activists for women's rights, and left-wing parties (the losers in the elections) are not only shaped by decades of state rhetoric in the struggle against 'religious ext Rémism'. In recent months they have been nourished by a series of public declarations and actions by religious groupings which utilise the country's new freedom to draw attention to themselves and, above all, to mobilise youth. This mainly involves Salafist groups and the 'Islamic Liberation Party', who loudly call for 'application of *sharia'* and re-establishment of an 'Islamic caliphate'. Often in these sometimes shrill disputes (among the public and in the media) between 'secularists' and 'Islamists', people – perhaps deliberately, perhaps unconsciously – overlook the fact that there are considerable differences and sometimes obvious oppositions between these relatively new factions and the Ennahda movement with regard to political, ideological, and also religious ways of thinking.

A relatively impartial view of the movement's development since its beginnings at the start of the 1960s does not provide grounds for evaluating Ennahda's current positions as expressions of provisional pragmatism, let alone political hypocrisy. On the contrary, they appear to be the result of political experiences gained and processed during decades of authoritarian rule in Tunisia – and also the outcome of debates and conflicts between different tendencies within the movement, reflecting self-critical assessments of the movement's own ideology and praxis, especially in the 1990s. A part was played as well by ongoing interaction between and co-operation with other (leftist, liberal, nationalist) forces in Tunisia and elsewhere in the Arab world.

MORE ADAPTABLE ISLAM? • The development of new ideological and political viewpoints becomes particularly apparent in Ennahda's chairman, Rashid al-Ghannushi. Born in 1941, he studied philosophy and then, after twenty years of exile in Great Britain, returned to Tunisia at the end of January 2011. He has devoted intensive attention to the processing of his movement's historical experiences in Tunisian society, and his theoretical and theological reflection has crucially shaped Ennahda's self-image today, with its guiding impulse of symbiosis between 'Islam and modernity' making the movement closer to the Turkish AKP than to the Muslim Brotherhood. In the 1980s al-Ghannushi was subjected to intense internal criticism, mainly because of his tactical leadership, but during his London exile in the Nineties he gained the reputation of being one of the Islamist mainstream's most influential reformist intellectuals in the Arab world and beyond. In many publications and interviews he has confronted contemporary Islamist ideology, programmes and praxis. Time and again his ideas have been concerned with the relationship between traditions of Islamic thought and modern concepts of democracy, freedom, and human rights. Again and again he has expressly advocated acceptance of democratic and pluralistic principles rather than restrictive conservative positions and hesitant attitudes, and argued in favour of a new approach to human and civic rights in Islamic theology within the context of the relationship between religion and the modern state.

In the fundamental orientation demonstrated in its election programme, and in many public statements since the revolution, the movement's positions clearly accord with recent theoretical reflections by Rashid al-Ghannushi and other Ennahda intellectuals. These include the central idea that the state has no right to prescribe to citizens specific religious convictions and norms laid down by law. In the election programme there was no mention of *sharia*. Up to now the Ennahda leadership has also urged that the old constitution's formulation that 'Tunisia is a free and independent state with Islam as its religion and Arabic its language' should remain unchanged in the new constitution. 'Islam' is understood here as a general historical and cultural frame of reference whose ideas about values should be harmonised with present-day requirements and those of 'human experience'. Nevertheless, present discussion of the new constitution includes consideration of reference to *'sharia* law' as a source or even the main source of legislation. That is partly in reaction to demands put forward by more conservative and Salafist groupings, and also by some prominent representatives of Ennahda. However this does not mean – despite the fears and accusations expressed by some of Tunisia's secularists – that the movement is now preparing authoritarian 'Islamisation from above'. As Ennahda sees the situation, *sharia* law is inconceivable without its ethical principles (*maqasid ash-sharia*), headed by freedom. Discussions about the constitution are thus not only concerned with finding a basic democratic consensus for future political attitudes in Tunisia. Attention is also being paid to democratic understanding of an appropriately contemporary interpretation of Islamic concepts and values. An-Nadha seems well prepared for that, both theoretically and programmatically, in terms of a 'symbiosis of Islam and modernity'. The months ahead will show how much of this can be implemented in today's Tunisia.

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Translated by Tim Nevill

Martin Gerner

TOO FAST TOO SOON

OBSERVATIONS ON DEMOCRACY IN AFGHANISTAN

Electoral office in Afghanistan.
Photo: Martin Gerner

After the fall of the Taliban, the West wanted to transform Afghanistan into a democratic state. Ten years later almost all of those early hopes have been dashed, and democracy has become something of a dirty word. The following article attempts to get to the bottom of the reasons for this failure.

A crime scene in Afghanistan. Two worlds that could not be further apart. While the media in Europe and the United States were asking questions about what could have motivated the American soldier who killed sixteen civilians, among them many children, in a single night of violence in Kandahar a few weeks ago, an official Afghan commission has established that the crime and its background make it impossible to conclude that it was carried out by a single perpetrator. Since then numerous Afghan media have been spreading versions that make room for the theory of an orchestrated murder by members of the United States armed forces.

Even if the facts seem to contain little that would support this thesis, perhaps there is no better indication of the depth of the mistrust that has established itself between the indigenous population and the foreign military.

Furthermore, the drama of Kandahar transcends the fiction of every script that has been written about the conflict in recent years. While politicians and the NATO leadership are understandably trying to present the crime as an 'isolated incident', in truth there are many reasons why it should be seen in the overall context of a war that is characterised by years of brutalisation, sustained disproportionateness, and growing alienation.

When furious Afghans took to the streets after the Koran-burning in Bagram, just a few days later the idea had almost crystallised that an entire people were in danger of being instrumentalised by radical Friday preachers and the Taliban.

This idea ignores the calls for moderation that were in many instances being made by precisely such mullahs in Kabul and elsewhere. It would be doing multifaceted Afghan society a disservice simply to reduce it to the cries of 'Margh ba America' – 'Death to America' – that have been echoing in the media as a result of these most recent events.

There is in fact more than one war being waged in Afghanistan. We are also experiencing the revival of an internal cultural battle with its origins in the last century. The slogans of the increasingly critical public – were they to dare to take to the streets on a regular basis – might just as easily be 'Down with Karzai' or 'Fight corruption'.

Certainly, when it comes to defining the position of democracy in the Afghan context, it is not too great a stretch to turn to the example of the upheaval in the Arab world. In Afghanistan too large sections of the population are seeking an outlet for their rage and disappointment: with warlords and nepotism, the arbitrariness of the authorities, and the state-sanctioned robbery of the people.

It is hard these days to find Afghans who do not, in private conversations, vehemently demand that those responsible at all levels of state, whether national, regional or local, be called to account. In the ten years of the international presence in Afghanistan, corruption and state inefficiency have had greater success in consolidating themselves than 'good governance', the programmatic title for the many projects that have swallowed millions of dollars in subsidies.

Nonetheless, despite the recent events in Kandahar, the scenario of democratically-inspired street protests is likely to remain a fiction for many years to come. That, at least, is the view of those to whom I have spoken. The younger generation in particular is unequivocal. 'Taking to the streets and demonstrating for our goals is the last thing we would do under the current circumstances,' says Abdullah Khodadad, one of the founders of *Eslah Talaban* ('those who seek reform'), a group of students and university graduates, linked up via Facebook, who have given themselves the name of the 'Reformist Movement'. They are demanding university places and further education for the tens of thousands of school leavers who graduate without any career prospects; governmental bodies that answer to the people instead of holding out their hands for bribes; the removal of old leadership elites. At a press conference, the Reformist Movement draped the walls with orange publicity banners. The idea was convey something of the atmosphere of the Ukrainian revolution. It is also the same orange as the overalls that presented the world with its first image of the prisoners in Guantánamo, in January 2002.

The movement's website lists around 170 Facebook friends. The number is growing every day, the initiators insist. They have been trying to establish a network with similar initiatives, so far without success. Social media in Afghanistan are indeed becoming daily more popular at a low level. There is, however, a lack of authorities or charismatic figures who could focus the protest. There is also the question of how independent such movements really are. 'Groups like *Eslah Talaban* still have the same connections with the political circles of the Northern Alliance,' comments Gran Heward, a young Afghan who works as a researcher on the subject for AAN, an independent international think-tank in Kabul. 'The former head of the Afghan secret services, for example – Saleh – got a lot of media coverage after he won the support of another section of the Afghan youth for his so-called "green movement".'

So is it all just an illusion? 'How are the youth here supposed to stage successful spontaneous protests and bring about the downfall of the existing structures when the "big brother" United States and the Europeans can't manage to curb the evil that is rampant in the country?' asks Shafiq, a journalist and colleague who has worked for many years for the Afghan Service of the BBC. 'But even if the young people were able to bring about the fall of the Karzai government, there would be another monster lying in wait for them: the new old Taliban.'

Child's drawing about the war in Afghanistan. Photo: Martin Gerner

Certainly anyone who takes to the streets to demand their rights in Afghanistan must expect to come into conflict not with the forces of the state but with several of the armed political factions. This has a deterrent effect on young people. 'Unlike in Egypt, where it was possible to identify a comparatively clear opponent in the form of the president and the apparatus of state, here we are dealing with threats from many different sides,' says Shafiq, in an attempt to explain the situation in Afghanistan. So the overwhelming feeling among the younger generation is that they are condemned to a sort of dubious trek through Afghan state institutions until they arrive at an influential position. If, that is, they see their future as being in Afghanistan at all.

AFGHANISTAN AS A RE-EDUCATION CAMP? • This is certainly a gloomy perspective. Not least because we have now reached a point where the Afghan government is quite shameless about eroding aspects of the newly-created institutions from the inside. The international players are often hesitant in registering any kind of protest. Thus at the beginning of the year President Karzai did not extend the mandates of three leading representatives of the independent Afghan Human Rights Commission, which in effect was the same as firing them. The main reason for this was a classified study that lists the names and alleged crimes of leading warriors such as former warlords, including some who currently hold office in the Karzai government. They are pressurising the president not to publish its conclusions. To date, Western governments have barely commented on the incident, which says a lot about the political rules of the game in Afghanistan. Yet it is common knowledge that since the end of 2001 the donor countries, above all the United States, have been co-operating in the fight against the Taliban with the same warlords now targeted in the controversial study.

Against this backdrop the inaction and the perceived fear of the young generation is understandable; it might even be seen as *realpolitik*. Looking beyond youth protests, many people in Afghanistan consider their own government and the ruling class of *nouveaux riches* to lack political legitimacy. Two massively rigged elections and the enrichment of an elite that has no scruples about using money and bribes to buy power and political office are among the reasons why the term 'democracy' has clearly suffered since 2001 in the eyes of ordinary people as well as intellectuals and those who believe in progress.

Another issue is the rapid speed with which tens of thousands of international advisers, civilian experts and military personnel spread out across the land. Overnight, Afghanistan became one big re-education camp. This was too great a strain, both socially and culturally, as Naser observes. 'Too fast, your democracy,' comments the thirty-five-year-old development aid worker from Herat. 'Large parts of our society were not prepared for it.'

Shafiq, the man who has been with the BBC for years, finds that the relative media freedom in the country is, nonetheless, the fulfilment of his personal dream. But he too sees Afghan culture as an area in which the limitations of the conflict of the last few years have become apparent: 'The cans of beer that you used to get in Kabul in the first few years for three US dollars; the Asian brothels that appeared on the scene and which were followed by prostitution on the Afghan side; the invasion of the Indian entertainment industry' – all this, he says, has compromised the name of democracy.

Shafiq won one of the coveted scholarships to study in the United States, and anti-modernisers are his *bêtes noires*; yet his words sound like the kind of thing an anti-moderniser would say. However, the *hubris* of the West seems to have created a double reflection. Some people it has inflamed against it, whilst at the same time strengthening the scepticism of others who are in principle well-disposed towards it.

Now, against the backdrop of the noble motto for 2014, 'Transfer of Responsibility', politicians have started stating that the goal of establishing a democracy in Afghanistan is unattainable. How then, one would like to ask, should the poorly coordinated attempts of the past ten years be categorised? And why did these efforts seem to lack direction from the start? The Afghans, at any rate, deserve better than 'democracy light'.

For a moment Shafiq grows melancholy at the thought of it all, as if it were possible to turn back the hands of time. '9/11 was wrong, the US intervention was wrong, and the premature peace talks that are taking place now are wrong too.' During our conversation two words stand out: 'monsters' and 'beasts'. Both, he groans, are constantly plaguing Afghanistan. 'There has to be modernisation, whether it comes from the Moon, from Mars, from Germany, from Europe or from somewhere else. But it has to proceed more cautiously and with less haste.'

DUBIOUS AID PROJECTS • Anyone who wants to understand why democracy is not a surefire success in Afghanistan, as some people assumed at the beginning of 2002 that it would be, and why the Taliban has been enjoying relative popularity since 2005, will find an explanation in the failure of the Afghan state and its representatives.

