

COMMENTS

DEMOCRACY: AN END OR A TOOL?

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Democracy has become a keyword in contemporary socio-political jargon after September 11th 2001. The drama of the whole world is due to the lack of democracy and consequently the necessity of democratization of the non-democratic world, namely the Muslim World, since the authors of September 11th are Arab Muslims. However, democracy is a tool not an end. It is a means to implement something else, namely national objectives. Democracy as a concept may differ from a culture to another. In the West, it is a quantitative concept based on majority-minority criteria. It is based on the concept of the individual. Other cultures are more oriented towards groups. A multiparty system based on free election, one man one vote, is a formal concept. The multi-party system did not prevent corruption: undeclared funds for election campaigns. Political propaganda and the power of the mass media have a big impact on the vote. Democracy in the West did not prevent the rise of extreme right wing parties. The Islamic concept of democracy is a qualitative concept based on the right of every person to express himself freely. An Islamic political regime is not a theocracy. The real ruler is not the executive power but the legislative power. The objective of democracy is to implement the universal intentions of the law, based essentially on the public welfare

1. Introduction

1.1 Post-11th September 2001, democracy has become a password in contemporary socio-political jargon. The plight of the whole world is argued to be due to the lack of democracy and consequently, there is the need to democratize the non-democratic world, namely the Muslim World, since the authors of the September 2001 attacks

were Arab Muslims. The error is in the other not in the self. The other is guilty, the self is innocent. The events of September 2001 were actions not a reaction to something else, power without justice, globalization as a new form of hegemony, a new cry of the oppressed against the new symbols of power, WTO, the Pentagon, the White House, economic, military and political power. Everybody remembers 11th September 2001; nobody remembers the 28th September 2000, the beginning of the second *Intifada*, ignored for a whole year, houses and fields destroyed, women and children massacred, and activists physically liquidated. Which September marks a landmark in history, and whose history?

Reviewing previous literature on democracy is a real hardship. It is not a study of an object but an object of study. It requires a complete historical survey full of hearsay and contradicting arguments. Phenomenological description of living experiences of democracy is much more productive if its essence is shared by all in a comprehensive inter-subjective experience. References, marginal notes, names of books and authors sometimes obscure more than clarify. They are even used as a camouflage for the lack of meaning and any real breakthroughs in the field. It falls into academic pedantry. It confuses information and knowledge, the already known and the not yet known. Besides, most secondary literature is a Western one which makes its account of human culture somewhat one-sided. In Asia, Africa and Latin America there is a huge amount of literature on the subject which is rarely mentioned in Western fora? Much literature is also written in non-European languages.

1.2 Democracy is a tool, not an end. It is a means to implement something else, namely national objectives. Other means are also possible, including authoritarianism. The South Korean experience of development was made under an authoritarian regime. The Japanese experience was based on a corporate value-system based on communitarianism, loyalty, dedication, sacrifice, work ethics, and perfectionism. The huge Egyptian experience of nation-building under Mohammed Ali in the nineteenth century was promoted by an enlightened despot. Since liberalism is a pre-requisite for democracy, not every culture has passed through a liberal period. Some went from feudalism to socialism, like the former Soviet Union. Liberalism was a transitional phase from feudalism to

modernity in the Western experience. It was the carrier of mercantilism and capitalism, including social democrat and Christian-democrat political parties in the West. "Oriental Despotism" may express the spirit of the East according to Montesquieu. In fact, there is no opposition between a strong and charismatic leadership and mutual consultation and national consensus. Liberalism or authoritarianism as two opposed alternatives may express the Western dichotomous. World-view is based on the "either-or" way of thinking.

1.3 Democracy, no doubt, is a universal value as such and in itself, based on mutual consultation and against monopoly of opinion. The truth, even a relative one, can be reached more soundly by a consensus rather than by a simple individual opinion. The intersubjective experience is more certain than the subjective one. A universal and objective judgment can be attained through reciprocity of consciousness which gives, according to Husserl, a higher degree of objectivity based on adequacy between several subjective experiences namely consensus, different from the classical scientific definition of truth *adequatio ratio in rei* or the new subjective Heidegarian one *ἀλετεία*. Democracy, the power of the people, is a cognitive power before being a political power.