'They do whatever they want. They loot and steal from us, and they think only of themselves,' says a tribal leader from Paktia province, talking about state officials and travellers from the capital. 'They wear jeans and drink alcohol "in the name of democracy". But our culture and traditions

do not allow this.' This sort of criticism is not just an expression of the city-countryside divide, which according to my observations is widening with all the billions that are being poured into Afghanistan. Scientific studies are now also questioning the fundamental assumptions of Western development aid with regard to sustainability and democracy. A recent US study asks whether well-intentioned aid projects can in fact trigger a mobilisation against the Afghan government. The study concludes that they can. The reasons it gives are as follows: lack of fair distribution of goods, insufficient information about the actual needs of the people in the project location; attempts to manipulate foreign aid organisations, as well as the prejudices of the international agents themselves towards the country and its people.

All this in turn influences the democratic process. Furthermore, aid projects exacerbate the political situation in places where insurgents have secured themselves a share in them. Numerous media reports in recent years suggest that in areas where the Taliban or insurgents lay claim to power, they are siphoning off taxes and duties amounting to between 20% and 40% of the aid budget. Without such secret agreements, aid or supplies for NATO facilities would often simply not get through.

THE ROLE OF THE *ULAMA* • We can tell from the public use of the words that *the process* – the rather coy term favoured by researchers and diplomats – is on the defensive. For a long time now Afghan aid workers have refrained from naïvely using terms like *civil society* or *democracy* when going about their work. They are afraid that doing so could invite trouble. Some of the aid workers define 'civil society' as an imported Western concept.

Until now, Naser's aid organisation in Herat has been led by a German. In two years' time, he is to be replaced by an Afghan. He points out an ongoing fundamental difficulty that they encounter in their daily work. 'When we do vocational training outside the city it is frequently the case that the tribal elders react with mistrust. Or they refer to the clergy. Many of the mullahs continue to propagate the kind of thinking that says the devil enters the room when an Afghan woman and a strange man come together to work in the same room.'

In mentioning this he is highlighting the influence of the Afghan clergy. For anyone who wishes to understand the social context that goes with the process of democratisation, this is key. The upgrading of the status of the Afghan clergy over the past thirty years could indeed be one of the 'beasts' referred to earlier.

'Along with the political leaders, they are our real problem. Sometimes the political leaders and the clergy are even one and the same,' says Enayat, a journalist from Mazar-e-Sharif who works for both national and international media. 'Those who are part of the *ulama* treat Islam as their own property, as if they had unlimited authority to determine matters. The lower the level of education of the people, the more the clergy take this for granted.'

On the one hand, Mazar, where Enayat is from, is said to have a liberal atmosphere. On the other, it was here that the case of the journalist Perwiz Kambakhsh, who was sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy, originated. The story was covered by media all over the world. The death sentence was later commuted under pressure from abroad. But Enayat is still afraid: 'When I'm taking part in a public debate and I translate passages from the Koran into the local language, Dari, and add my own personal comments in certain places, I have to pay close attention. If the debate gets heated, I could be risking my neck,' he says bluntly.

The atmosphere of 1980s and '90s is still prevalent here. Up to the 1970s the mullahs and *talebs* were the butt of jokes and had little relevance within society, but in the years that followed their power quickly grew. 'Islam was a side issue in the 1960s and '70s in the context of Afghanistan as is was then,' remembers the translator and philosopher Masoud Rahel. 'Back then we had no inhibitions about making jokes in public about religion and the clergy; we didn't have to fear reprisals, or being seen as the enemy. *Taleb* was what we used to call a mullah's young assistant back then: a boy who was a kind of acolyte and went from door to door seeking alms.'

Then the Soviet occupation brought parties and movements with Islamic leanings into the equation, groups that in their Pakistani exile primarily organised religious education on a grand scale. To this day the numerous *madrassas* in the border region are an expression of this fundamentalisation. Soviet sources at the time estimated the number of clerics in the population – from educated *ulama* doctors of Islamic law to uneducated village preachers – at around 300,000 – a number that has probably risen further still as a result of the wars. Under the Taliban almost all the important positions in government were held by mullahs: they were the ministers, representatives, governors and vice-governors. The judiciary was also in the hands of the clergy.

These structures have not simply been swept away since the US intervention. Nonetheless, the advent of modern mass media, above all television, since 2001 has resulted in many Afghans taking a critical view of the clericalisation of their society. So the country is experiencing, for the third time in just a few decades, an escalating struggle between modernisers and conservatives, the first of whom explicitly want help and influence from abroad; but at the same time, their warnings and advice often go unheeded.

The forthcoming talks between the United States and the Taliban signify the start of a new chapter. It is unclear what place democracy will have in this, or how it will be negotiated, and this is a cause for concern in spite of hopes for a negotiated peace. Women in particular, as well as those living in the cities, are afraid of losing the freedoms they have gained in recent years.

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Translated by Charlotte Collins

A great deal has been written about and a great deal of thought devoted to the issue of democracy in the Arab world over the last few decades, and in the course of those decades opinions have changed considerably. This article examines the discourse about democracy and human rights in Iran – from both a historical and a contemporary perspective.

Katajun Amirpur

IRANIAN ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

THE HISTORY OF AN APPROPRIATION

'Can Islam Do Democracy?' This was the theme repeatedly expressed in headlines in the German media at the height of the events in Egypt in January/February 2011. But the call for democracy and freedom has now been taken up in other countries of the Arab world, giving the impression that there is little doubt here that, to employ this dubious formulation once again, 'Islam can do democracy'.

This article examines the discourse about democracy and human rights in Iran – from both a historical and a contemporary perspective. It will describe how democracy was viewed by several renowned intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s – namely, in a negative light. And it will demonstrate how at the beginning of the 1990s it then came about that a few outstanding thinkers did turn towards democracy. This reorientation was a consequence of the existing Islamism, which had had a deterrent effect. Democratic post-Islamism, however, as it will be referred to here, needed to be well founded in argument. In a country in which democracy and human rights were deemed to be un-Islamic – according to Ayatollah Khomeini's dictum – an explanation had to be given as to why they are in fact Islamic, or at least do not contradict Islam.

Sabah Naim (Egypt): From the series *Street Studio*, 2008. From the book *Arab Photography Now*, Berlin 2011 © Rose Issa Projects/Kehrer-Verlag

DEMOCRACY AND VIOLENCE • One notable event was crucial to the discourse that took place in the 1960s and '70s. This event determined the way in which people thought about the West, which claimed to stand for democracy. This event was the overthrow of the Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadegh. The US secret service toppled Mossadegh because he had nationalised Iranian oilfields, and it returned the dictator Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who had already fled the country, to the Peacock Throne. From this point on, with American assistance, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi extended his dictatorial rule. Since then, the democratic West has been considered by many Iranian intellectuals to be discredited.

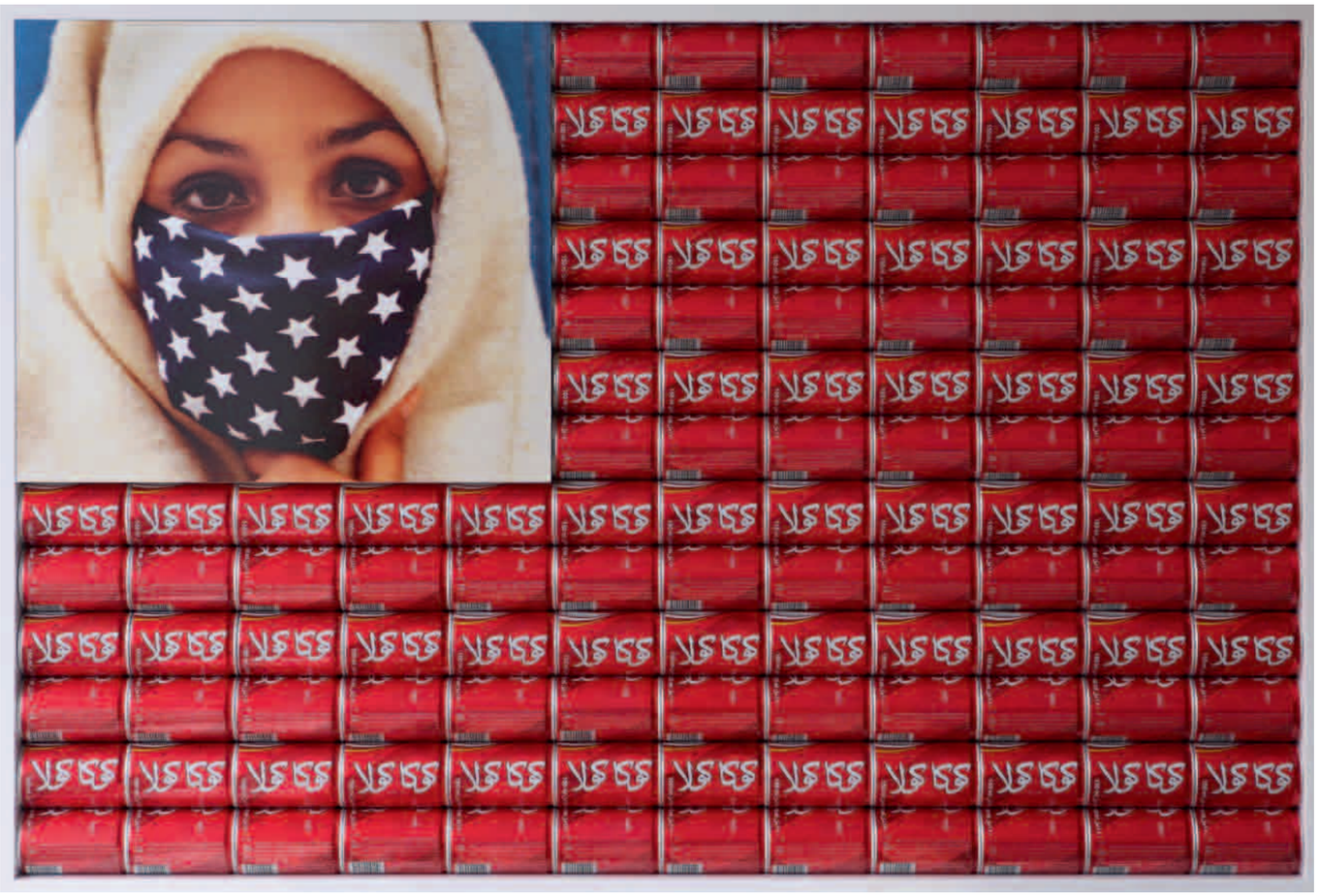
Mohammad Hosein Tabataba'i (1903-1981), known as Allameh, the Great Scholar, wrote about democracy under the impression of this event. He was regarded in Iran as the Great Scholar because he was the author of the most important Shiite Koranic commentary of the twentieth century, the *Tafsir al-Mizan*. Tabataba'i was also a philosopher and thus represented a discipline that, although little appreciated by the clerical establishment, was appreciated all the more by the younger clergy.

In 1961 Tabataba'i published a text examining the political rule of the clergy. Up until then the prevailing belief had been that until the return of the twelfth Imam all political rule was illegitimate. The clerics were therefore not permitted to rule, but had to practise waiting patiently. Hosein Boroujerdi, the most important religious authority of his time, had decreed in the 1950s that a secular authority should be recognised. Borourjerdi saw the monarchy as promising greater continuity and respect for the Islamic laws than a republican system, and had forbidden any alternative opinion on the subject. The majority of clerics, including Ayatollah Khomeini, had followed him unquestioningly in this attitude, but now, in 1961, his death had recently prompted fresh questions as to who was the legitimate ruler in a Shiite state.

What Tabataba'i formulated as an answer to the question of the legitimate ruler must be seen against the background of a monarchy that called itself constitutional and claimed to be democratic: it had a prime minister, elections, and a parliament. Tabataba'i seems to assume, or does at least claim, that this state corresponds to what the West calls a democracy.

This is probably because of the support the Shah was receiving from the West. So because the Iranian system claims to be a democracy and yet is nonetheless tyrannical, Tabataba'i turns away from democracy altogether. He writes:

> *It is more than half a century since we accepted the rule and the precepts of democracy and took our place in the line-up of progressive Western countries. Yet we see how our situation deteriorates day by day and gets worse. And from this tree, which for others is full of blessings and fruits, we pluck only the fruits of adversity and disgrace.*



Hassan Hajjaj (Morocco/UK): *M.U.S.A.*, 2010.
From the book *Arab Photography Now*, Berlin 2011
© Rose Issa Projects/Kehrer-Verlag

Tabataba'i does not actually directly demand political rule by scholars of law instead of the political leadership, and only explains that he regards democracy as discredited as a form of governance. But on the other hand he does say clearly that the people need a kind of uncle who will act as a guardian to the orphans. The guardian must be a legal scholar, because only a legal scholar will be just. He should be assigned a *velayat*, an authorisation to lead the people, because this is a law of Islam.

RECEPTION OF WESTERN CULTURAL CRITIQUE • In the 1960s the fundamental question of whether to try to emulate the West, and thus also its system of government, or whether it was better to reflect on one's own heritage was not restricted to the clergy. For secular intellectuals, too, the most important topic was the confrontation with the West, with its ideas, its culture, and its impact on Iran. The secular intellectuals of those years were inspired by the West while at the same time also being critical of it. After Hiroshima and Vietnam, Algeria, the Cold War and Soviet expansionism, liberalism and socialism had lost their attraction as ideas and many Iranian thinkers agreed with the criticism being formulated in the West by intellectuals such as Albert Camus, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Jean-Paul Sartre.

This was true in particular of Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969), who translated several of these authors into Persian. In 1962 Al-e Ahmad published the essay *Gharbzadegi*, 'The Obsessed-With-The-West', or more literally 'The-Being-Smitten-By-The-West'. In this he wrote:

> *I say* gharbzadegi, *the state of being-stricken-with-the-West, like being stricken with cholera* (vaba zadegi). *Or if you don't like that term: like sunstroke* (garma zadegi), *or like a chilblain* (sarma zadegi). *Or – no. It is at least like being bug-ridden* (senzadegi). *Have you seen how they blight corn? From the inside. The corn stands there with its husk intact, but it is nothing but a husk. Like the husk of a butterfly that remains on the tree. In any case, what we are talking about here is a sickness.*

It is generally accepted in the field of Iranian studies that if there has been one single truly influential text in the history of modern Iran, it is this. *Gharbzadegi* is the 'sacred text' for several generations of Iranians. This essay provided the vocabulary of Iranian social criticism and formulated the essence of the anti-Western nature of the discourse for more than two decades. Al-e Ahmad's theses were defining ones for all intellectuals, and on the eve of the Revolution there was probably no one who would have questioned Al-e Ahmad's analysis of Iranian society.

Al-e Ahmad claimed that Iran's sickness consisted of the unthinking adoption of Western conduct and ideas. This was not in itself a direct attack on democracy, but Al-e Ahmad rediscovered Islam as the sole authentic component of Iranian culture. Al-e Ahmad explained to an astonished, secular public the potential might and power of the religion and declared the clergy to be the most significant part of the authentic identity: the clergy were the only ones who evaded the negative influence of the West, and it was Islam that had prevented the West from christianising, colonising and exploiting Iran. Al-e Ahmad, the most important secular intellectual of the 1960s, took Islam as his subject – and in doing so prepared the way for the greatest and most influential critic of democracy of the 1970s.

PROGRESS THROUGH REVOLUTION • It is scarcely possible to overestimate the influence of Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977) on the generation that would later make a revolution to shake off the impact of the West. One of his most influential texts, and the aforementioned essay by Tabataba'i, together with the now famous lecture by Ayatollah Khomeini about Islamic government, all have exactly the same argumentative thrust: they all criticise the West in general, and are therefore against democracy and for an Islamic government instead. Let us not concern ourselves here with how naïvely and uncritically the three authors view the government they describe as Islamic, or how flawed their definition of Western democracy is. The point here is to record that the West, and with it the idea of democracy, was so ferociously attacked by these three thinkers, and the wise leader praised so highly in comparison, that it became almost inevitable that an entire generation of students would turn to Islamism. They were all intellectually socialised by these thinkers, and when Ali Shari'ati wrote that the West claimed democracy was the form of government that most respected human rights, yet it only wanted human rights for itself, hundreds of thousands followed his lead. Shari'ati wrote:

> *The governments we have to thank for colonialism, which brought with it the mass murder of peoples, the destruction of the cultures, treasures, histories and civilisations of non-Europeans, were democratically elected governments that believed in liberalism. These crimes were not committed by priests, inquisitors and Caesars, but in the name of democracy and Western liberalism.*

But for Shari'ati it is not only the conduct of the democrats that speaks against democracy. Another question he asked was whether democracy was always in the interest of the masses, in every place, in every society, and at every time. Shari'ati's objections were directed above all towards democracy as a form of government for Iran. He claimed that it was not possible to achieve through democracy what he considered to be most important: progress. Shari'ati wanted revolutionary change, but he considered it inconceivable that the Iranian people would elect the government that would bring this about, namely, according to Shari'ati, an imamic leadership. Shari'ati even considered their totalitarian policies to be justifiable, as otherwise they would have no chance of overwhelming the encampment of the existing entrenched forces.

The next thinker who contributed to a one-man leadership prevailing over democracy after the 1978/9 revolution was of course Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989). In the 1960s Khomeini's criticism of the Shah's government was initially directed at the increasing control by the state, above all in the administration of justice; at secularisation in general, and the accompanying weakening of the Islamic institutions; at state repression, and the influence of the United States on politics.

Sent into exile in Najaf as a result of this criticism, in the winter of 1971 Khomeini gave a series of lectures that were transcribed and published under the title *Hokumat-e islami*: 'The Islamic Government'. They contain Khomeini's fundamental thoughts about the instructions of Islam, on the Islamic state, and on the need to create such a state – his aim. Long sections of the lecture, however, read like an anti-imperialist polemic: he declares that the only true Iranian identity is the Islamic one, which is why only a return to Islam can save the country from ruin.

This was why Khomeini also attacked clerics who steered clear of politics. According to Khomeini the Islam being taught in the theological universities was a false one, because it was apolitical. The clerics, he said, had adopted a colonialist attitude, and now they too believed what the exploiters, oppressors and colonialists wanted them to: that Islam, the state, and politics should all be kept separate. Khomeini, on the other hand, claimed that for hundreds of years the consensus among the clergy had been that the duty of a cleric was to assume the responsibilities of the Prophet and of the imams. This he justified as follows:

> *Firstly: It is historically proven that the Prophet established a state. […]*
>
> *Secondly: At God's command he designated a ruler for the time after his passing. If God, the Sublime, designates a ruler to rule over society after the time of the Prophet, this means that the state is also necessary after the passing of the Prophet. And as the Prophet communicates the commandment of God in his testament, in so doing he declares to us the necessity of establishing a state.*

Another of Khomeini's arguments is the fact that God has revealed a law, for example penal law. This must therefore also be applied. In saying this, however, Khomeini deliberately disregards the fact that most people believe that enforcement of the penal law is one of the prerogatives of the hidden twelfth Imam, and therefore, according to the traditional Shiite view, suspended during the great period of concealment. Khomeini makes his postulations with a degree of certitude that admits no contradiction.

> *No man can say that it is no longer necessary […] to pay or to collect taxes, poll tax,* khums[1] *and the alms tax, or that penal law, blood money and retributive justice should be suspended.*

However, what was more important than this contentious line of argument was that Khomeini was a perfect candidate for the role Shari'ati had described. Everyone in the 1970s who heard and read Shari'ati's declarations about the imamic leadership thought of Khomeini – the inflammatory cleric who fulminated about the Shah from his exile in Iraq. Shari'ati brought Khomeini a tremendous number of followers, perhaps more than Khomeini himself won with his own book on the Islamic state, which hardly anyone had read, hardly anyone understood, and no one took seriously. Shari'ati, on the other hand, was considered cosmopolitan because he studied in Paris for his doctorate in sociology. He was a stirring speaker, a charismatic man, well-read and good-looking. When he spoke in the Tehran meeting-place *Hosseini-ye ershad* in the 1970s thousands hung on his every word.

Yet Shari'ati by no means favoured *velayat-e faqih*, or a legal scholar as leader, as Khomeini had described. Shari'ati does not take up the idea; it is impossible to tell whether he was even aware of Khomeini's lecture. Furthermore, Shari'ati certainly did not have a cleric in mind as his prototypical leader, because he was very critical of the clergy. In spite of this the fact remains: it was impossible to translate the concept of democracy into the Iranian context, either practically or theoretically. What was more successful in the 1970s in pre-revolutionary Iran was the idea that challenged that of democracy: the idea of a philosopher's state, if you will. The result was the establishment in 1979 of the system of so-called *velayat-e faqih*, the rule of the Supreme Legal Scholar.

IRAN TODAY • Since the Revolution of 1978-9 Iran has called itself the 'Islamic Republic of Iran'. Certainly the Iranian system, unique in terms of state structure, does have republican elements, even if these are consistently replaced by theocratic ones. In the run-up to the referendum on the future governmental reform, Khomeini had explicitly objected to the term 'Democratic Islamic Republic'. He had declared that the nation wanted an Islamic republic, not just a

[1] *khums*: a form of income tax constituting one-fifth of the value of certain items

republic, not a democratic republic, not an Islamic democratic republic. He said that the term 'democratic' should not be used, because this was a Western concept. The fact that 'republic' is also a Western term was something Khomeini deliberately chose to ignore.

Iran may not have become more democratic since Khomeini announced his rejection of democracy in 1979, but in recent years the dialogue about democracy has completely altered. One example of this is Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari (b. 1936). Shabestari is one of the most important thinkers in Iran today. He too was intellectually socialised by Shari'ati, Tabataba'i and Khomeini, but has over the years emancipated himself from their views. Shabestari has very explicitly presented the case for democracy. He supports democracy for many reasons, as long as it does not contradict the will of the Creator – as Khomeini contended it did. Shabestari's central argument, however, is that democracy puts into practice what Imam 'Ali, the Shiite's first imam, called for the ideal government to do in his governmental mandate.

During his time in office as Caliph, 'Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, made Malik al-Ashtar his governor in Egypt and gave him a governmental mandate to take with him. Western Islamic scholars doubt that this document is in fact authentic, but this is of no significance as far as its effectiveness is concerned, because regardless of its authenticity or otherwise the governmental mandate occupies a central position in the Shiite philosophy of state. In it, 'Ali explains to his governor how he should rule in order to be certain of securing God's approval. This governmental mandate thus establishes the norm for good governance in Shia Islam.

Because the governmental mandate is regarded as normative by most Shiites, Shabestari's argument plays on a very familiar keyboard. The content of the governmental mandate bears out Shabestari's claim that government must be one thing above all: just. Detailed or concrete instructions with regard to content, like the necessity claimed by Khomeini of applying the penal laws mentioned in the Koran, are not, however, to be found in this document. This too is emphasised by Shabestari, and it is indeed significant insofar as 'Ali is regarded by the Shiites as the most important interpreter of the Koran. If 'Ali, the Shiites' First Imam, does not instruct his governor to apply the *ius talionis or the hadd* punishments, for example, his understanding of the Koran was obviously not that this had to be done. Instead, 'Ali writes to his governor:

> *O Malik, be just in your dealings with God and with the people. Whosoever oppresses the servants of God makes an enemy of God and also of those he oppresses. The worst thing that can happen to a people, which irrevocably calls forth the wrath of God and his vengeance, are oppression and tyranny over God's creatures. May the ruler guard against these things, for the merciful God hears the cries of the oppressed.*

From an empirical point of view, Shabestari says, democracy is the form of governance that is most effective in preventing oppression and tyranny, the most essential of the criteria for good governance as set down by Imam 'Ali. What is decisive for Shabestari – and in this, incidentally, he is very much in the tradition of the constitutionalist movement of 1906 to 1911 – is that democracy is a form of government that prevents tyranny – and creates justice.

Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1945), probably the most important intellectual in Iran, holds a similar view. At the beginning of the 1990s Soroush, who can look back on a similar experience of socialisation to that experienced by Shabestari, turned his back on Islamism and began to propagate the idea of a so-called *hokumat-e demukratik-e dini*, a religious-democratic government. In his opinion, a government can be both religious and democratic, because any religious precepts that contradict democracy can be subjected to fresh interpretation. Soroush advocated this thesis in numerous writings and supported his argument with the theory of the so-called 'Theoretical Narrowing and Broadening of the Sharia'. The religious democracy Soroush envisions is no different in this from an ordinary Western democracy, and its acceptance of human rights is not conditional but absolute. This is already remarkable insofar as Ayatollah Khomeini described human rights as a collection of corrupt norms that had been dreamed up by the Zionists to destroy all true religions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was criticised for this reason, not only by Iran but also by Sudan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, for its failure to take into account the cultural and religious aspect of non-Western countries. There were vociferous complaints that it was a secular interpretation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition which Muslims could not abide by without breaking Islamic law.

RELIGION AS THE CONSCIENCE OF SOCIETY • Soroush, however, argues that there are also, in principle, extra- or meta-religious values and laws. These, he says, do not originate in religion, but do not contradict it either. He states that, in principle, no sensible commandment or law can contradict religion – certainly not Shia Islam, which is especially orientated towards reason. To give an example of what Soroush means by this: whereas Sunnis say that lying is bad because the religion says so, the Shiites say – in the tradition of the Mutazilites, the great rationalists of Islam – that because lying is bad, the religion also states this to be the case. For precisely this reason, Soroush concludes, Shiites must accept human rights, because one thing they patently are is reasonable.