1.4 Democracy as a concept may differ from one culture to another. In the West, it is a quantitative concept based on majority-minority criteria. The truth is with the majority against the minority. The majority is the winner, the minority is the loser. The first is in power, the second is in the opposition. The balance may change through the people's vote whereby the majority becomes the minority in opposition and the minority becomes the majority in power. The truth becomes falsehood and the falsehood becomes truth. The quantity makes quality, might makes right. How many times was the majority wrong, such as Nazism and Fascism, at one time having almost absolute majority? How many times were the minorities wrong, such as resistance and liberation movements and after their victory, they became right? For a classical philosopher the body is quantity, the soul is quality, and the question is: who is directing whom?

Democracy in the West is based on the concept of the individual and of citizenship. Other cultures are more oriented towards groups

and communities, brotherhood and comradeship. The individual is a brother or a comrade. The individual does not exist *per se* but within the community, the family, the tribe or the sect. Democracy in such cultures is based on coalitions and compromises between different groups. The same things occur in Japan. Democracy is a national *consensus* or an agreement between different fractions.

2. Western Democracy

2.1 Democracy as a multiparty system based on free election, one man one vote, is a formal concept. The differences between the parties may be minimal. Two big parties are in power alternatively or in a coalition which may share the same ideology with different accents. Democrats and Republicans in USA share the same ideology of hegemony, invasion of Iraq and support of Israel. Labour and Conservative parties in the United Kingdom share the same ideology as the USA's two main political parties. Likud and Labor parties in Israel share the same ideology concerning aggression on the Palestinian people, and the continuation of occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip, including Jerusalem. The objectives of the parties especially in foreign policy are the essence of the party, not its name or the number, in power or in opposition. Democracy is not a façade, forms and devices, or political games for transfer of power. Sometimes national interests are sacrificed for political parties' interests, whether in power or in opposition.

Political propaganda and the power of the mass media have a big impact on the vote; not necessarily a conscious reading of the political program of each party. 'One man one vote' is a formal concept, given the differences of education and of political awareness between voters. The phenomena of the absentees began to be more visible, year after year. Peoples become more and more apolitical, feeling political apathy. Have they taken enough from the system? The multiparty system is run for the benefit of the parties, not of the country. Some vote green: at least the defence of the environment is something useful, for the benefit of all and for human survival. Sometimes the result is 50-50 or almost a couple of thousands votes decide who is in power and who is in opposition. Frauds in voting are common practices even in the most famous democracies.

2.2 The multi-party system did not prevent corruption: undeclared

funds for election campaigns, spying on the opposition party, as in the famous Watergate case, briberies for better treatment after the election. Corruption sometimes reaches Presidents and Vice-Presidents. Plotting against other political regimes by *coups d'état* or by direct invasion became a common practice in many democratic States. Democracies sometimes practice double-standards. The so-called democratic States may support the most dictatorial political regimes as long as these regimes are allied with Western powers and serve their interests. Violation of human rights is tolerated as long as political regimes are allied to the so-called Western democratic States. They are opened and used as a whip once these regimes disobey powerful States and defend national interests.

Democracy in the West did not prevent the surmounting rise of extreme right wing New Nazi party in Germany, new right trends in France and Austria, Christian-Zionist fundamentalism in USA and the extreme right wing, the *Likud*, in Israel. Democracy as a façade goes in one direction and anti-democratic socio-political forces go in another direction. Minority problems in the West are not resolved to this day. In USA, native Indians are in reservations, Black, Chicanos, Apalachians, and the coloured sub-groups turn the melting pot into a myth.

2.3 Democratization along with other items such as civil society, governance, minorities, human rights, gender and so on, is a point of foreign agenda conceived by Western democratic states to be imposed on the so-called non-democratic ones. The aim is not to implement democracy as such but to get rid of the remnants of the Nation-States of the sixties: defending the public sector, food subsidies, free education, industrialization, sustainable development, economic planning and other policies for which the masses are longing nowadays. The aim is to build a socio-political basis for globalization and market economy based on competition and profit, requiring open borders and the relinquishment of national sovereignty. Democracy here is used as a tool to implement the liberal economy and not as a value in itself. It is even used as a camouflage, a cover-up to hide exploitation and hegemony. Global governance is a substitute for nation state. Global economy is another substitute for national economy.