In saying this, Soroush is also calling into question Khomeini's claim that Islamic law has to be applied. Unlike Khomeini, for him it is more important that the soul of government should be religious. His argument is: it is not the society in which Islamic law is applied that is religious, but the society in which people profess the faith of their own free will. One does not create a 'religious society' through the application of the *shari'a*, only one that 'lives according

to Islamic law'. What is more important to Soroush than the application of Islamic law is that religious actions should be piously motivated. This piety is not, however, something that can be enforced.

> *Hypocrisy and dissimulation are the greater sins, not the enjoyment of alcohol and gambling. But in the government of Islamic law more importance is accorded to the external action and not to the acquisition of the heart.*

Soroush's ideal is a religious state that is governed by faith, but not as a legislative or political authority; rather, as the spirit and conscience of the society. Their aim is piety, but this can only be achieved through freedom. Freedom, in Soroush's utopian idea of an Islamic state, is a necessary, godly precondition for freely chosen religiosity and thus an argument for the superiority of the democratic order. There is therefore no formal difference between Soroush's religious-democratic government and a normal democratic government. Soroush writes:

> *Indeed, one must not expect a religious government to differ in essence from a non-religious one. After all, it is not the case that the sensible people in this world walk on two legs and the religious on their heads. What is wrong with it if people of other societies have accepted the same methods regarding the question of government as those we have come across through our definition of a religious government?*

Here the traditional norm is translated into a modern principle or modern norm. The ethnologist Sally Engle Merry has called this 'vernacularisation', or 'framing'. This form of translation seems to be very helpful and cannot be rejected as apologetic: the framing of democracy as a key Islamic concept of justice mobilises society to strive towards this social and political goal. Framing is also necessary for another reason. Only when a culture truly appropriates ideas such as democracy and makes them its own – the philosopher Seyla Benhabib has called this process 'iteration' – does the suspicion of Western paternalism fade away.

The degree to which the attitude towards democracy has changed is apparent not only in the positions of progressive thinkers like Shabestari and Soroush, who are referred to in Iran as *nouandishan-e eslami* (literally, 'Islamic newthinkers'). It is also apparent in the reaction of the non-democrats. The current president of parliament, Ali Larijani (b. 1958), for example, refers to the dictum of Abraham Lincoln that democracy is the government of the people by the people for the people. In this sense, he says, the Iranian system, the *velayat-e faqih*, is also a democracy; after all, the *velayat-e faqih* is also 'for the people'. The other two components, he argues, are less important and can be ignored. The revolutionary leader Khamene'i (b. 1939) argues in the same way.

DEMOCRACY AS A BENCHMARK • The nonsensical nature of this remark is not what is key here. Far more important is the fact that democracy has obviously now become so much the norm, and a general benchmark against which one is prepared to be measured, that both these men would rather declare their own system a democracy than reject democracy outright as Khomeini did with absolute confidence several decades ago. Naturally their definition of democracy leaves something to be desired, but nonetheless it does offer the theoreticians of democracy Soroush and Sabestari alternative starting points if even undemocratic rulers start to engage with the concept of democracy.

What is significant, though, is that theoreticians like Soroush and Sabestari have given democracy an argumentative foundation, an inner-Islamic framing. Whether it is indeed thanks to them that the Iranian people today seem more ready than ever to accept democracy (this is the impression one gets from observing the events of recent years) is another question. But it certainly can't hurt to have an Islamic rationale to justify democracy.

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Translated by Charlotte Collins

View from the Galata-Tower onto the Galata-Bridge over the Golden Horn, Istanbul. Photo: Stefan Weidner

Since the Arab revolutions of 2011, if not before, Turkey has generally been seen as a possible positive model for the Arab states, both in economic terms and with regard to the democratic development of Islamic parties. But how good a model is Turkey really?

Zafer Şenocak

A MODEL FOR THE ARAB WORLD?

WHAT TURKEY IS DOING DIFFERENTLY

A great deal has been said and written lately about whether Turkey can be a model for the democratisation of the states in the Middle East. There have been two fundamental changes in Turkey that make this question a legitimate one. Firstly, since 2002 Turkey has been governed by a party that regards itself as conservative Muslim and has its roots in the political Islam of the last century, with a conspicuous proximity to the genesis of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the AKP – the Justice and Development Party – can also demonstrate a successful track record that is unique in the Muslim world. Within ten years it has succeeded in transforming an ailing economy into a flourishing one, with tangible consequences for the average person's standard of living. The country is in the grip of a wave of modernisation that is affecting every area of life. On cultural issues, however, the AKP's Muslim roots are still apparent. It caters to the conservative values of society with moderate measures embedded in democratic decision-making mechanisms. Thus, for example, the drinking of alcohol has not been banned, but it has been curtailed through high taxes and serving restrictions.

SUSPICION OF ISLAMIFICATION • Ever since it came to power, the AKP has been suspected of pursuing the Islamification of Turkish society. At the same time, however, it has managed to gather the liberal forces in the country behind it, those forces that envisage above all the democratisation of the country, the disempowerment of the military apparatus, and entry into the European Union. A coalition between liberal democrats and democratic Muslims is the key to the success of the AKP. Is it possible to imagine something similar happening in Arab societies?

Far too often a democracy is judged on the aspect of regular free and secret elections. But democracy is not only manifested at the ballot box. It needs a framework, established through laws, legal security, and the rule of law. This framework has a philosophical foundation that goes back to the values of the Enlightenment. Without the Enlightenment, which guarantees human rights and ensures freedom of expression and freedom of religion, there can be no democracy according the Western, and thus also according to the Turkish model.

For Muslims in Turkey, who have been organised in political parties since the end of the 1960s and who have been searching for many years to try and find an Islamic democratic tradition, have now abandoned this in favour of a

Western-style democratic model. They have not done so because they have lost their faith, or because they no longer wish to aspire to an Islamic society. They have done it because they have gone through a process, of both thought and experience, in which it has become clear to them that without a secular foundation, *i.e.* the separation of matters of religion and matters of politics and public life, it is not possible to establish a democratic society.

This was a bitter pill to swallow, because every Muslim believes in the Koran as the guiding principle when it comes to how to live their life. But the Koran is no longer the guiding principle when laws are passed or abolished in Turkey. This initially sounds like a contradiction. Yet what happens when Muslims allow themselves to be guided by the Koran in their actions and behaviour, but do not speak publicly about this personal guidance, do not turn it into a matter of policy, but rather into a canon of values that determines their policy? This is precisely what many AKP politicians are doing, in particular their chairman, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. However, by no means all members of the AKP draw their inspiration from Koranic principles. For these principles – Turkish society has long since agreed on this – are only valid when they do not infringe on universal human rights, on human dignity, on the equality of men and women, on the freedom of religion, in short on that canon of values that was born of the Enlightenment and constitutes the foundation of all Western democracies.

IDEOLOGICAL FATIGUE • This Turkish way of mediating between the Muslim tradition of thought and belief and the values of a secular society is the result of a process of enlightenment that has been going on for more than a century, and which was and is handed down to the people primarily through a progressive ideological education policy. The vast majority of Muslims in Turkey are secularised Muslims, for whom the Kemalist form of state laicism imposed from above has gone too far. Turkey is a country suffering from ideological fatigue. This is why there is no longer a majority in favour of replacing an ideology such as laicism with another, religious ideology. Amending a rigid laicism that would like to ban every sign of religiosity from public life in favour of a democratic society built on individual faith, in which there can no longer be any major conflicts between the Koran and the constitution because the universal principles of human rights are what bind them together, defuses the cultural struggle between tradition and modernity, between the Muslim world and the West.

This is the Turkish way, and it has been anything but easy. Although the country has formally had a multi-party system for sixty years and holds free elections, until just a few years ago Turkey was only a semi-democracy. This was ensured by a rigid justice system that had ideologically committed itself to laicisim and secured Turkey's position as an outpost of NATO. What emerged was thus not a constitutional state but a state that perverted justice, whose main aim was to suppress unwelcome opinions. It was not Islam that swept this system away, but Turkey's closer ties with the European Union, *i.e.* with a justice system that today unites all democratic societies. However, it is the Muslims in Turkey who must be thanked for paving the way – a path that does not lead back to the Golden Age of the Prophet but to the United Nations Charter of Fundamental Rights, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to the salons of the Enlightenment and to freely-elected democratic parliaments.

Turkey's success story undoubtedly put pressure on the neighbouring Arab regimes. In addition there was also a fundamental about-turn in Turkish foreign policy, which now no longer looked only to the West. Corrupt regimes that cannot even ensure the livelihood of their subjects are nothing more than slaveholders. And no people will allow itself to be enslaved in perpetuity.

Half a century ago, Egypt and Turkey were at about the same level of development. Their *per capita* incomes were almost identical, as was the size of their populations. Today, however, the comparison, for Egypt, is devastating. According to IMF figures, in 2010 Turkey's *per capita* income was US $9890, while in Egypt it was US $2771. These days the two countries are worlds apart; the only area where they are still on the same level is size of population. Yet this distinct disparity has for the most part come about in the last ten years. This can only cause resentment in Egypt and throw up many questions for the authorities. But is the discontent that led to the Arab rebellions sufficient to set in motion a philosophical discussion that will shake the self-image of Muslim societies to its very foundations? Can the Turkish process of reform simply be adopted? Is this actually desirable? What forces and people involved in the democracy movement use Turkey as a point of reference?

THE MAGIC WORDS: 'GOOD GOVERNANCE' • When, in Cairo recently, the Turkish prime minister praised as a blessing the separation of state and faith, the path to a secular society, the response was for the most part a mixture of astonishment and rejection of his remarks. But with Erdoğan you don't just get the brave campaigner for political justice, the spokesman against Israeli policy, the man in the region who defies the West. The popular politician Erdoğan is only available as a total package. That means bidding farewell to the slogans of Islamism, to simple answers like 'the Koran is the solution to every problem'. It means orientating oneself much more towards a complex world with many challenges that awaite rational and practical solutions. This requires the ideological cloak of reli-

Istanbul: Turkish president Erdoğan promising better health care as part of his campaign during the Turkish parliamentary elections of 2011. Photo: Stefan Weidner

gion to be cast aside. And yet Turkish politicians are not travelling around the world enlightening people. Their priority is to open up new trade routes and win new trading partners. That too is the result of the secular democratisation of a society. A politician is not judged by how often he prays but by how he manages the economy. 'Good governance' is the magic word, which is equally capable of assimilating Islamic principles such as fair and transparent rule and the maxims of a free but also social market economy.

At the same time, civil society with a Muslim character is considerably more conservative than that in contemporary Western societies. Families in Turkey, for example, are still organised differently to those in the majority of European countries. Almost 93% of the population live in a family environment. In the majority of cases, there is close contact across three generations. But this conservative stance in daily life is simply a proposition with regard to an individual's way of life, not one that is decreed for the entire society, and certainly not one that is forced on people by laws and binding rules. Tradition as a voluntary agreement can be incorporated in modern daily life like a piece of a jigsaw. But tradition as a sacred inheritance, if elevated above the everyday, usually shatters on the realities of the modern, globalised world. It leaves behind split personalities who plunge into a hopeless cultural struggle.

It is scarcely possible to implement liberalisation and democratisation in Islamic countries without intensive intellectual accompaniment. From today's point of view, Arab states, with the possible exception of Tunisia, seem to be very far from going down the same path of mediation followed by Turkey. In Tunisia the Islamic Ennahda Party has openly committed itself to the same path as the AKP in Turkey. In the first free elections it came out on top and looked for allies in the secular camp. Elsewhere, however, far too many people still have their heads full of the *sharia*, which they understand to be the transposition of Koranic legal principles into the world of today, with no exceptions. This is a strange distortion of history that can hardly be expected to be successful. Previously, numerous reforms were implemented in the Ottoman Empire of the sixteenth century and secular laws passed, which is why Sultan Suleiman (1494-1566) is known not only as 'The Magnificent' but also as 'Kanuni', the Lawgiver. Egypt too, in its recent history in the second half of the nineteenth century, has had numerous experiences of reform and has also produced important religious reformers such as Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Already at that time the focus was on re-examining the Muslim sources and interpreting them afresh for the present day. It was about overcoming the systematic imitation of archaic theological positions that had led to a paralysis of thought in the Islamic world. But all these past experiences today lie buried beneath the rubble of years of despotism and corrupt rule, which have made no philosophical efforts whatsoever to explain the world anew. Any such efforts were nipped in the bud. Despotism thrives on intellectual paralysis.

COMPLEX CHALLENGES • So the question of whether Turkey can today serve as a model in the construction of Arab democracies depends above all on how the reasons for the success of the Turkish way are comprehended, in all their diversity and complexity. The outward appearance of the Turkish success, its economic success, could prove deceptive if the Muslim identity of those in government in Turkey is seen as the sole reason for this success. But the internal attitude, along the lines of 'we are all Muslims and that unites us', is essentially a distraction from the real challenge, namely: how a Muslim society can get to grips with the present in a globalised world by adopting a democratic system.

In this the youth in the Arab countries will play a key role. During my visit to Egypt as a guest at the 2006 Cairo Book Fair one could already observe a productive unrest among the young people. At all the events the hunger for debate was perceptible – and so was the desire for a change in the political conditions. The questions came thick and fast. Back then they were already curious about the situation in Turkey, especially about the changes that had taken place in so short a time. Perhaps these young people's desire for reform can sweep away the outmoded prescriptions and clear the way for free, open societies in which the people are better able to develop, feed and educate themselves. For young people are in the majority both in the Arab countries and in Turkey. And they are the masters of modern methods of communication, which are very difficult to control. They are capable of whipping up a dynamic energy that we on the old continent of Europe cannot even begin to imagine.

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Translated by Charlotte Collins

Luthfi Assyaukanie

INDONESIA AS A MODEL OF MUSLIM DEMOCRACY

DEVELOPMENTS, PROBLEMS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Buddhist Temple of Borobodur in Java is a witness to the multi-religious past of Indonesia. Photo: Stefan Weidner

In the wake of Islamic resurgence and the growing democratic movements in North Africa and the Middle East, it is relevant to see Indonesia as a model of Muslim democracy. The country has shown a stable democratic government, civil liberties, and tremendous economic growth.

Prior to 1998, Turkey was often considered a model of Muslim democracy. Not only was it the sole majority Muslim country that rigorously applied secular principles, it also tried to maintain a democratic government. Although there were some criticisms of military dominance in Turkish politics, many people at the time still considered Turkey to be the only democratic Muslim country in the world. In the absence of any other democratic government in the Muslim world, the presence of Turkish democracy, however minimal it was, was a relief.

This view began to change when Indonesia moved from an authoritarian regime to democracy in 1998. Eight years later the country was crowned by the US-based think tank, Freedom House, as a free country: the only large majority Muslim country to have attained such a status. Of the countries in North Africa and the Middle East, Israel is the only country to be regarded as free.

Since then, many world leaders have lauded the rise of democracy in Indonesia. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Indonesia a role model of democracy for the Muslim world. She believed that

'Indonesia's own recent history provides an example for a transition to civilian rule and building strong democratic institutions' (*The Jakarta Post*, 2011). Likewise, President Obama pointed out that Indonesia's democracy can be Egypt's model (Ben Smith, 2011). Indeed, Obama has often praised Indonesian democracy as a good example for the world (BBC News, 2010). In the wake of democratic movements spreading through large parts of the Arab world, it is necessary to explore Muslim models of democracy. There are at least four reasons why Indonesia is a good model.

FOUR REASONS • First, Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world to have undergone political transition from authoritarian regime to democracy.

Second, the country has maintained political stability despite the ethnic conflicts and religious riots in the first years of its political transition.

Third, Indonesia has demonstrated stable economic performance. Over the last five years, economic growth in Indonesia has been around 6%. During the global financial crisis in 2009, together with China and India, Indonesia was the only country that could maintain economic growth above 4%.

Fourth, Indonesia is the only Muslim majority country where Islamic political parties have failed to win the general election. In North African and the Middle Eastern countries, democracy always gives Islamic political parties victory. In 1989, Jordan held a parliamentary election in which candidates from the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) dominated the votes. In 1991, Algeria's Islamist party, Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), won the legislative election. In 1995, the Muslim-based Refah Party won the Turkish general election. Most recently, the Egyptian Freedom and Justice Party and the Tunisian Ennahda won the general elections in their respective countries.

Indonesia is an interesting case for anyone wishing to study the interplay between Islam and democracy. In the wake of Islamic resurgence and the growing democratic movements in North Africa and the Middle East, the question of whether Muslim countries are going to be more Islamised or secularised becomes increasingly important.

Let me explain first the historical background of Indonesia's road to democracy.

The current process of democratisation in Indonesia started in 1998, particularly on 21st May, when President Soeharto publicly announced his resignation from his thirty-two-year rule of the country. The announcement was quite surprising as he had just been elected for the seventh time and had committed to ruling the country for another five years. The public pressure from students seemed to be Soeharto's main reason for resignation. Student movements had occupied the parliament for three days and riots a week earlier (14th – 15th May) had brought the capital city to a standstill. Indonesia was on the brink of financial and political collapse. Soeharto's resignation was the right response in a dire situation.

THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY • As in many other countries, political transition is never easy, particularly with a country that has been ruled by an authoritarian-military regime. Soeharto handed his government to Burhanuddin Jusuf Habibie, his deputy, but he was perceived as a part of the same regime. Worsened by economic crisis, Indonesian politics in the first three years of its transition was filled with tension, conflict, and demonstrations.

People felt free to express what they thought. Democracy allowed them to form organisations where they could recruit and mobilise people. Hundreds of organisations and political parties were formed. Groups with various ideological inclinations filled the public sphere, bringing their own paradoxes. Indonesian democracy in its early years was chaotic and people started to speak about the disintegration of the republic and the potential for Balkanisation.

People were dissatisfied with the new government and perceived it as a sequel to the old one. The economic crisis brought the country its most difficult times in three decades. Inflation reached 77%, interest rates jumped to 68%, gross domestic product went down to -13%, and unemployment rose to 24%. From the beginning, Habibie's power was always considered to be short-term.

People wanted a fair general election in which they could choose their own leaders. Various laws regarding the political transition were drafted and enacted. The general election was scheduled for June 1999. It was a parliamentary election in which people voted for legislative members. According to the then constitution, the president was not directly selected by the people but by the legislative members.

The 1999 general election was not only about the selection of a new leader and the hope for a better economic future; Indonesian democracy and the trajectory of the country was also at stake. Soon after the general election was scheduled, hundreds of political parties were formed and registered themselves to the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU).

Islamic political parties were among them. Out of 160 parties that enrolled in the KPU, only 48 parties met the basic conditions and were entitled to join the election. Among these parties, eleven were Islamic parties whose mission was to struggle for the implementation of *sharia* (Islamic law) in the country. All parties were so optimistic that their leaders confidently predicted that they would win the election.

Before the result of the election was announced no one knew what was going to happen with Indonesian democracy. Some people were cautious about the rise of political Islam and the possibility of Islamists winning the election. The agenda of Islamic political parties was quite clear: returning the 'seven words' to the constitution. The seven words are the wording that contains the implementation of sharia for Muslims in Indonesia.

The words were originally in the constitution, but following protests by a Christian delegation, on 18th August 1945, the Preparatory Committee of Independence removed them (Ismail 2004; Noer 1973). Throughout recent Indonesian history, Muslims have been struggling to return the words back to the constitution. They tried during the Soekarno times, but failed. They had also tried in the Soeharto times, but it was impossible to do so as the regime did not allow any talk about political Islam. The opportunity came when Indonesia became a democratic country. They put their hope in the 1999 general election.

Polling station during the parliamentary elections of 2004 in Jakarta, Indonesia.
Photo: Stefan Weidner

In the event, the general election result defied many expectations. The winner was the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDIP), a secular party led by the daughter of Soekarno, the first president of the Republic. In second place was Golkar, another secular party, the ruling party throughout the Soeharto era. Out of eleven Islamic parties, only one party gained significant votes, namely the Development and Unity Party (PPP), which obtained 10.7%. The rest only obtained less than 3%. All the votes of the Islamic parties combined were no more than 20% – not enough to dominate the parliament.

This result disappointed many Muslim leaders who wished for victory. Something that has been happening recently in the Middle East did not happen in Indonesia: democracy does not side with Islamic parties in the race for political power.

The question we should address here is: why did the majority of Indonesian Muslims not vote for Islamic parties, but rather for secular (or non-religious) parties? Has there not been an Islamisation process in the country? Why is the resurgence of Islam in Indonesia not followed by success in gaining political power?

There are many answers to these questions. But the most striking one is that there has been a radical change in the political mindset of Indonesian Muslims. Partly due to the external factors that were boosted by the secular-militaristic regime under Soeharto, and partly due to internal ones which were pushed by liberal Muslims. These two factors played a crucial role in changing Muslims' political mindset and the way Muslims perceived democracy. Let me elaborate on this aspect.

ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY • Along with nationalism and Communism, democracy is one of the most debated concepts among Indonesian Muslims. During the 1930s there was a debate on nationalism between two young intellectuals who then became important leaders of the country: Soekarno (1901-70) and Muhammad Natsir (1908-93). Representing the secular group, Soekarno believed that nationalism was the glue for Indonesian unity. Meanwhile, speaking on behalf of the Islamic group, Natsir considered nationalism to be an ideology that could dilute Muslims' religious belief. The debate between Soekarno and Natsir was the classic example of the disagreement between secularists and Islamists over various issues regarding religion and politics.

The Islamists (in Indonesia, this group was usually known as 'Islamic nationalists' as opposed to the 'secular nationalists') were generally reluctant to embrace modern concepts such as nationalism, Socialism, and democracy. While their counterparts, the secularists, unhesitatingly promoted

[1] In 1989, Jordan held a parliamentary election where candidates from the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimin) dominated the votes. In 1991, Algeria's Islamist party, Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), won the legislative election. In 1995, a Muslim-based Refah Party won the Turkish general election. Most recently, the Egyptian Freedom and Justice Party and the Tunisian Ennahda won the general elections in their respective countries.

those modern ideas, the Islamists criticised and often condemned them on the basis of Islamic arguments. Their objection to these concepts was mostly based on their particular understanding of Islamic doctrines that they believed to be superior to secular ideas.

Natsir, for example, preferred to embrace an Islamic version of democracy: that is, a combination of Western democracy and the Islamic model known as *shura*. Natsir's reluctance to accept democracy was due to his understanding that democracy could harm Islamic principles. He believed that there are certain things in Islam that are considered to be final (*qat'i*), thus giving no room for people to discuss them. He gave the examples of gambling and pornography as being beyond discussion, saying that Parliament had no right to discuss such things (Natsir 1968 and 2001).

In the early years of independence (mid 1940s), Muslim leaders found themselves more comfortable embracing the concept of 'Islamic democracy' rather than just 'democracy'. Theoretically, the concept was widely promoted by Muslim intellectuals and scholars. Zainal Abidin Ahmad (1911-83), another proponent of Islamic democracy, argued that the Islamic political system is not a theocracy as some people might think, but rather a democracy.

The roots of Islamic democracy, according to Ahmad, are the Koran and political life in the early generation of Islam under 'the rightly-guided caliphs' (*al-khulafa al-rashidun*). In the verses 159 of the Sura Ali Imran and 59 of al-Nisa, the Koran clearly advises Muslims to maintain the deliberative method approved in the decision-making process. For Ahmad, this is a strong argument for Muslims to embrace democracy. Likewise, Ahmad believes that 'the early caliphate system was democratic, since it had sufficiently maintained democratic requirements. Democratic instruments such as a people's assembly, succession, deliberation, and social institutions, had all existed during that time' (Assyaukanie 2009).

Muslim leaders like Natsir and Ahmad believed in democracy not only because it was theologically justifiable, but also because they believed that with democracy they could win the race to political power. As Muslims are the biggest population in the country, there is a possibility for them to win the democratic contest. It is for this reason that they formed an Islamic party and then joined the general election in 1955.

The early generation of Indonesian Muslims generally understood democracy as majority rule and mostly ignored its substance. They believed that, as Muslims were the majority, they could rule the country according to their taste, ignoring the rights of minorities. They enthusiastically accepted democracy because it could help them to gain political power through general elections. If they won the election, they could dominate the parliament and thus change the constitution. This was the main reason why Islamic political parties were so ready to participate in the election.

Indonesian history would have been different had the Islamic parties won the 1955 general election. In that election, all the Islamic parties together obtained 43%: enough to take over the government, but not enough to steer the parliament. The Law requires the support of two-thirds of the members of parliament as a minimum requirement for changing the constitution. Certainly Muslim leaders were disappointed by the result, but they fully realised the consequence of democracy.

With this failure, they accepted the rules of the game: enjoying their position according to what they got in the election. Thus Muslim representatives were in the parliament, and some of their leaders were involved in the government. Burhanuddin Harahap (1917-1987), a Masyumi leader, was appointed prime minister from August 1955 to March 1956. As a chairman, he had to deal with other people and had to participate lawfully. He fully realised that he could not impose his party's vision of Islamic democracy.

THE ROLE OF LIBERAL MUSLIMS • What is good about democracy is that it teaches people patience and tolerance. If one loses an election, one has to wait for four or five more years to place another bet. And if one wins the election with only a small majority, one has to deal with other parties. One has to share the 'electoral cake' with others in order to form a government. Indonesian Muslims have learnt so much about politics and how to deal with it.