2.4 Indeed, democracy is a real need in Third World countries as

an internal agenda of the peoples: an aspiration for freedom and liberalization against the authoritarian culture inherited from the past, that of truth and that of leadership. A pyramidal concept of the world has been inherited from the past, a vertical *weltanschauung* between the top and the bottom, which are the roots of authoritarianism. Democratic reform and democratization of traditional societies do not occur by imposing the Western formal concept of democracy but by extracting the roots of dictatorship from the mass culture. Democracy is not a political system but a mass culture. There is no democratic regime without a prior democratic culture and a democratic *weltanschauung*. The relation between two things is not between the top and the bottom, the vertical pattern, but between the forward and backward, the horizontal pattern. Consequently, the idea of progress can emerge, and serve as a device to switch from permanence to change, from authoritarianism to liberalism.

3. Islam and Democracy

3.1 The Islamic concept of democracy is something else. It is not a quantitative concept, majority-minority, power and opposition, but a qualitative concept based on the right of every person to express himself freely. No one has the right to monopolize the truth and impose his view on others. The right to differ is a legitimate right, a religious duty. Good advice, to order the good to be done and the evil not to be done, is a religious duty amounting to an article of faith. The truth is the outcome of consensus *ijma'*. Every one has to spell himself out. Silence is devilish, showing fear and lack of commitment. Diversity of opinions is similar to diversity in nature, a creative diversity. All opinions are right once they express good intentions and public welfare. The truth is multiple, as theoretical frameworks for reasoning. Practical truth is one because it fulfils the public welfare and the common interest.

3.2 An Islamic political regime is not a theocracy. God rules neither in person nor through his so-called representative. No one on earth has the right to represent God. The ruler in Islam, the *Imam*, is freely elected by the people. Sovereignty is the outcome of a social contract between the ruler and the ruled. The ruler orders and the ruled obey, provided that the order is according to the terms of the

contract. If the Ruler fails in implementing the clauses of the contract from his side, the ruled have to advise him, privately and publicly. If the Ruler continues in the violation of the contract, warnings have to come publicly in sermons preached in Mosques. If the Ruler does not listen to these warnings, the people or their speakers, the *ulemas*, have to bring him to court. If the high judge rules against him and he does not obey, a popular revolt led by the high judge will be launched against him. The Ruler fails his commitment if he is unjust inside and weak outside, if he fails to implement justice and if he fails to defend the borders.

3.3 The real ruler is not the executive power but the legislative power. Some would call this type of the rule of law, "Lawcracy". While a human ruler is a person linked to his appreciation, passion and will, Law is impersonal, more objective and more just. The human ruler is only an executive power, not a legislative or a judiciary power. Law is impartial. It does express the public welfare. It provides the general guidelines, leaving the particular cases to the work of the scholars, such as democracy, *Shura*, as a political theory, social justice, *'Adl*, as a social theory, peace, *Salam*, as a theory in international relations. The judiciary, which is completely independent from the Executive, rules in cases of conflict of interpretations and decisions by the Executive.

3.4 The objective of democracy is to implement the universal intentions of the law, based essentially *Ibtida'* on the public welfare called "public reason" which are five:

- Life *Nafs* against death, disease, hunger, drought and all threats for survival;
- Reason *'Aql* against ignorance, fanaticism, dogmatism, unilateralism and imitation;
- Universal norms called Truth *Din* which means the *consensus* of mankind on major norms of behavior and a universal code of ethics against relativism, skepticism, agnosticism and nihilism;
- Honor *'Ird* and human dignity against humiliation and violations of human rights;
- And finally, public wealth *Mal* against waste, usurpation, exploitation and monopoly.

These are the major intentions of Islamic law which have to be understood, since the law is the outcome of human understanding *Afham*, then assimilated since the law has to be called for, not imposed *Imtithal*, and finally realized by human action *Taklif* as a personal self-commitment. The authentic religious life is the compatibility between the universal intentions of the law and the particular intentions of the believer. Revelation would become the ideal structure of the world. In contemporary words, these five intentions of revelation are a real and genuine combination of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and Universal Declaration of Peoples Rights formulated in Algiers in 1977.

The question is: *who is setting the agenda?* Democracy, globalization, the end of history, the clash of civilizations, the information revolution, new technologies of communication, the world as one village, governance, human rights, civil society, minorities, gender and so on are all Western agendas. Decolonization, freedom, social justice, unity, self-reliant development, identity, mass-mobilization portray another agenda. Conflict of agendas is a conflict of power. As far as the actual imbalance of power between the centre and the periphery exists, between Cultural and cultures, the future of democracy will be always a one-way track, from the centre to the periphery, from the big 'C' to small 'c's, a monolithic model based on unilateralism which is a negation of the very basis of Western culture, namely pluralism. It would be taken as another practice and a new evidence of the double standard, the stumbling block in Western culture.