Many things happened during Soeharto's New Order regime. Muslims were barred from forming Islamic parties. They were forced to join one of the three parties approved by the regime, namely Golkar, the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), or the Development and Unity Party (PPP). Some scholars argue that the change in the Muslim political mindset was in large part due to the way Soeharto treated them. Indonesian Muslims have been politically secularised such that their attitude towards politics is no longer the same (Effendy 2003; Hefner 2000; Anwar 1995).

It is true that Soeharto's New Order regime played a crucial role in changing Muslim political attitudes. The shift, however, is not only due to Soeharto, who ruled the country repressively, but also due to the large and passionate role played by Muslim intellectuals. What is happening in Indonesia is not happening in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries. Indonesian intellectuals played an important role in changing the Muslim political mindset and attitude.

Through lectures, writings, and actions, they advocated democracy and delegitimised Islamic parties. Unlike in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries, the Indonesian reform movement has always operated through organisations. Intellectuals such as Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009), Ahmad Syafii Maarif (born 1935) and Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005) are Muslim leaders who chaired big organisations. They spread their liberal ideas to Muslim society through these organisations. Wahid did it through Nahdlatul Ulama (40 million members), Maarif through Muhammadiyah (30 million members), and Madjid through the Islamic Student Association and its *alumnae* (over 10 million members).

In Egypt, the Islamic reform movement has developed in a more solitary manner. Great intellectuals such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1837-1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) did not have any organisation where they could spread their ideas. This trend continues up to today's generation of reformers. Intellectuals such as Hassan Hanafi (born 1935) and Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd (1943-2010) are solitary thinkers who do not have a big following. They disseminated their ideas in academic classes, seminars, and scholarly journals. No matter how sophisticated their ideas are, they remain limited and have never reached the grassroots.

PROMOTION THROUGH ORGANISATIONS • In Indonesia, Muslim intellectuals have been very active in promoting democracy and pluralism to Muslim societies. Abdurrahman Wahid was one of the most influential leaders among the Nahdlatul Ulama members. Born into a strong family background and educated in Baghdad and Cairo, Wahid was highly respected by both Muslims and non-Muslims in the country. He read Western literatures and tried to synthesise them with Islamic intellectual tradition.

One of Wahid's most significant contributions to Indonesia was his untiring campaign for democracy and *Pancasila* (five principles) as the only basis of the state. From independence until the 1980s, many Muslims believed that adopting *Pancasila* – not Islam – could dilute their Islamic creed. Wahid argued that *Pancasila* did not contradict Islam. Throughout his career as an intellectual, Wahid publicly criticised and delegitimised Islamic political parties. He denounced the idea of an Islamic state and refused the formal implementation of *sharia*.

Nurcholish Madjid was another intellectual who is remembered for his daring ideas that challenge Muslim minds. From the early 1970s onwards, he consistently campaigned for secularisation and appealed to Muslims to separate their religious interests from politics. Like Wahid, Madjid also campaigned against the idea of an Islamic state and Islamic parties. For him, Muslims could channel their political aspirations in non-religious (secular) parties. He believed that what is more important for Muslims is not to struggle for a formalistic agenda of Islam such as the implementation of *sharia*, but for substantial ones such as healthcare, security, and education.

During the 1980s there were quite a number of Muslim intellectuals who came from a religious background but campaigned for liberal Islam, *i.e.* the Islam that supports liberal values such as freedom, democracy, pluralism, and tolerance. Most of them affiliated themselves with major Islamic organisations such as NU and Muhammadiyah. They played a crucial role in enlightening Indonesian Muslims. Through mass media, discussion forums, public lectures and social actions they spread their flexible interpretations of Islam and appealed to Muslims to fully engage with modern challenges.

CONCLUSION • Indonesian democracy is still young but it is growing dynamically. Despite the many problems that the Indonesian government has to face, the country can successfully maintain its economic growth, curbing the unemployment rate, reforming the legal system, and building infrastructure. Since 1998 Indonesia has undergone three general elections, which were consecutively won by secular (non-religious) parties, namely the Indonesian Democratic Party (1999), Golkar (2004), and the Democratic Party (2009).

These three parties have a great commitment to democracy and Indonesian pluralism. On the other hand, Islamic political parties are declining. According to the recent survey released by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI), Indonesian Muslims will keep their preference for secular parties in the next general election (2014).

In spite of such an optimistic view, there are two big challenges that Indonesian democracy is seriously facing up to: corruption and intolerance. Over the past ten years, the Indonesian government has been fighting against corruption. An independent institute called the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, KPK), was founded and is working hard to bring those involved in corruption to justice. Hundreds of corrupt individuals have been detained and hundreds more are in waiting.

Meanwhile, intolerant actions have threatened the unity of Indonesia. Radical Islamic groups have been the biggest threat to pluralism and harmony in the country. The Indonesian government has worked hard to curb the terrorist groups and has approached moderate Muslims to help fight against Islamic radicalism. If the Indonesian people and government can overcome these two challenges, there is a very big possibility that the country can become a role model for Muslim democracy.

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MISCELLANEOUS

Kader Attia (Algeria/Germany):
From the series *Rochers Carrés (Square Rocks)*, 2008.
From the book *Arab Photography Now*, Berlin 2011
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Since the 1970s Germany has increasingly become the destination of choice for emigrés from the Arab world and Iran. They came to Germany to study, or for political reasons, often fleeing war and political persecution. Many of them stayed in Germany and have contributed equally to cultural life in Germany and in their home countries, often acting as mediators between the two cultures. Many of them write in both languages; others have decided to make the German language their own, while others still continue to write in their mother tongue.

Stefan Weidner

EXILE THAT ENRICHES

THE CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF IRANIAN AND ARAB AUTHORS IN GERMANY

In order adequately to acknowledge the cultural achievements of Iranian and Arab immigrants in Germany we must first explore the historical and social context in which immigration to Germany must be seen. As you are aware, Germany was not a major colonial power. Unlike in France and Britain, there has not therefore been immigration to Germany from former colonies, and the German language is limited to the German-speaking countries of Central Europe: Germany, Austria, Switzerland. By contrast, the majority of Arabs in France learned French from a very young age in school in their (North African) homeland, and are completely fluent in it. The Iranians and Arabs who come to Germany, on the other hand, have to learn the language as adults, *i.e.* with greater difficulty. Furthermore, German is undoubtedly a language that is harder to learn than French or English. A further difficulty is that the German-speaking countries are not traditional countries of immigration like the United States, Canada or Australia. Nonetheless, since the 1960s there has been a continuous rise in the numbers of Arab and Iranian immigrants in Germany.

Let us begin with an exception: Cyrus Atabay, who was born in Berlin in 1929, the son of an Iranian doctor and one of Reza Shah Pahlavi's daughters. After the Second World War he went back to Iran. However, as he did not speak the language properly he returned and studied in Germany. Later he lived in other places, including London. He wrote his poems in German and was well acquainted with numerous German writers, including Gottfried Benn and Elias Canetti. He also translated poems by Hafiz, Rumi and Omar Khayyam into modern German prose. He died in Munich in 1996.

Where do these people come from, and why do they come to Germany?

After the Second World War, people came to Germany primarily for the purposes of study. To this day Germany remains a very popular place to study, not least because university in Germany is free. In this context it is worth mentioning the division of Germany after the Second World War, as many people did not study in West Germany but in the Communist East (GDR). This was particularly true of the students who came from those countries that had declared themselves Socialist (mostly in the form of Baathism or Nasserism), so above all from Syria and Iraq.

Other intellectuals from the same generation (and most Iranians) went to study in West Germany. From Egypt came Nagi Naguib (1931-1987), who was one of the first to translate modern Arabic literature, and for this purpose founded the Edition Orient in Berlin, which still exists today and also publishes Persian literature. From Lebanon came the poet Fuad Rifka (1930-2011), who studied in Heidelberg and wrote his Ph.D. on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. He subsequently returned to Lebanon. This, incidentally, is true of many Arabs of his generation who went to study in Germany at this time: if political circumstances in their homelands allowed them to do so, they returned.

Already in this generation we can observe three typical career paths:

1. Those who, after a certain time, usually after finishing their studies, return home and become mediators of German culture in their homeland, or write their own work which is influenced by German culture. These are mostly Arabs, whereas many Iranians remain in Germany for political reasons, such as opposition to the Shah.
2. Those who remain in Germany and
   a) write primarily in German and translate Arabic literature into German
   b) write primarily in Arabic and translate German literature into Arabic.

We find the same characteristics in subsequent generations, although it is apparent that the number of those choosing to stay in Germany and write in German increases. The number also increases of those who do not come of their own free will, but for reasons of political persecution or (civil) war.

The generation of those born in the 1940s and 1950s was particularly affected by the political crises in the Arab world in the 1970s: the Lebanese civil war, the seizure of

power by Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein, and the Iran-Iraq war. Let us take Rafik Schami as a representative of this generation. Rafik Schami (a pseudonym – his real name is Suhail Fadhel) was born in 1946 and came to Germany in 1971 to study chemistry, but soon began to write in German. Nowadays he is one of the most successful and best-known authors in the German language. He sells more books than the majority of German writers. We will take a closer look at his literature later on.

SAID, born in 1947, came from Iran to study in Germany and was active in the opposition movement against the Shah. Since the 1970s he has written his poems in German. Later he also produced numerous essays and short stories. From 2000 to 2002 he was the president of German PEN, and has campaigned on behalf of many persecuted Iranian authors.

Bahman Nirumand, born in Tehran in 1936, has played and continues to play a particularly important role in Germany. His book *Persien. Modell eines Entwicklungslandes (Persia: A Model of a Developing Country)* was highly significant for the German 1968 movement. One can dare to say that he remains to this day the most influential Iranian author in Germany. He is still politically active and has published numerous books about Iran. However, he is also active in the realm of literature, particularly as a translator. He has translated works by, among others, Sadegh Hedayat and Mahmoud Doulatabadi.

Later on, some writers came from Iraq, particularly in the late 1970s. They were fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime and the Iran-Iraq war. Among them was Hussain al-Mozany (b. 1954). At first he wrote in Arabic (including the book *Der Marschländer (The Marshlander)*, about his experience of fleeing Iraq); today he writes in Arabic and in German, and publishes his books in both languages. He has also translated German literature into Arabic, including *The Tin Drum* by the Nobel Prize winner Günter Grass (under the title *Tabal as-Safih*). Another writer who came to Germany from Iraq was Khalid al-Maaly. Al-Maaly (b. 1956) came to Germany as a political refugee in 1979. Here he founded the publishing company Manschurat al-Djamal. He wrote poems in Arabic, but also translated Arabic poems into German in collaboration with German friends, including myself. This publishing house currently has the largest quantity of German literature in Arabic in its list, including works by Navid Kermani.

At this point we should also mention Shahram Rahimian. He was born in 1959, came to Germany to study in 1976, and now lives in Hamburg, but still writes in Persian. (http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/136760._). Abbas Maroufi is another of the best-known Iranian authors in Germany who write in Persian. Since the mid-1990s he has lived in Berlin, where he runs a Persian bookshop. Many of his works have been translated into German and have been enthusiastically received by the critics, above all his novel *Symphonie der Toten (Symphony of the Dead)*.

Finally, I would like to speak of the younger generation. Almost all of them write in German, as for example the German-Persian poet Farhad Showghi (b. 1961), who now lives in Hamburg. He not only writes his own poems in German, he also translates Persian poems into German, including a book of poetry by Ahmad Shamlu (Verlag Urs Engeler, Basel, 2002).

Navid Kermani, born in Siegen in 1967, also writes in German. He holds a doctorate in Islamic Studies, but regards himself first and foremost as a German writer. In his most recent book, the 1200-page novel *Dein Name (Your Name)*, he deals not only with Iranian themes such as the story of his

Sabah Naim (Egypt): From the series *Street Studio*, 2008.
From the book *Arab Photography Now*, Berlin 2011
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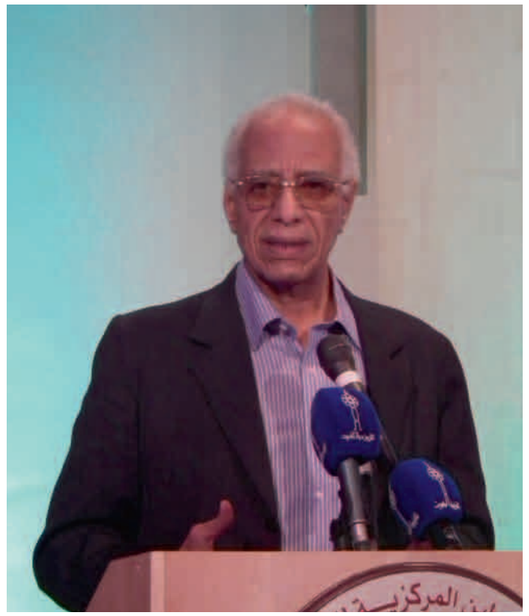
grandfather in Iran or that of his parents, who emigrated to Germany, he also writes a lot about life in Germany. Kermani is also renowned for his essays and reportages, and is one of the most prominent authors of Iranian origin in Germany.

Among the Arab authors in Germany today, three in particular stand out. One is Hamid Abd al-Samad, born in Egypt in 1972. He came to Germany in 1995 and has an established academic career. He initially attracted attention with a self-critical autobiographical book, also critical of Islam, that he wrote in German and Arabic (the Arabic edition was published by Dar Merit; the title of the German edition is *Mein Abschied vom Himmel [My Farewell to Heaven]*). He has also published two political works of non-fiction about Islam and the Arab revolutions. He is very well-known as a result of numerous appearances on talkshows. Another representative of the younger generation is the Iraqi Abbas Khidr. Born in Baghdad in 1973, he came to Germany in 2000 as a political refugee. He writes his poems in Arabic, but since 2008 he has written his novels in German. These in particular have had great success with German literary critics. Finally, we must not forget Sherko Fatah, a Kurdish-Iraqi author who speaks and writes German as well as he does his mother tongue, and whose books have also been highly praised by the critics. He was born in East Berlin in 1964, and thus belongs to some degree to the so-called 'immigrant generation'.



Egyptian Poet Hassan Talab at a poetry reading during the conference in Kuwait on Arab literature in exile, March 2012. Photo: Stefan Weidner

What do the authors mentioned above write about? What effect does exile have on their writing, and to what extent do they enrich German or Arab/Iranian literature?

The first thing one notices is that the majority of Arab writers take as the theme of their work not Germany but predominantly the Arab world and its problems, or their experiences in their homeland. One could almost say that these writers, *from a thematic point of view*, have not arrived in Germany. There are, however, exceptions, and we can say of the Iranian writers in Germany in particular that they really regard Germany as their home and often write more about Germany than about Iran; Navid Kermani is one example, but Cyrus Atabay and SAID, who has frequently written about the feelings of being an exile, have done so too.

Some Arab authors, especially those who write in German, also take as their subject the flight itself, or the difficulties of settling in in Germany, or of getting on with Germans (often in a humorous vein, as with Rafik Schami, or a grotesque one, as with Hussain al-Mozany).

However, the fact that the majority of Arab authors cling thematically to their origins, even in Germany and even if they write in German, should not in my opinion be regarded as a defect or deficiency. For German readers this has the advantage and the great attraction of introducing them to foreign worlds, to foreign lives and stories. Even if there is sometimes an element of occasionally trivial exoticism in it, the readers do however always become acquainted with an authentic Arab voice. So it is that Arab writers in Germany are often asked their opinion on current political issues. Thanks to them, the Arab world has a voice in Germany (although of course it must be made clear that Arab authors in Germany do not speak as representatives for Arabs or Arab writers as a whole, nor do they wish to do so).

A linguistic and stylistic examination of the works of Iranian and Arab writers in Germany is of interest for our purposes. Here, however, we must make a distinction: in what language is the author writing, and who is his audience? Most Arabs who write in German have a very good

command of the language, but it is seldom perfect, which is to say that it is generally not as good as that of an educated native speaker of German. But this is seldom a disadvantage as, firstly, there is always someone at the publisher's who corrects the language, and because the authors usually write in a simple and thus very accessible, easily readable voice. As a consequence their books are often open to a very wide readership, not just to educated readers and intellectuals (like the books of Alaa Al Aswany, which are also written in very simple language).

Lebanese Poet Shauqi Bzia reading in Kuwait during the conference on Arab literature in exile, March 2012. Photo: Stefan Weidner

This is conspicuously not the case for the writers of Iranian origin in Germany. Their German is generally as good as their mother tongue, whether it be because they were born in Germany or because they were very young when they came to the country to study. Their literature, however, is often less popular. Whereas someone like Rafik Schami is an easy read for the ordinary reader, the literature of Navid Kermani is aimed more at an educated audience.

This linguistic feature is of course no longer relevant with regard to the Arab and Iranian authors whose books must first be translated into German (*e.g.* the Iranians Abbas Maroufi or Shahram Rahimian). Yet these books are also often very successful in Germany, often for another reason, which they share with Arab books written in German: many Oriental authors write with a great love of storytelling, of spinning tales, of extravagant stories. It sounds like a cliché, but one could describe this as the 'Sheherezade effect'. (I do not wish to claim that there really is such an effect, or such a peculiarly Arab love of storytelling – but I do notice that this is how German readers and critics see it.) One of the reasons why Rafik Schami, for example – who, unlike Najm Wali, writes in German – is so beloved by his readers is because his style is so close to oral storytelling. At times it is even Réminiscent of a storyteller in a coffee house. This characteristic of Schami's becomes especially apparent in his public readings. Rafik Schami does not read aloud from his books like other authors; he stands in front of the audience and tells them the story from memory. You could almost say that Schami is a performance artist. This is something completely new for German readers and in German literature.

Through the characteristics mentioned here, Arab literature (unlike the Iranian, which is generally speaking closer to the German) contrasts in a positive way with German literature, which is often written in a very restrained, intellectual style that does not take special delight in the narrative *per se*. Germans therefore profit not only in terms of subject matter but also from the style and narrative form of the Oriental writers living in Germany.

Which begs the opposite question: what does Iranian or Arab literature gain from the authors who live in Germany? What repercussions do their experiences in Germany have on their homelands? As mentioned above, many of them have not yet put down roots in Germany as far as their subject matter is concerned, so the thematic aspect is not relevant in the case of Arab literature. With only a few exceptions, Arab readers do not discover from these authors what life is like in Germany or among the Germans. Iranian readers, on the other hand, insofar as they are able to read the books of Iranian writers in Germany in Persian, certainly do discover a great deal from them about life in Germany, especially from the books that are written in German. Those who have continued to write in Persian, on the other hand, often continue to cling on to their homeland.

However, if what the German critics write is true, namely that the Oriental authors distinguish themselves above all by writing in a 'typically' Oriental fashion, *i.e.* with Oriental delight in invention and love of storytelling, then Oriental readers would notice very few stylistic idiosyncrasies or new, as-it-were 'German' influences in these works. Whether or not this is the case I do not know. No scholarly literary studies have been done on the subject, unfortunately. We will have to ask the Iranian or Arab readers themselves.

The influence Arab and Iranian authors in Germany have on their homelands is, I suspect, in areas other than narrative literature. It is, with the Arabs in particular, firstly in the work of these authors in the field of translation. Secondly, with the Arab authors, it is in the field of lyric poetry. This is illustrated again by the examples of Fuad Rifka and Khalid al-Maaly. What distinguishes all these authors is that their poetry, in comparison with other Arab lyric poetry of their generation, does without traditional rhetorical devices. They write poetry that is simple, clear, and short. It is the school of Goethe, Hölderlin, Benn, Rilke, Brecht, Celan. In this respect one can speak of a true amalgamation of Arabic and German poetry.

Finally, I believe that the German influence is above all philosophical and political in nature, and this is also true in particular for the Iranian authors in Germany, who are often politically active. We can see this influence of political and philosophical culture in Germany on the Arab intellectuals who live here, in the fact, for example, that the majority of Iranian and Arab authors in Germany are very critical in their opinions about religion and tradition in their homelands; that they adopt with particular intensity the body of thought of the philosophy of the Enlightenment (Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel) and the political freedoms that we currently enjoy in Germany. And in the fact that they allow this philosophy to influence their political essays, articles and public statements. In this way, too, these authors also have an effect on their homelands.

And so we see that the cultural exchange between Germany and the Islamic world, especially Iran and the Arab countries, is currently more intense than at any time in history. But if we want to comprehend it correctly, we must see it in a nuanced way: on the one hand, from the different perspectives of the German, Iranian, or Arab reader, and on the other in its wider philosophical and political context. Only when we do this will we understand how fruitful this exchange really is.

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This article is based on a lecture given by Stefan Weidner at the conference of the literary magazine *Al-Arabi* in March 2012 in Kuwait on exile literature.

Translated by Charlotte Collins

Tarek Eltayeb (Austria/Egypt, left) and Saif Ar-Rahbi (Oman) at the conference on Arab literature in exile which took place in Kuwait in March 2012. Photo: Stefan Weidner

The motto of this year's 'Arabische Literaturtage' (Arab Literary Festival), which took place in Frankfurt in January, was 'Moving Towards Freedom'. Significant Arab authors met with their German counterparts and discussed developments.

Kersten Knipp

SEISMOGRAPHS OF THE REVOLUTION

THE ARAB LITERATURE FESTIVAL IN FRANKFURT

➔ People stand packed together in long queues in front of the ticket office; large groups gather around the bookstands; there is a respectable media presence. Above all, there is a gentle hint of *Weltgeist* ('world spirit') in the air. Just a year and a half ago, before the spirit of rebellion had swept through the Middle East, it would have been reasonable to doubt whether all these Arab poets, authors and musicians would be speaking and performing in front of sell-out crowds.

litprom (the Society for the Promotion of African, Asian, and Latin American Literature), which is behind the festival, knew only too well from its many years of experience that Arab literature alone has only limited mass appeal. An additional something is needed to pull in the crowds; a revolution, for example. Almost overnight, the Arab Spring transformed authors who were largely unknown in Germany and are often persecuted in their own countries into sought-after figures on the German literary market.

litprom made the most of this opportunity and gave the invited authors a platform, which they used, albeit more for political concerns than for literary matters. Boualem Sansal, for example, who was presented with the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade last autumn, explained the subtle differences between real democracy and sham democracy. His native country, Algeria, enjoys the reputation of being a model country in terms of freedom of speech, he explained.

Algeria has a huge number of newspapers, magazines and television and radio stations. However, the problem is that, in one way or another, the state is behind most of them. The state, explained Sansal, gave citizens such a vast media choice that they were soon exhausted by all that was on offer and switched off. This meant that texts were being printed, but hardly anyone was reading them. In this way, he continued, media plurality benefits the government above all others.

The government is using this plurality to legitimise itself both domestically and internationally. After all, said Sansal, why vote a government that respects freedom of speech out of office? With a wink, he added that such a move becomes even less likely the less this freedom results in political demands.

Magdy El-Shafee, on the other hand, told of a text that certainly is being read. In 2008, the Egyptian author published *Metro*, the first Egyptian graphic novel, a genre that has proved to be a big headache for the censors. The censors, El-Shafee explained, are not actually interested in literature; literature only ever reaches a small number of readers and has quite simply become too insignificant to be banned. *Metro*, on the other hand, which tells the story of a young man who has had depressing encounters with those who benefited from what used to be the Mubarak regime, was read by a great many people, thereby undermining the logic of the censors. After all, *Metro* is undoubtedly a book and, indeed, quite obviously literature. That said, it is a book that contains pictures, and a disturbingly large number of pictures at that. So to what genre does it belong, then? The censors didn't even bother to enter into such theoretical literary considerations and promptly banned the book. Only now, four years later, is there any chance of an officially sanctioned new edition being published.

Rosa Yassin Hassan explained how conventional literature can also fall foul of the powers that be. The Syrian author, who has had a travel ban lasting several years imposed on her because of her writing, was only given permission to leave the country the day before she was due to arrive in Frankfurt. The courage she showed in speaking openly about the situation in her country is thus all the more impressive. Several thousand have already died, she reported; Syrians are living in fear; many have gone underground in an attempt to evade the attention of the state. In the face of such events, she explained, she found it very difficult to talk about literature.

Maha Hassan, an author with Kurdish roots who travelled to Frankfurt from Paris, fled the

regime in Syria eight years ago. She didn't just flee because she feared for her life; she had already published her first novels at that time and feared for her intellectual independence. 'I wrote about three taboo subjects,' she explained, 'politics, sex, and religion.' That immediately attracted the attention of the censors. Her books were banned, and labelled 'morally contemptible'.

Censorship can, however, do much more than just condemn this book or that. Censorship is menacing because it is omnipresent, can strike at any moment, and can ban authors and their works. Moreover, what happens when posters of the president hang all over Syria, when he looks down on Syrians from countless signs, posters, and banners, when it is obvious that the entire state has been tailored to suit him? This is what happens: authors take great care and give careful consideration to what they should and shouldn't write before they pick up their pens. Making greater or lesser concessions, taking precautionary measures, and indeed the opposite: a secret desire to please, coming to an arrangement with the powers that be … for Maha Hassan, such behaviour is an expression of 'cultural corruption' from which no writer can escape.

According to the Lebanese author Alawiyya Sobh, however, there is also pressure from society, traditions, and customs that citizens allow to regulate their daily lives. In her country, she said, this is above all demonstrated by two phenomena: the relationship between the religions and the sexes. Lebanon is a denominationally structured state. This is, however, very dangerous because an order such as this encourages citizens to base their entire political vision of the world on a denominational foundation, which brings them dangerously close to racism, a cultural racism that is no different from a biologically-based racism in its destructiveness. Moreover, the tacitly acknowledged hierarchy between the sexes and women does not contribute to the development of a free society either. According to Sobh, hierarchical thought is very difficult to overcome because it is upheld not only by openly conservative people, but also by a similar number of people – both men and women – who are supposedly modern and supposedly advanced.

Speaking of which, women certainly dominated the event in Frankfurt. Mansura Izzeddin had travelled from Egypt and Sihem Bensedrine from Tunisia. Ultimately, what made the event in Frankfurt noteworthy was the fact that numerous German authors were also invited to come and debate with their Arab colleagues. Among others, Thomas Lehr and Michael Kleeberg – in whose works the Arab world plays an important role – were at the event.

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Translated from the German by Aingeal Flanagan

Hartmut Fähndrich, Maha Hassan, Kersten Knipp, Alawiyya Sobh and Boualem Sansal at the Arab Literature Festival in Frankfurt, January 2012. Foto: Markus Kirchgessner

Clifton Beach in Karachi during the third Karachi Literature Festival, February 2012. Photo: Stefan Weidner

Despite ongoing political difficulties in Pakistan, a thrilling but all-too-brief literature festival took place on 11th and 12th February in the nation's largest metropolis. Impressions from Karachi by Stefan Weidner

Stefan Weidner

LONG ON TALENT, SHORT ON TIME

THIRD KARACHI LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Literature festivals are popular – in Germany, in Europe, and indeed throughout the world. More often than not, we see the same authors in the space of a few weeks in Berlin and in Jaipur, in Erbil in northern Iraq, Asila in Morocco, and the Colombian city of Medellin – a city not only famous for its involvement in the drug trade, but also for its excellent festival of literature.

For sure, these festivals often appear like space ships landing in a random area and discharging a cargo of writers, books and international culture onto the bewildered natives, if these are at all interested in such exotic goings-on. And if such a space ship can land in Medellin, why not in Karachi?

MANY LOCAL FANS • In February 2012, it actually landed there for the third time and has in the meantime attracted a strong local following and a large, very enthusiastic, highly educated audience – so enthusiastic and educated, in fact, that for a moment you might have been forgiven for thinking that the fans had hitched a ride on the space ship.

Organised by the British Council with support from the Goethe-Institut, the US embassy and other institutions, this year's literature festival landed on the peaceful outskirts of Karachi, in the wealthy 'Defence' district in the Carlton Hotel, overlooking the water and protected by heavily-armed security forces.

This may have lent the festival an air of exclusivity, but it was open to all, and free to attend. The only requirements for attendance were an awareness that the event was taking place at all, and a good enough command of English to follow the programme of events – Urdu was rarely spoken. The festival featured a glittering array of authors including some of the great international voices of Pakistani-English literature, among them Hanif Kureishi, Mohsen Hamid, Mohammed Hanif and Kamila Shamsie. But there were also many younger, lesser-known names to discover, for example the young writers Maniza Naqvi or Bina Shah.

INTERNATIONAL AND ANGLOPHONE • Not that the festival was lacking in international flavour. Best-selling author Shobhaa De travelled to Karachi from India to vehemently defend the emancipatory significance of the fiction genre 'chick lit'. Of course, her comments found favour with the predominantly young female audience, while one of the few older men in the crowd pointed out that English-language readers are already emancipated and that there have been and still are women writing in Urdu who have contributed much more to the process of female emancipation and, in doing so, demonstrated far more courage.

The English novelist William Dalrymple also flew in from India. He has been living in Delhi for a while now, and his travel accounts and highly readable historical books on the Islamic Indian past are also popular with readers in Pakistan.

The few European participants on the other hand appeared to be something of an oddity, even though they were presenting books on the subject of the Islamic world and which were therefore highly pertinent to the festival – for example Navid Kermani and Jürgen Frembgen from Germany, and Robin Yassin-Kassab from Britain. What was missing, however, was 'normal' literature in other languages, the stories and poems from another world – another world from the Pakistani-Islamic viewpoint, that is.

FORUM FOR DEBATES • But in any case, perhaps the most important element of the festival was not the literature *per se*, but the discussion forums, which were often highly political, for example on the war of secession between Pakistan and Bangladesh, or the debate over the threatened status of Pakistan's religious and ethnic minority. Judging by the high level of audience interest in these events, it is clear that opportunities to hold public debates on such issues are still few and far between in this country.

This made it all the more regrettable that the festival only lasted two days and that participants were so numerous it was difficult to find the time and opportunity to gather informally on the sidelines of the many podium discussions (with four such events being held in parallel).

Both audience and writers simply needed more time to get to know each other. Let us hope that the organisers, who have again achieved great things in 2012, will heed this small piece of constructive criticism and extend the duration of next year's festival!

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Translated by Qantara.de

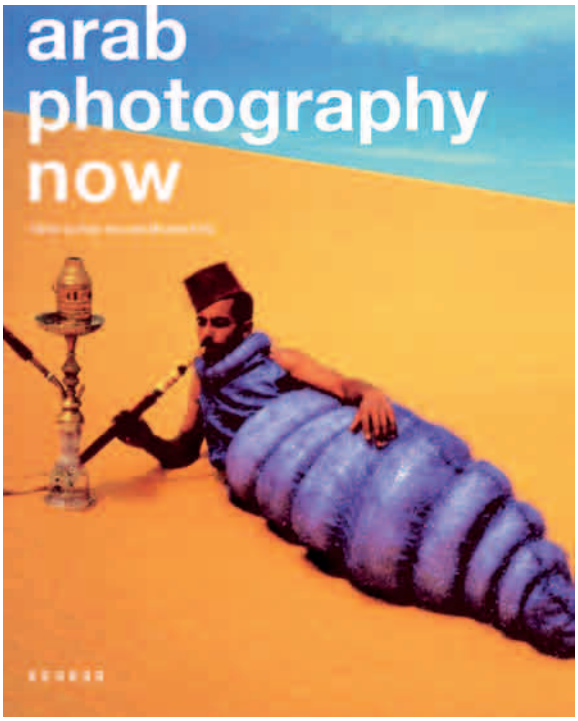
Rania Gaafar

IMAGE FEVER

➔ Rose Issa and Michket Krifa, curators of art from the Arab world, recently published a collection of photographs by Arab artists in a major catalogue entitled *Arab Photography Now* (2011). Anthological publications in general and photography catalogues in particular that include reproductions of art works are often a product of actual exhibitions. Instead this volume is emblematic of *bricolage*, a genre that is eclectic and reflects a grouping-together of diverse thematic subjects and aesthetic forms. The editors make reference to this problem of the ambiguities of arbitrary selection, a centrepiece of their efforts in *Arab Photography Now.* The introductory essays by both Issa and Krifa showcase a number of problems addressing the state of photography as an art form in the Arab world, from the lack of cultural and academic infrastructures to raise and support generations of emerging artists to the fragility of the political and socio-economic scaffolding across the Middle East and North Africa that leads to exile, disrupted lives in the diaspora, and frequent migrations across national borders. All of this diversity intricately binds the 'dislocated self' in a competitive relationship with the medium of photography and its long and dubious association with the history of the colonial enterprise in the Middle East and North Africa. This somewhat residual colonial rhetoric is central to the display of the photographs in this collection, since the selection of the pieces demonstrates the strategies of the mediatised gaze – the non-native gaze of the inhabitants of a region materialised through media channels that have informed the self-perceptive artistic endeavours and obsessions of a generation of Arab photographers.

The editors deal with the thematic and aesthetic concerns of the artists whose work they include in an encouraging yet also self-reflective manner by displaying what reflects a 'figurative turn' in Arab photography's images of the self. The collection illustrates a desire to uphold an emphasis on the textual negotiations of the medium and at times the materiality of the photograph. Produced mostly within the last ten years, between the cataclysms of September 2001 and the Arab revolutions commencing in January/February 2011 when the presidents of Tunisia and Egypt were toppled by their own people, the photographs are imbued with documentary form. The topographies of the Arab world – the landscape and the vernacular – become territories of self-identifying signs that relate the image to its suspect and often abusive function, akin to its exploitative use in news reporting, warmongering, stereotyping, propagandising, ideological indoctrination and gendering.

Many of the artistic expressions conveyed by these twenty-two Arab photographers address bicultural and bi-national narratives, thereby embodying the fleeting spatial and temporal landscapes that they inhabit. Those who have chosen to stay in their home countries of *e.g.* Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt, Libya, or the Gulf region disclose a fascination with forms and methods of artistic practices as well as with the politics of 'representations' in journeys towards a self-determined modernity of the subject. However, this empowering modernity is in flux, growing out of the perpetual duel between the regime of 'representation' and the 'other'. Ideally, the product of this contestation is a politics of aesthetics. For instance, the Iraqi-Irish photographer Jananne Al Ani names her photographic series *The Aesthetics of Disappearance: A Land Without People* (2010) in a supposed nod to Paul Virilio's *The Aesthetics of Disappearance.* Al Ani's series features aerial shots of archaeological sites, referencing satellite images of wars in the Middle East (such as the Gulf War of 1991). The focus is on the disappearance of the subject in the ongoing armed conflicts and wars, particularly with the rapidity of technological advancement, which allows for death and destruction obfuscated by the disappearance of the subject, who remains invisible in a dehistoricised cartography. In both military imaging and archaeological sites, the emphasis is on deserted blank landscapes empty of human beings and their existence. In one instance, the show *Shadow Sites II* (2011) was originally produced as a film disclosing the 'denigration of vision' by implicating the role of light. By literally 'enlightening' (*i.e.* making visible), culture



Rose Issa and Michket Krifa (eds.)
ARAB PHOTOGRAPHY NOW
Kehrer, Heidelberg and Berlin, 2011

and civilisation become visible in aerial shots when the shadows, the black spots and lines, disappear with sunset. Western folkloric and mythical characters such as Penelope and Cinderella are set in the contested Palestinian landscape in Raeda Saadeh's *Once Upon a Time* (2007) series, in which the artist herself becomes the disguised subject. Scripture and its materiality become a very prominent part of an artistically intertextual gesture in the photographs displayed in the catalogue, which makes this technique of subversion as visible as the image of the Arab woman in colonial postcards and Orientalist paintings, or a Nubian man's face staring down a scripted Arabic print shaped like his face. The latter is Fathi Hassan's *Glance towards the Unknown* (1985). Lalla Essaydi's photographic series *Les Femmes du Maroc: Fumée d'Ambre Gris* (2008) challenges the materiality of calligraphy by using natural herbs such as henna to cover the bodies of her female subjects and their clothing, shedding light on forms of female self-perception that have themselves been altered through the imposition of the white male gaze.

The publication is hardly free of the overarching binaries, even hegemony, of the gaze and the different cultural perceptions Arab photographers are often trapped within. It seems that the aesthetic styles here are concerned with different visual genealogies. These artists are concerned, albeit in an often existentialist manner, with the aesthetic matrix of creativity. For instance, Taysir Batniji, a Palestinian photographer, blatantly discloses the desire to follow artistic methodologies and forms in war zones. Unable to visit and photograph the Israeli watchtowers in the West Bank himself, he commissioned a friend of his to shoot the images that do not achieve – and do not want to achieve – the perfection of the Düsseldorf school, and the Bechers' water towers in particular. The need to aestheticise the subject is challenged by realities on the ground: the Arab vernacular in Pop Art and advertising parodies inform Hassan Hajjaj's photo series; fantasy as the *mise-en-scène* of photographic fragments, scenes even in the hyperrealist desert in Lara Baladi's *Oum el Dounia* (2000); the amalgamation of photojournalist ambitions with artistic practices; or the cinematic scenography in photographic slices in Tarek Al Ghoussein's *Untitled* (2003) series.

We might look at these photographs as different forms of ethnographies of the self, sometimes in their primary deconstructive stages, at other times with a bird's eye perspective and a suspicious invisible surplus, yet always with the subject at its centre, visible or invisible, but abstaining from the master narratives of Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism and Islamisation. It's the return of the artist, or the author, in a region that is struggling to find its passage towards a novel and variable modernity without yet managing completely to bypass the many indices imposed or self-imposed on it in all their forms and functions. This catalogue displays a desire to finally 'become' in an often cumbersome fashion. Comments by the artists to explain their intentionality are important for readers lately engaging with the contemporary photographic history of the Arab world. Yet this also sheds light on an unresolved perpetual aspiration to come to terms with the complementary relationship between image and text, in photographic form as well as in life. This relation seems to disclose an often traumatic mnemonic past of visual colonisation, 'representation' in its most conventional, theological as well as sign-based interpretation and etymology, war, Western or native autocratic domination. It will be left to readers to decide what this group publication can convey regarding the negotiation between image and the self.

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